

Eastington Community News

May / June 2009

Nº. 115

There is plenty happening here in Eastington, and we have a selection of activities for you in this Early Summer edition of ECN. Beyond the Parish we hear of turmoil in National Government on almost a daily basis, and stories from around the World might lead some to suppose the end of life as we know it is nigh. Although the World and his dog seems agreed that we are in a huge global financial mess at the moment, the opinion about a world pandemic of swine 'flu' seems less certain. Maybe it is timely to have a wake-up call to heed commonsense advice - to use a handkerchief to avoid coughing and sneezing over other people and to wash our hands frequently and thoroughly.

Progress continues at the New Community Building at Owen Harris Memorial Ground and you are invited to nominate the eldest and youngest Eastingtonian to officially open the new building. Regretfully, there has been a serious burglary and several thousand pounds of equipment was stolen. It takes just a few minutes for those of ill intent to destroy the hard work of many volunteers and the donations that have taken a long time to achieve. If you have been offered any cheap deals for such equipment or if you have ANY clues about the theft, please contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 (details inside).

With so many birds to see in our Parish, it's good to have another article from 'Birder' this time. I have been fascinated to observe which in birds our garden can learn and adapt when faced with a feast on the feeders. The robin likes his mealworms presented on the plate. Unlike the Starlings he has not yet perfected hanging on the fat block for mealworms embedded there. There were a few early Spring days when our beloved Song Thrush serenaded us from atop the birch tree. Sadly he is no more; a victim of a local latch-key cat on early patrol. It's natural for cats to kill, but keeping kitty in overnight would help reduce such early morning carnage of local wildlife. Come to think of it, a night-time curfew of all domestic pets might not go amiss.

The changing seasons have brought a delightful variation to the countryside across our Parish. Dense carpets of bluebells have been the latest sequence to be enjoyed. If you enjoy walking further afield, 'Walking in Gloucestershire' www.walkinginglos.co.uk is a website designed to help people get out and walk in this beautiful county.

Demolition works at Millend Mill are well underway. We have a summary of progress and interesting findings to date by Steve Mills of Cress Green. Steve is a widely acknowledged authority on Gloucestershire Industrial Archaeology, and he is well placed to document and record the secrets of Millend Mill as work continues. Eastington Park, (recently rebranded Eastington Hall,) has formed an important part of our Parish history. In this edition Steve gives us Part 1 of a fascinating insight of how the families that lived there shaped the development of this Parish.

The Stroudwater Canal is an important heritage, and it has highly significant potential for exciting future opportunities for people around Eastington. Ken Burgin gives us a summary of behind the scenes activities to rescue the project, following abandonment by British Waterways last year.

Please come to the Annual Parish Meeting Tuesday May 19th at 7pm at the Methodist Church Hall. Your ideas for possible uses of the remainder of land the Parish Council has recently purchased at Alkerton Green will be greatly valued. (Not all the land will be taken up by allotments). The Parish Council would also like to hear your views on what else you would like it to do for 'Eastington.'

There are a number of issues impacting Eastington from a District perspective, and a view of these is given in a letter from our District Councillor, Ken Stephens. It is worrying to note the proposal to curb local influence in the Planning Permissions approval process.

A vast proportion of issues affecting our Village are controlled by Gloucestershire County Council; roads, traffic management, street-lighting, footpaths & pavements, waste disposal, education etc. Representation by a County Councillor is vitally important in such matters and you will have an opportunity to vote in County Council Elections on June 4th 2009.

**** **Please use my NEW e-mail address when sending articles for future editions** ****

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Next Deadline:- All articles by **Sunday 5th July 2009** please!

Next Delivery:- by **Thursday 23rd July 2009** please!

You are invited to the Annual Parish Meeting.

Methodist Church Hall at 7pm on Tuesday May 19th.

Up for discussion will be *your* ideas for possible uses of the remainder of the land the Parish Council has recently purchased at Alkerton Green. The land will not all be taken up by allotments, and the Parish Council is looking for your suggestions on the best use of the remaining land.

The Parish Council would also like to hear your thoughts on what else you would like it to do for Eastington - so please do come along and make your voice heard.

Mary Gribble, EPC Clerk

The Parish Council is in the process of providing 3 additional Dog Waste Bins in the worst affected areas of the Village.

The process of marking out allotment plots and deciding the appropriate land preparation is continuing. It would of course be great to get on with the planting, however, some carefully considered decisions first need to be made. If you have an interest in acquiring an allotment plot please contact Cllr. Rob Gothard (827096). - Ed

EASTINGTON SLIMMING WORLD GROUP

Now with the long range forecast predicting a warm, dry summer everyone is turning their thoughts to shorts and tee shirts and that we will be discarding the cover up jumpers and jackets we have possibly hidden underneath for the winter months. So how will we look? Could we do with losing a few pounds, if the answer is yes then come along to the village hall on Wednesday nights and join Slimming World.

