

Coddenham Village History Club

Newsletter ~ September 2020

We trust that you have all kept well and free from this awful virus which has affected us all in many different ways. Sadly, we have had to cancel all our meetings and outings for this year - and even next year could be hanging in the balance. However, we have not been idle. Committee meetings have continued via Zoom and the most exciting thing to come out of the lock down for us is our own section on the Coddenham Parish Community web site:

<https://www.coddenham-parish-uk/coddenham-village-history>

Under the guidance of our chairman, Ray Collins, the site has turned out to be something we are very pleased with and has received excellent feed back. As well as interesting articles on the history of the village, we will be posting information on future events, and eventually digitalise the archive information which we currently hold in filing cabinets. Members will still receive a newsletter by post but, if you can, keep an eye on the web site for the time being.

These are very uncertain times and because we have had to cancel or postpone our programme for this year we will not be asking you for subscriptions for 2021, and any monies you have paid out for visits can either be refunded or carried over to next year. Just let our treasurer know.

Another outcome of the lockdown - we have had the time and opportunity to start sorting through the information held in those filing cabinets! Some things we hadn't seen for years and some things had just been slung in there when we were too busy to deal with at the time We never threw anything away!! Therefore, we have had the odd surprise or two. One of the files which was rarely opened, probably because it was filed under 'W' and was at the very back, is one on 'The Weather'. Does anyone remember Fred and Christine Harrold who lived at 'Crantock'? Fred was a retired meteorologist who had worked for the Met Office. He was also a keen historian and recorded unusual weather events in the village. As well as recording The Great Storm of 1987, he recorded the lesser remembered Electric Storm which struck Coddenham during the afternoon of 23rd July 1986 and to quote Fred:

“This was a memorable day, being the Wedding Day of Prince Andrew and Miss Sarah Ferguson, now the Duke and Duchess of York. Many villagers were viewing the wedding on television at the time.

Just to the north of The Old Dower House is a flattened building plot. The garden of The Old Dower House rises sharply to the East and it was near the top of this rise that one lightning bolt appears to have struck. The target was the root of a tree several feet in thickness which was well split; pieces of tree were hurled over the top of the buildings and landed between the houses opposite which are on the Wickham Market road. A few feet north of this strike, the chalk soil could be seen split open and blackened (like the cat's face in a later reference). Evidence of the track of this strike can be followed down towards the houses via the fused wire of a chestnut fence, iron pieces of a gate and thence to upturned soil on the side of Wing Commander Hoskin's garage. It is hardly credible that a box of sand could have been lifted and deposited upon the bonnet of a car inside the garage by the electric force, yet there seems little doubt that this was the case.

Some forty feet west across the building site (*now 'Brambles'*), two houses on the other side of School Road felt the force and some windows of The Old Police House and Hill House were smashed.. Greta and her sister who were in one of the aforementioned houses, experienced the deafening clap of thunder and saw a red glow. Roy Gudgin's village shop escaped but the Offord family, driving by at the time, were shaken by the force of the strike.

In the Red House and Crantock, next door, items from the facing wall were thrown inwards into the room and the same deafening noise and strange red afterglow were reported. A piece of wood found between the two houses is believed to have come from the tree which was struck, as mentioned before.

It was estimated that over 30 telephones were put out of action; some had damaged lines or wall connections and some had damaged instruments. The story was similar with the mains electric wiring; plugs burned out and household equipment damaged, e.g. freezers and ovens and also shop tills were affected.

The greatest problems seemed to be around what used to be the Crown Inn and next door in the Doctor's surgery where walls, for some reason in the past, had been lined with a metallic material. A strange pattern appeared where the electric charge within the wall had blasted the top paint off leaving irregular speckles. Chips of paint covered the floor and the telephone was broken.

Mr & Mrs Hazel, who live up the High Street near Love Lane, were watching the Royal Wedding on the television when suddenly the whole house was bathed in light (this light was observed by Mrs Knight next door). Inside the house, the brilliant flash put the television out of order. The cat was enjoying its own place on the settee and from here it was seen to shoot 4 or 5 feet into the air, presumably across the electric discharge, and

received a black singed face. He is normally completely white. There has never been a fireplace in the house where soot may have come from. Several other houses in the vicinity of Love Lane had their televisions and telephones put out of order.

On the north side of the High Street, in the Duke's Head, the landlord had just purchased cigarettes from the machine near the bar. The machine became live and he was severely shaken. Other electrical equipment in the Duke's Head was affected.

At the Old Bakery (the Peacocks were away) the time switch clock motor burned out and the two way 13A socket adapter feeding the deep freezer was damaged.

Further up the hill, metal scaffolding on one house became alive. Unfortunately, it could not be confirmed whether or not the bolts had become welded.

To the north-west, along School Road and opposite Blacksmith's Lane, Mr Ovenall was crossing his yard at the time of the strike. Afterwards he commented, "It felt like a flood of electricity passing through my body". This feeling made his joints shake and he fell to the ground and took a little time to recover. Later he was heard to express his disappointment that this treatment had not improved his arthritis, though he believed his rubber soled shoes had saved him from being more seriously hurt.

The slaughter house beyond the butcher's shop also received a shaking, and a blinding blue flash of discharging electricity was seen on one of the machines. This cut off the mains supply.

To the south of the village the church clock stopped. This was probably due to a temporary cut-out of mains electricity. Church Cottages were not affected seriously but the telephone of Manor Farm, opposite the church, was cut off and perhaps a few tiles were lost from one of the farm buildings.

Away to the west is Limekilns. A lady there was talking to a friend on the telephone when the lightning strike took place and she is said to have been so struck by the force, that she was temporarily paralysed down one side of her body and still felt the tingling sensation the next day."

Fred Harrold 1986

This, and many other articles, will eventually find their way on to our web site as we gradually work our way through the files.

Sadly, we are unable to hold Working Meetings or make arrangements for a future programme but in the meantime we, the committee, wish you all well – keep safe – and we look forward to when we can all meet again.

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