

# Coddenham Village History Club

## Newsletter ~ September 2022

At the end of July we had our first club meeting for over two and a half years. Still being careful with covid infections circulating it was held in the Community Centre, which was just as well as attendance was over 75. A brilliant performance was given by Charlie Haylock on his experience as voice coach for the Netflix film “The Dig” and in particular for Ralph Fiennes who played Basil Brown.

Our old friend Bernard Baker sadly passed away last year at the age of 91. He and Clarissa came to live at The Old Lodge in the High Street in 1962 and both quickly became involved with village life. Whilst Clarissa was a leading light in the WI, Bernard served on the Parish Council for 32 years, nine of them as Chairman. As well as being a very successful commercial artist, he also found time to paint and draw characters and scenes around the village. He was a valuable member of our history club from the outset until he and Clarissa moved to Rattlesden. Clarissa has very kindly donated to the history club some of his paintings of past village characters and other memorabilia connected to Coddenham. Amongst some of this material was this lovely cartoon of their old home, The Old Lodge in the High Street. It's one that we haven't seen before and we think it may date from the 60's/70's. We thought it very apt!

## Future Programme

Our next meeting is on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October at 7.30pm in the Community Centre with Pip Wright and “A Poacher's Life”. A spellbinding tale of poaching, murder and intrigue – the true story of the notorious Whistlecraft family from Rickinghall and Hinderclay. A family of poachers who now have “folk hero” status within the local community, especially Joe Whistlecraft for reasons we will discover when Pip Wright takes over his character!

Our AGM is on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November at 7pm in the Community Centre. The present officers and committee are willing to stand for another year but would very much welcome some new recruits. If you feel you would like to join us, please contact myself (Ed) or a member of our committee. We are also looking for someone with IT skills who would be willing to help us with digitally archiving our records. The programme for 2023 will be discussed and we welcome any new ideas for speakers/activities. After the business of the meeting, at 7.30pm, we are delighted to welcome back our very own Tom Boles with “An Introduction to Astronomy: From Here to Infinity (and beyond?)”. Tom is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Association and a past President of the British Astronomical Association. He has discovered more supernovae than any other person and the International Astronomical union has named main belt asteroid 7648 'tomboles' in his honour. He has been awarded the Merlin medal and the Walter Goodacre Award for his contribution to astronomy. And to cap that, he's a best selling author of thrillers. An evening not to be missed!

## Recollections

Nowadays, we seem to be living through times of uncertainty – can we afford to pay the electricity/gas bill, how can we economise on food, will we have enough money to put fuel in the car? These are certainly some of the questions many are asking themselves. Sometimes it's good to look back and learn from the past when there were no benefits and government handouts. No help with the winter fuel bill for pensioners and how on earth did people manage with a disabled child or elderly parent to care for. But they did.

John Smith sadly passed away last November. He was born in the village in 1929, a descendant of the Smith family of Harness Makers who lived in Holbeck House, with direct family connections going back 150 years. From memories of his young life in Coddenham, it's interesting to note how far we have progressed (or regressed?) in the last 80 years or so!

“I remember Coddenham as a thriving self-contained village employing most of its inhabitants. It was a happy friendly place to spend one's childhood, there were very few cars, and children played safely in the streets. Bicycles abounded and were propped up against every wall, a few pony and traps were still in use and an occasional wagon would trundle past. Hopscotch, skipping, spinning tops and bowling hoops were popular pastimes, together with bows and arrows and catapults all made from wood found in the hedgerows. Pocket-knives, much prized possessions among the boys, were used to make whistles from green ash wood, popguns made from hollowed out elder were loaded with acorns, hazel sticks served as supports for kites which were covered with brown paper and flown on windy days. During freezing spells in winter, the iced ponds offered opportunities for skating and in snowy weather several children pulling home made toboggans would wend their way to Green Hill, a favourite spot for this sport.

In those days the village was largely self-supporting. It boasted six shops: four grocers, a hardware shop and a sweet shop. Most of the daily food intake of its inhabitants was either bought in these shops or grown in the cottage gardens. There was also a post office in the main street. Most of the shops also sold paraffin oil, this was widely used for lighting and to lesser extent oil stoves, a popular means of cooking during the summer months. There was little need for dustbins as packaging was basic; most goods were weighed up in thick blue paper bags, tinned food apart from the occasional tin of cocoa was rare. Jam jars were saved from year to year to be filled with home made jam, chutney and pickles. Most of the few bottles bought were returnable.