Along with the existing members you can discover how to lose weight while eating tasty, filling and healthy foods and yet still enjoying a glass of wine, a chocolate biscuit or packet of crisps. The choice that Slimming World can offer is wide and varied as we now have the choice of five different eating plans. So whether you have a large or small appetite, enjoy potatoes or chicken, are vegetarian, vegan, a carnivore, a shift worker, diabetic, cook for your family or cook for yourself - we can help!

We have had a great few weeks in group helping each other to reach our goals. Well done to Brian who lost seven and a half pounds in his first week and to all my members who come every week to gain the help and support from the group and also offering help and support back to others in the group. We have discussed BBQ foods that we can enjoy and started talking about foods and recipes to eat through the summer months, including scotch eggs, lemonade, wine, ice-cream, cheesecake, fruits, burgers, salads, pastas, potato dishes, picnics and lots more. We have discussed how to ensure we are eating a healthy balanced diet to give us the weight loss we want yet give our bodies all the nutrients it needs.

New members are welcomed every week so make this week the one that you choose to come and find out about Slimming World and what we can offer you. We meet on Wednesdays at seven o'clock at the Village Hall, 52 weeks of the year. If you would like to know more ring Lorna on 01453821751.

Developments During the Demolitions at Millend Mill

For more than twenty years, like many others in Eastington, I've watched what should have been one of the landmark buildings of the village, decay to the point where its future looked very uncertain. For a long time, Millend Mill presented a picture of increasing dereliction but, as most people are now aware, a new use has finally been found and the main building is being transformed into apartments.

Most of the buildings added to the main mill over the years, most in very poor condition, are being demolished, to be replaced with new housing. As things are now moving at quite a pace, it became imperative that these major changes should be recorded and documented before all of this social and industrial history was swept away. Greystone Construction were good enough to grant me (as a mill historian and long-standing member of the *Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology*) unlimited access to the mill to record developments as they took place. Along with reams of notes and measurements, I have a portfolio of 400 photographs so far, along with plenty of questions!

The Background

There has been a mill on or near the Millend site for a long time. One was recorded here in the Domesday Book and there have been a succession of mills on the site since then. The present building was built by Henry Hicks in 1818 as a woollen cloth mill, and this is how it stayed until it was sold in 1873. It was then converted to a corn and saw mill, then a maltings. The most obvious legacy from the latter stage was the distinctive large red brick malt kiln added to the front of the mill (recently demolished). This was followed by a further stint as a corn mill, before another switch to producing animal feedstuffs. After this, part of the mill was used for corn drying and general storage, before finally becoming the home of an antiques export company. Since their departure in the 1980's, the mill has stood empty and decaying.

Initial Demolition and Initial Discoveries

So far, much of the main mill has been stripped of its floors and internal walls. The condition of all internal timber was appalling and in parts, roof trusses and floors had collapsed. Much of this has since been removed and some of the windows unblocked, letting in daylight for the first time in decades. It really is a surprisingly large and impressive structure inside, although there is clearly a huge amount of repair needed to the stonework of the main walls. But what sorts of things have so far come to light as work has proceeded and more has been uncovered?

Perhaps one of the most impressive discoveries came after the removal of much of the modern concrete ground floor, revealing the tunnels that still channel the Frome under the mill and the three large pits that originally housed the 15 ft diameter water wheels used to drive the mill's machinery. Records suggest that there was a fourth, but where was it? The opening up of the middle wheel pit also revealed vestiges of a water turbine, quite a rarity in Stroud valley mills. There is no record of its existence, but nevertheless, there it is - another mystery to be solved.

Both of the long brick-built buildings flanking the mill stream at the rear of the mill are to go. To date, the building along the lane to Cress Green has been demolished, as has the engine house that formed part of that structure. Examination of these during demolition revealed interesting features but again, also raised various questions over their construction and uses. It turns out that this building, as well as its two-storey neighbour on the north side of the stream, was much older than originally thought, both having been added back in the 1820s or 30s.

More Questions than Answers

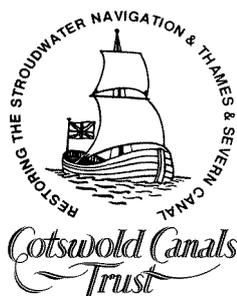
There are other things yet to be resolved. For instance, in 1821, a Boulton & Watt steam engine was installed, one of the first in the region. But where was it housed? I have a suspicion where, but until some of the 1950s buildings on the north side are demolished, we must wait. It seems likely that as the various added-on buildings are stripped away, further interesting aspects of the mill's history and uses will emerge. Hopefully, many of the mysteries will then be resolved.

Thanks to the kindness and encouragement of the developers, I aim to continue following and recording things as they progress - I will give you further updates in the coming months. This seems to be the right time to draw as much information together on what was once one of the village's biggest and most important employers, so, if anyone has old photographs or memories of the Millend area and the mill in particular, I would like to hear from them.

Stephen Mills

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The views expressed in ECN are not necessarily those of the editor.

Cotswold Canal Project Update



The project to restore the Cotswold Canals is now almost back on track following all the problems of last year when British Waterways, the Lead Partner, suddenly decided to drop out at no notice.

The funding has been re-secured and the gap left by BW's exit has been largely filled from other sources. Stroud District Council have taken on the role of Lead Partner and have recently recruited Paul Coupe as the Project Manager. Paul is a chartered civil engineer and worked for British Waterways for several years earlier in his career. He lives locally and is on a near vertical learning curve and in the process of recruiting his team to help deliver the project.

On the last day of March, the long lease on the Stroudwater Canal was assigned from British Waterways to the Stroud Valleys Canal Company. SVCC is a new body set up to own and manage the canal for the benefit of the public and is in the form of a charitable company. It is getting to grips with a number of maintenance issues left by BW and the control of the water supply for the lower part of the canal at Ryeford is now being managed by a team of volunteers who live nearby. However, someone yet to be identified, has used a digger to trash a water control structure further up the river Frome and there is concern that this might compromise water supplies in the summer - the matter has been reported to the Environment Agency.

The initial £25m restoration programme, known as Phase 1A, extends from the Ocean at Stonehouse to Brimscombe Port on the far side of Stroud. Phase 1B, which largely falls outside of the scope of the current funding package, is the 4 mile length which links this with the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and is the bit which passes through the Parish of Eastington.

The Cotswold Canals Trust has its main western maintenance depot at Pike Bridge where volunteers meet on Mondays and Wednesdays to carry out a wide variety of tasks either directly on the canal or to equipment that is intended to be used on it. A current project is the refurbishment of the Trust's dredging equipment including the dredger which has been moored on the canal above Pike Lock for a number of years.

The Trust has also identified a potential funding source which might help purchase land between the M5 and A38 where the canal was destroyed when the A419 link road was built to bypass Eastington in about 1970. If this funding becomes available and the current owner agrees to sell the land, it will secure the route for the canal, which will essentially be a new cut here with a new lock near the A38, as well as provide a substantial area of land for the creation of a multi-function wetland area between the canal and river.

These are exciting times and the Trust is always looking for new members and volunteers (but you don't have to be a member to be a volunteer). Please get in touch if you are interested in either or both.

Ken Burgin 01453 827414

www.cotswoldcanals.com

OWEN HARRIS MEMORIAL GROUND



Owen Harris Memorial Ground Charity

Eastington Community Centre News.

www.ohmg.org.uk

Firstly, we are saddened to report that the new community centre suffered a burglary on the night of Friday 3rd April during which over £7,000 of construction equipment and materials were stolen. The police are currently investigating the matter and CCTV footage is being examined. It's a real shame that this has happened and we would welcome any information to help with the apprehension and prosecution of the thieves. If anyone reading this has any information which would help us continue our investigations, then please do contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. Also, if anyone is, or has been, offered second-hand tools and construction equipment recently, and you feel this may be stolen, then please help, as this financial blow will affect all of us! Remember that the centre is being constructed by a charity for the people of Eastington and the money raised for the centre is due to the generosity of individuals, authorities and businesses within the area. Although the stolen items were insured, there will still be a cost implication for us and will have a negative effect on what facilities we can provide within the grounds.

Despite this blow, the good news is that the construction is going well and we expect to be complete in June, with external site clean up taking place in the summer. This will lead to a grand opening ceremony in September! The building is looking superb and we look forward to having it fully operational. Requests for bookings are now being received; so if anyone is considering setting up a group and would like to use the centre on a regular evening or weekend basis, then please contact Vanessa (details below) who will take your details.

Over the weeks, we've heard that people would like to see the building internally. We will not now be holding another open day, but if anyone would like to be shown around on an individual basis, then we will be happy to oblige. Simply contact Vanessa who will arrange an appropriate date/time.

Finally, our grand-opening day will require someone to officially open the centre. We have decided that we would like two people to perform the ceremony - those being the most representative 'oldest' and 'youngest' within the village. Obviously for the oldest we would like someone with a long connection with Eastington and who has seen many changes over the years and could probably tell some great stories of the olden days. For the 'youngest', we would like someone who will be most likely to benefit from the building in the coming years as it starts to accommodate early-years education, and clubs such as youth, sports and weekend clubs. If you would like to nominate yourself, relative, colleague or child to officially open the building please fill-in the form below and return to Jayne Elder ('Ashleaze', Alkerton). We would love to hear from you and your support is (as always) very welcome.