Oven fires were the normal means of both heating the home and cooking. Fuel was obtained from fallen trees or cutting hedgerows. It was common practice to seek permission to cut a farm hedge in exchange for timber. Coppicing was done every ten to twelve years, larger trunks were cut into logs, the brush wood and blackthorn tied into faggots and used to heat brick ovens. Friday was baking day. Early in the morning a faggot was placed in the huge brick oven and ignited. As this burnt the brick walls of the cooking space would heat up and retain this heat for a considerable time. When it was considered the oven was hot enough, the ashes were cleaned out and cooking started. Enough bread was baked to last the week out, and a joint of meat would probably be cooked while the oven was hot. The remainder of the weekly joint would be served cold for the next day or two together with pickles and potatoes boiled in a black saucepan on the open fire. Pies were made with fruit gathered from the garden and hedgerows when in season. Friday night was usually bath night. Buckets of water heated in the brick oven after baking was finished, were used to fill a tin bath. The whole family would then take turns to bath before the kitchen fire.

After a brief respite from work on Sunday, the week began in earnest Monday morning as the copper was filled and stoked up for washday. By afternoon, white sheets decorated every washing line in the village and a good drying wind was needed. Apart from a clotheshorse in front of the fire this was the only means of drying the laundry. Little waste was tolerated in those days. Brick floors were scrubbed with the recycled water from the washtub used to wash the family's clothes.

Three butchers, slaughtering locally produced cattle, pigs and sheep, supplied fresh meat, with vans delivering to the door. Freezers were unheard of and refrigerators extremely rare. Every household owned a meat-safe made of perforated zinc. This allowed the meat access to air but excluded flies; a crude but effective method of storage.

Bickers' bus made two trips a day to Ipswich, and goods bought in the shops would be delivered to the Half Moon and Star public house yard where the bus was parked ready for the return journey. It also provided a carrier service and for a small charge the driver would buy goods needed by those unable to make the journey. The fare to Ipswich was 6d return and the driver Mr A Bickers would let the bus (an old Dennis) freewheel down the hills to save petrol.

The same bus was used as transport for the Methodist Chapel Sunday School treats. This comprised a trip to Felixstowe and after a day on the beach, tea at Millers followed by funfair rides at Butlins, the homeward journey would begin. As two buses were needed, the day ended with a race home. Carefully stage-managed by the drivers of course.

The blacksmith shop was always busy. On rainy days when unable to work on the land, the Suffolk horses would be brought to have their worn out shoes replaced. This was quite a social occasion for their handlers who chattered and smoked clay pipes while they waited their turn. A wheelwright plied his trade some five hundred yards away. There was always great interest when the wheelwright trundled a newly made wagon wheel up the road to the forge for the final stage of its manufacture, the fitting of the steel rim. This was achieved by heating the ring of steel red hot, placing it over the wooden wheel and cooling it with many pails of water. Clouds of steam filled the air as it then contracted and affixed itself tightly to the wheel.

Mounted on his bicycle the village policeman patrolled the village and together with the head school master maintained a trouble-free situation in the younger generation of the population. A descendant of the poet William Wordsworth was vicar of the village; a wealthy man living in the very big rectory and employing a large staff of indoor and outdoor servants. The church was well attended probably more from a sense of duty rather than a desire to listen to his humourless sermons. The Methodist Chapel also carried a very strong membership.

Farm workers occupied the majority of cottages in the village. Well-kept vegetable gardens surrounded many of them. Most spring evenings the householder, after a hard day's toil in the fields, could be seen tending his plants. A good garden was considered a

great asset as much of the family food could be produced there.

The village of Coddenham has changed but the memories of its hay days will remain with me forever.”

John Smith 2004

### WORKING MEETINGS

Now that the threat of covid appears to be receding, we intend to resume our regular working meetings. These evenings are for anyone wishing to research, work on a project or just browse through the material we have collected over the years. 7.30pm Ivy Farm House, High Street, Coddenham, where our records are kept.

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October

Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November

If you are unable to make either of these evenings and are researching a particular subject or family, please contact Sylvia Bickers 01449 760382 for a mutually suitable date and time.

### DIARY DATES

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> Oct: “A Poacher's Life” by Pip Wright.  
7.30pm Coddenham Community Centre

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> Nov AGM 7pm followed at 7.30pm by “An Introduction to Astronomy:  
From  
Here to Infinity (and beyond?)” by Tom Boles  
7.30pm Coddenham Community Centre

Meetings are free to members, visitors £3

Newsletter Editor: Sally Garrod, 15 Mary Day Close, Coddenham, IP6 9SR. Tel.01449  
760542

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