Just a reminder that we are still collecting ink cartridges and we now collect ink toner cartridges too (collection box in the Post Office or hand to any committee member).

Contact Details for the Owen Harris Committee:

Mark Cousins (Chair)	828557
Gill Glover (Funding Manager)	828782
Jayne Elder (Secretary)	828027
Vanessa Cousins (Bookings Clerk)	828557

Don't forget you can get an update of how the build progresses from the website: www.ohmg.org.uk

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Nomination for Grand Opening of Eastington Community Centre (see article above)

Name of nominated person: _____

Age: _____ Contact phone number: _____

Why you think this person should open the new building: _____

Name and contact details of proposer: _____

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS NEWSLETTER

PLANNING

The administration at Ebley Mill are seeking to amend the present scheme of delegation on planning applications. This basically decides whether elected members or officers make the decision on a planning application. There have been many attempts to change this in recent years. Many of them contentious. Two years ago the number of members on the committee was arbitrarily slashed by almost a third, thus reducing the amount of local knowledge available to the committee. The main points they seem to be looking at this time are: Removing/reducing the ability of neighbours, or other interested parties, and Parish Council's to influence who determines an application. Reducing the number of meeting the Committee hold. Reducing the number of members that sit on the committee or even not have a committee at all, officers then making all the decisions. Having a 'gang of three' decide what route any application will take. The driving force, we are told, behind this is that the Council is not meeting its delivery targets and therefore not receiving much in the way of Planning Delivery Grant from the government. The administration have given reasons for wanting to increase the number of applications that officers deal with so that they can increase the amount of Grant. My opinion on these reasons is that the information in them is rather selective. My understanding of this planning delivery 'bonus' is that it is for improving delivery. It should be seen as a bonus and not looked upon as needed to meet the daily running of the planning department. The government expects local authorities to continuously improve the services and systems they provide to the public. I think this is what the grant is all about. I have seen little on how the process's used and the work setting for officers etc is to be improved to meet targets. Most people in their working lives have to strive for continuing improvement. It is a fact of life and nothing unusual. I do not see how reducing the input from Parish Councils, both of the councils who's meetings I attend take planning very seriously and have special meeting to meet deadlines on consultation, will improve the planning process. I will continue to work to ensure that both Parish Council and neighbour/interested party opinions are considered important, and to keep a strong and vigorous member committee

CORE STRATEGY

I mentioned this in my last newsletter. Input from the public has been very low. I say again if you do not have your say someone else will get what they want. It may well have a direct effect on your surroundings for their benefit not yours.

COUNCILLORS EXPENSES

The group to which I belong has been studying the expenses claimed by members. We have asked for more detailed information on some of them. In particular certain taxi journeys that have been claimed for. We will be seeking further clarification on some items to ensure that there is full transparency in the council's affairs. I expect that these questions will be expanded to cover other items of expenditure incurred by some members so that there is no confusion on why they were claimed.

JAVELIN PARK

Along with several hundred other people I recently took part in a protest march against the proposal by the County Council to build a huge waste incinerator at Javelin Park Haresfield. Opposition is growing daily against this project as more people realize the impact it will have on their lives and the area in which we live. If you want to know more on the whole incineration issue/debate I suggest logging on to web site, ukwin.org.uk. A few quick bullet points on why I am opposing this issue are that it: 1/ Depresses recycling and waste resources. 2/ Releases greenhouse gasses. 3/ Is often forced through against strong public opposition. 4/ Relies on exaggerating future quantities of waste instead of strongly increased recycling and composting. 5/ Creates toxic emissions and hazardous ash. 6/ Poses significant health risks. Be in no doubt, this is a local decision. It is not being forced on the County Council by government.

I feel so strongly about this, and other County Council issues, such as the inability of the County Council to ensure that the full traffic calming measures required for the Springhill development were in place

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before it was started, (it looks like the project will be completed before it is properly implemented), and the prevarication over the B4008 through Standish that I have decided to be a candidate in the elections for the County Council in June.

MILLEND MILL

It is pleasing to see the work going ahead with this project. The demolition of the malt kiln has opened up the area as was thought. Although I am not sure that the face of the remaining building was what was quite expected.

Ken Stephens MAY 2009.

EASTINGTON BROWNIES

A reminder that we meet on Monday evenings from 7 - 8pm, during term time in Eastington Village Hall.

Brownies are girls aged from 7 - 10 years and if you would like more information please contact us. There is currently a waiting list, so if you know of anyone who may like to join please contact us in advance of their 7th birthday.

Kate Taylor 01453 821184

Sarah Mannings 01453 826850

Stroud Valleys Project

'Great Crested Newt by Torchlight', organised by Stroud Valleys Project was a great success. Visitors from some other parishes were quickly rewarded for braving the cool night-time dew, with spectacular performances by these colourful creatures. -Ed

Bohemian Beads Children's Party



If you are looking for an unusual, entertaining party, a children's jewellery making party is a great choice. Perfect for children aged 5+, the activity is fun, very rewarding and will keep the children absorbed and surprisingly quiet!

At a Bohemian Beads children's party we take away any stress. We provide the invitations, equipment, beads and a lovely bag for each child to keep their jewellery in. All you need to do is provide a roomy table with good light, we come to your party venue with a colourful range of beads for the children to choose from. We will spend at least an hour helping the children to design and make two pieces of jewellery, making from a choice of necklaces (lariats for older children), bracelets, or earrings.

A variety of options are available depending on the age of the children, including a special option for teenagers. The jewellery makes the perfect going home gift, as a pretty ribbon-tied organza bag is included in the price. Our prices start from £10 per head, depending on the chosen option, (subject to a minimum of 6 children), this cost includes all beads, stringing materials and the presentation bags – there are no extra hidden costs.

If you are interested in holding a party or would like more details on the options and price scales please email info@bohemianbeads.co.uk or call 0845 391 8941.



EASTINGTON PLAYGROUP

Tel 07977 342742

Charity number 1084981

We are making the most of the sunny weather and have been playing both inside and out in supervised free-flow play which is very enjoyable. This enables the children to choose where they would like to play and when and supports our self choosing scheme which helps children become more independent. Weather permitting!!

Whilst outside we can see the fantastic progress that the building is making and we have been thinking about storage systems. If anyone in the village has connections within this area we could do with your help please any ideas would be gratefully received. The new building has a purpose built covered play area which we can't wait to use.

We have started our Pre-School sessions at Eastington Primary School which are on Wednesday afternoons which helps the children prepare for school in September. By holding this session at the school the children get used to their new surroundings, meet the older children and their new teachers.

We are linking our sessions to the children's interests at Playgroup and at present the children are talking about their super hero's. We are supporting this by offering a box of props for the children to use which encourages their imaginations, the box presently contains some material of different colours and sizes, maps, tubes, shells, beads and jewellery amongst many others. We have been hearing some very interesting ideas from this which helps their social, communication literacy and language, knowledge and understanding, creativity as well as their problem solving and reasoning skills.

Sessions are full at the moment however if you would like some information regarding our Playgroup, and would like to visit us for an induction morning for spaces in September then please phone us and speak to a member of staff. There is funding available for children aged 3 years – a full day may only cost you £2 for the lunch club.

We look forward to meeting you!

Lingos ***Language Tuition***



French For Your Holidays
8 x 1 hour sessions
or

4 x 2 hour sessions
Daytime only

Why not gather a group
of friends – more fun
and less expensive!

Beginners welcome
Danish and Spanish also available

07799 657975

lingos@fsmail.net
Eastington

A Birder in the Parish

We approach a very interesting time of the year when migration is already under way and one never knows what might turn up in the country, but at the end of a lovely spell of early Spring weather, the first few drops of rain for some weeks came in on a cold north-westerly today - not the best news for Spring migrants. However, look out for Sand Martins and Swallows passing through, and also Swifts, heading to more northerly breeding sites. In fact, there are already Sand Martins and Swallows in the County where they tend to look for pools and lakes where insects in numbers are more likely; if you look outside the Parish for example, at Saul Warf, a small group have recently been seen, with one House Martin. Swallows are also hawking the meadows at Millend. These hirundines (the swallow family) will not yet be arriving in large numbers until the weather moves to a more southerly aspect. One or two Swifts have also been seen with one over Millend on April 25th.

I am gradually removing feeders from the feeding station as birds start to disperse to pair up for breeding; it has been a very good winter for number of species when a cracking male Brambling visited for two weeks with a flock of Chaffinches, and a lovely pair of Siskins joined the resident Goldfinches to fight over the niger seed!

Another bird to listen out for at this time of bird movement is the Willow Warbler; this really is a bird whose delicate cadence of a song means Spring is well and truly here, and they will be heard in the Parish usually by end of March into April.

The larger birds are nest building and egg laying, Magpies in particular are on the ground now looking for damp earth to strengthen their nests before lining it with fine roots and hair. It will be at the end of April and into early May when they unfortunately begin taking young birds of other species to feed their own chicks.

Our resident Carrion Crows are already setting up territory in the east meadows, driving off all larger birds who trespass over the invisible boundary, and propose a threat to the pair's nest site. It is intriguing how these territorial boundaries are delineated. The male Crow for example, will stoop and attack other birds in the territory, then drive them off relentlessly, only stopping and pulling away when the boundary is reached - but how they define it is a mystery, though I'm sure that physical factors are involved such as footpaths, or hedgerows, or individual trees. Most birds will decline to fight over territory, but Robins, on the other hand, probably the most recognizable of all our birds and much loved, will fight like demons over territory, with deaths having been recorded!

I will certainly miss the Jackdaws and feral Pigeons which have bred in Millend Mill for decades, but will surely have to move on as the mill is 'restored'. Jackdaws are such good value birds, very inquisitive and intelligent and have been a delight to watch all these years. They haven't yet really started nest building, but one or two pairs are dropping investigatory sticks down chimneys, and squabbling over the best nest sites; they would usually wait for the cows to appear in the meadows and tug hair from their backs to line the nest, but instead have been busily doing the same to some old carpets on our bonfire! Also watch for a pair of Kestrels nesting on one of the pylons in the east meadows, making use of an old Crow's nest.

Now is the best time to look out for Buzzards, when a good clear day will see as many as nine circling at once over the village, their 'mewing' calls being quite distinctive as pairs will defend the air-space above their territories, dive bombing intruders and sparring in mid-flight. Buzzards are now probably our commonest raptor and there are at least two to three pairs in the Parish, which is excellent, particularly after a tough winter when their main food supply of earthworms would have been scant.

Eastington Methodist Church

We have just entered one of the loveliest times of the year. Easter with all the hope of salvation and the resurrection coincides with all the trees coming back into iridescent green leaf and the emergence of a wellspring of new life.

Living next to the canal, we have an abundance of wildlife on our door step and at this time of the year there are often small fluffy ducklings. All of a sudden and apparently from nowhere, a flustered mother duck will appear with perhaps 10 or 12 little ducklings and launch into the canal. She has been sitting on a pile of eggs for the best part of a month hoping not to be eaten and she has just managed to get her little flock into the water for the first time. She quacks and they follow; if they lose sight of her, they start peeping loudly. A mother duck guiding her brood to safety and food - a good analogy for the way God looks after us perhaps?



Perhaps not! Mother ducks try to do the right things but they don't really have the brains for it.

For example, having been swimming up and down the length of canal above Pike Lock feeding happily, the mother duck decides that there is some interesting food at the bottom of the 2m high wall of vertical stop planks at the head of the lock.

Down she flies - "quack quack quack" she goes. The tiny ducklings stand on the top of the stop planks "peep peep peep" they go. At this age they cannot fly as their wings are little more than fluffy stumps and it is a long way down. With evermore urgent quacking, the mother urges them to join her and eventually one or two of the ducklings drop 2m down on to the concrete below, bounce and then get up and run to their mother apparently unharmed. The other ducklings run back and forth not wanting to jump. After perhaps 10 minutes of frantic quacking and peeping, the last duckling drops down to the rest. All feed happily for a while.

Then the mother duck gets bored and flies back up to the top of the vertical stop planks and starts quacking to her ducklings to follow her.....

God often challenges us to take a leap of faith and sometimes attempt what we perceive to be impossible. When we trust Him and take that leap, we have the joy of experiencing His power in our lives and we come out the stronger for it. What God does not do is shout at us uselessly from the top of the stop planks demanding that we try and do the impossible in our own strength.

Over the next few weeks, our Sunday services and many of our other activities, will be focussing on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us discern what we should be doing with our lives and for God. Our ability to know Jesus Christ and have a relationship with him is through the Holy Spirit who is sometimes described as the Comforter. The comfort comes from the real experience of knowing God and an assurance of eternal life with Him.

If this is outside your experience or you had it once but have lost it, now would be a good time to come along to our 11am Sunday services - all are welcome.

Ken & Rebecca Burgin - 01453 827414

info@EastingtonMethodists.org.uk

www.EastingtonMethodists.org.uk

The Leaze - Eastington Park

Introduction

As most readers will be aware, the former Eastington Park old people's home is in the process of being converted for use as a wedding venue. After nearly 60 years as a retirement home, there is a lot to do, and the Georgian house is undergoing a tremendous amount of renovation and restoration, aimed at returning it to its days as one of the most important residences in the parish. It seemed an appropriate time to look back at its history, to the days when it was inhabited by wealthy families, all of whom left their mark on the village in some way. If anyone has memories or pictures of the house or its former residents and would like to share them, I would be very grateful if they would contact me.

But, to return to the house. Throughout its lifetime as a residence, only four families lived there. All of them achieved their wealthy lifestyles largely through industry and commerce, as opposed to via the privilege and patronage that tended to accompany those with their roots in the landed gentry. Two families were influential in the local woollen cloth making trade, one was engaged in brewing, and the fourth had a long background of trade and commerce in Bristol. Of these families, the one that had the most profound influence on Eastington was the Hicks family. Between 1800 and the 1830s, the head of the household, Henry Hicks, was largely responsible for developing and expanding the woollen cloth trade in and around the parish. He bought and rebuilt the two existing village mills and added a third one, in the process, guaranteeing employment for several generations of the local population not engaged in agriculture. Henry Hicks was also responsible for the building of Eastington Park, an important visual reminder of his success. The family lived there until after his death in 1836.

The owners that followed Hicks maintained the traditions of their respective times. All appear to have maintained a paternalistic attitude towards the parish, and to have supported various village institutions and organisations. These families, like many country families of the time, remained engaged in a variety of spheres such as farming, politics, and the military. And like so many others, family members went to fight in the Boer War and both World Wars. Two families lost sons and husbands as a result.

Some individuals were well connected in circles outside their immediate locale or sphere of commercial activities. For instance, Henry Hicks was a personal friend of Dr Jenner, famous for introducing inoculation as a safeguard against smallpox. Similarly, members of the de Lisle Bush family were great friends with the fabled cricketer, W G Grace. The focus for these four families remained Eastington Park, long described as one of the 'principal residences' in the village. In this first part of the story, we will look at the first two families who made Eastington Park their home.

The Hicks family

At its peak in the 19th century, Eastington became a thriving mini mill town, with virtually all of its social and industrial life inextricably bound up with the woollen cloth trade. Much of this industry's development during the first half of the 19th century occurred as a direct result of the influence of the Hicks. For several generations, they came to dominate virtually every aspect of village life.

The Hicks family formed an offshoot of the notable Cotswold Hicks-Beach family, first appearing on the Eastington stage c1785. By 1798, they were living in Millend House. The family was clearly already wealthy, possibly as a result of their prior involvement in the woollen cloth trade elsewhere. Various family members had long been active in the trade in other parts of the county, although before Henry Hicks' arrival, they had no known connections with Eastington. During the ensuing years, Hicks built up a substantial empire that would ultimately encompass property, lands, farms and mills.

His initial efforts were focused mainly on the existing Churchend Mill that by around 1806, he had substantially rebuilt and enlarged (it stood immediately behind the school and was demolished c1912). In the same year, he bought the estate of Henry Stephens, along with the manorial rights. The position of Lord of the Manor was to later prove useful in a number of ways. By 1820, Henry had been joined in the

business by his two sons, James Phillimore and Henry Purnell Hicks, and "H. Hicks & Sons" were adding steam engines to their Eastington mills. By now, they were also operating Bonds Mill, just over the parish boundary in Stonehouse, where they installed a further engine. The period c1810-1830 was one of great activity for Hicks, as he continued to build up his business and update and enlarge his manufacturing sites. Apart from a programme of expansion for his existing mills, c1810, he built a completely new mill in the meadows below the confluence of the two arms of the Frome than run through the parish. This was aptly named Meadow Mills.

As his wealth increased, Hicks decided a new family residence was in order and c1815, built The Leaze, to which he added a large park, a short distance from his mill at Churchend. Along with this, he systematically bought up adjoining land until eventually, he owned much of this area of the parish. Churchend was formerly linked to the Stonehouse-Alkerton road by a lane that ran from the north-east of the churchyard to a point near the entrance of the drive to Eastington Park. When this was built, the lane was stopped up and replaced by the road that now runs along the north of the churchyard, which had apparently formerly been the private drive of the (demolished) Stephens' manor-house situated adjacent to the church. Despite the fact that much of his wealth was generated through the efforts of his workers and his mills, Hicks apparently did not wish to be reminded of them from his new house and during the construction of a new chimney stack at Churchend Mills, the height was reduced so that it would not be visible from The Leaze. Likewise, a tall screen of trees was planted along the southern edge of his estate, effectively hiding Bonds Mill from his view.

There was a peculiar happening at the house in December 1829, a period of great economic hardship and social unrest in the countryside. A group of sixteen 'poachers' came to the house and shot tame pheasants that Hicks had trained to wander about on the front lawns. When Hicks came to the front door to investigate the noise, the poachers continued shooting and dared anyone to stop them. This act was clearly not about poaching, but a symbolic act of protest about worsening living conditions in the countryside. It was also a show of strength in front of a landowner and obviously meant to be intimidating, despite the fact that those involved made no specific demands of Hicks nor aired any general grievances.

Although Hicks seems to have remained fairly remote from his workforce, he nevertheless made some contributions towards their spiritual and other needs. For instance, he paid for the clock for the tower of St Michaels church (although this may have been his way of ensuring that his workforce at Churchend Mills would not be late for work!). Although there was a gulf between Hicks and his workers, he does not appear to have been deliberately antagonistic as were some of the other masters. In a time when philanthropy and business went hand in hand, he contributed in a variety of ways to the well-being of the parish. He supported the village schools, such as they were, and encouraged children employed in his mills to attend school on a half-day basis. Local education prospects were boosted further when in 1818, from his position as Lord of the Manor, he donated land adjacent to the church for the construction of a new Charity School. In addition, his grant of £50 went some way towards paying for its actual construction. The building of the new school took away the need for the teacher who had been employed for some time to instruct 30 pupils in one of his village mills.

Although the quality of the cloth produced in Hicks' mills was never in question, in March 1835, the business failed. Overall, the decade was not to be a good one for the Hicks family, as apart from the failure of the business, a spate of deaths occurred. Charlotte Hicks, Henry's wife, had already died in May 1832, to be followed in June 1836 by Hicks himself. The Hicks had previously lost one son in 1824, when Winchcomb Henry Hicks died at the tender age of 21, and in the same year that his father died, the eldest son, John Phillimore, also passed away. Immediately following this troubled period, the estate was split up amongst the other members of the family. Part of the estate passed to Eliza Phillimore-Hicks, John Phillimore's widow. This consisted of The Leaze and its park, plus Churchend and Meadow Mills. Eliza and her four daughters subsequently spent some time living in France before retiring to Clevedon. Her daughters (Emma, Fanny, Julia and Margaret) inherited the estate at Eliza's death in 1868. In that year, she was still recorded as Lady of the Manor, and The Leaze as a principal residence. Within a year or so,

The Leaze had been sold to Thomas Marling, of the well known local cloth-making family. Up to the early 1890s, Emma and Julia retained ownership of Churchend and Meadow Mills. Julia died in 1896 and when the last of the four (Emma) died in 1901, ownership passed to a cousin, Cecil Hicks-Austin of London; the Hicks' long connection with Eastington effectively came to an end at this point.

Thomas Marling

Around 1870, The Leaze was sold to Thomas Marling, a member of the wealthy local cloth-making dynasty, long established in the Stroud area. Although perhaps not as well known as some of his relatives, Thomas had spent much of his life in the trade and had been appointed a juror for the 'purpose of awarding medals to articles of merit' at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The Marling family (descended from William Marling of Stroud who died in 1859) were one of the most prominent in the cloth trade, at various times, operating a succession of important mills in and around the Stroud valleys. These included Avening, Brimscombe Upper and Lower, Brimscombe Port, Bourne, Upper Doreys, Vatch, Slad, Lightpill, Hawkers, Pitts, Ham, Fromehall, Freames, Salmons and Steanbridge. Crucially, it also included Ebley and Stanley Mills, two of the biggest and most important mills in the region.

In 1825, William Marling, Thomas's father, was running Ham Mills near Stroud and in that year, Thomas entered into a partnership with his father. Thomas's brother, Samuel Stephens Marling, joined the partnership a little later. Between 1825 and 1832, Thomas's share in the business rose from nothing to £9000. Like other family members of the period, he apparently took little cash out of the business for his own use.

At this time, the partnership was also running Fromehall Mills, also near Stroud. In 1836, the brothers installed power looms at both mills, some of the first in the region. By 1840, they had moved to Ebley Mill although in the following year, Thomas may have reverted to Ham Mills and is thought to have retired from the business soon after. However, it was decided that he would receive half of the profits from Ebley Mill for 1841 and 1842, in compensation for earlier heavy outgoings. After this, Samuel carried on alone. As a result of the family's business success, the Marling family achieved considerable local importance, particularly throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thomas's brother later became Sir Samuel Stephens Marling, 1st Baronet (1810–1883), a noted cloth manufacturer and Liberal Party politician. In 1850, he bought what became for a century the Marling family estate at Stanley Park, Selsley. Samuel was also one of those responsible for the founding of Marling School, Stroud, in 1887, contributing £10,000 to the cause. He was succeeded in 1883 by his eldest son Sir William Henry Marling who by 1888, was Sheriff of Gloucestershire. His son, the 3rd baronet, Sir Percival Scrope Marling, had a distinguished military career in Egypt, the Sudan and South Africa. Stanley Park remained the main family residence until the estate was broken up in the early 1950s. However, Ebley Mill remained in Marling family ownership until its closure in the 1970s.

Little is known of Thomas's life after his retirement around 1841 until his purchase of The Leaze c1870. His stay there was to be relatively brief, as before the end of the decade, the Marlings had been replaced by members of yet another local dynasty, the Stantons. We will look at them and their successors, the de Lisle Bushes, in Part 2 of the story.

Stephen Mills **Crest House** **Cress Green**