

METHWOLD

PAST - PRESENT - FUTURE

METHWOLD PARISH APPRAISAL 1994

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PREFACE

Towards the end of 1993, after consultation with the Norfolk Rural Community Council, Methwold Parish Council held an open meeting to discuss the feasibility of a Parish Appraisal. Although there were no major or divisive issues confronting the Parish, it was thought that the Parish would benefit from an Appraisal.

In January 1994 a Steering Group, completely independent of the Parish Council, was set up with the task to conduct the Appraisal and write a Report. This Steering Group comprised 5 born - and - bred Methwoldians and 4 newcomers, bringing together traditional and outside backgrounds and establishing an early confidence in the Appraisal within the local community.

At its second meeting the Steering Group proposed its timetable: a Questionnaire to be finalised by early May, distribution of Questionnaire in June, collection of Questionnaire by the end of June, analysis of returns by the end of August, and then two to three months to draft, publish, and circulate the Report. It is a credit to everyone concerned that this tight timetable slipped only slightly.

For an Appraisal to be representative of the views of the Parish it is essential that answered Questionnaires be returned by the majority of Households. Our Questionnaire was framed to be completely confidential and free from embarrassments, but inviting comments on all issues. Questions which might possibly identify the family who had filled in a return and questions which related to money, either property values or personal finances, were rejected. Furthermore it was decided that each individual distributor of the Questionnaire should deal with no more than 10 houses, which was achieved with 50 volunteers. A subsequent return of just below 90% justified these measures.

The smooth running of this Appraisal has been due to the good humour, dedication and persistence of the distributors, the enthusiasm of many local people to share their knowledge of the Parish past and present, the willing cooperation of all organisations and firms, and the support from those staff contacted at King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.

Only time will tell whether or not the hard work put into this Appraisal has been worthwhile. The mere exercise of carrying it out has been highly rewarding, bringing together many people in a common cause and offering a rare opportunity to all to let off steam. Hopefully this Appraisal Report will increase awareness of this particular rural community, stimulate debate and discussion, and lead to some tangible actions.

To every one who has participated in this Appraisal, especially the people of the Parish for answering the Questionnaire, sincere and grateful thanks.

Geoff Hancock
Chairman of the Steering Group

January 1995

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INTRODUCTION

This Report is written for, and on behalf of, the people of Methwold Parish. It serves three aims:

to inform the people of the Parish about the history of the Parish and about the factors which determine and govern the life of the Parish at the present time.

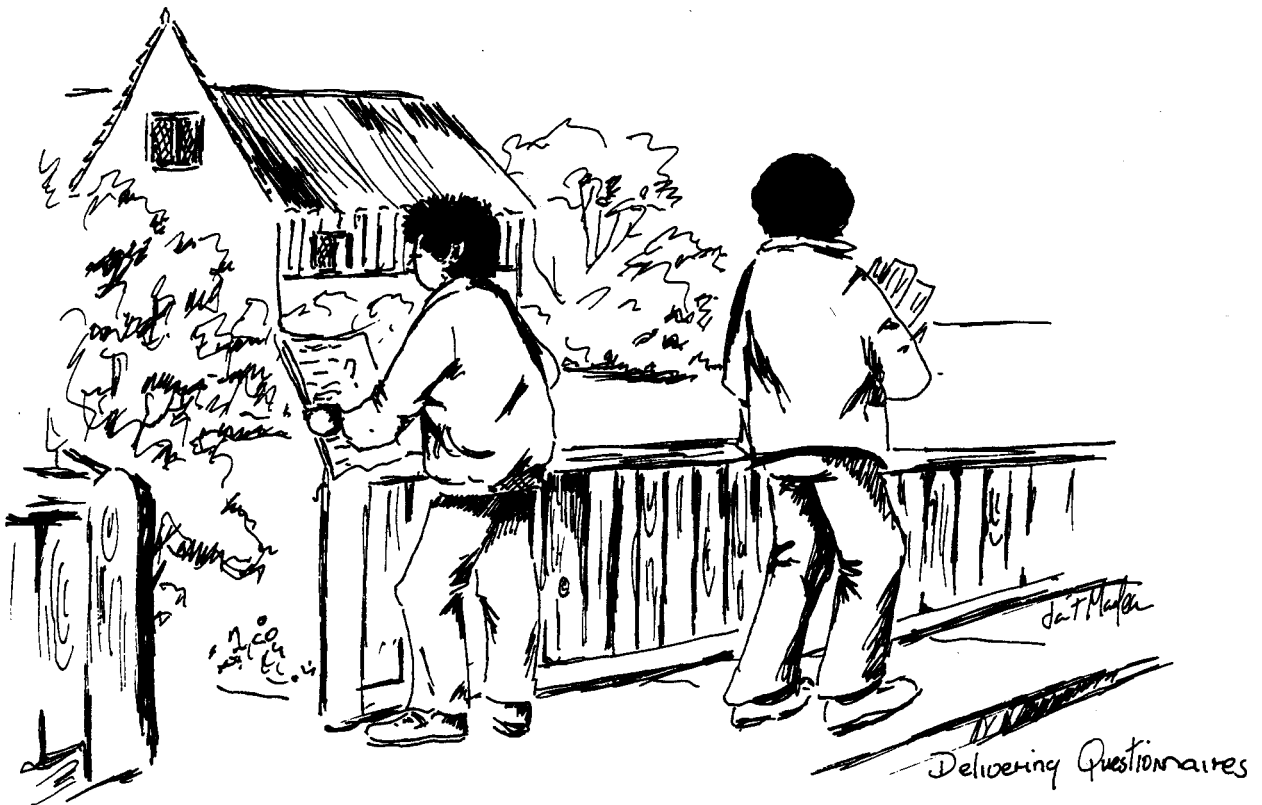
to provide a platform for the opinions of the people of the Parish on the current state of the Parish and their suggestions for future developments.

to stimulate further debate not only within the Parish, but also within the Borough and County, on where we go from here.

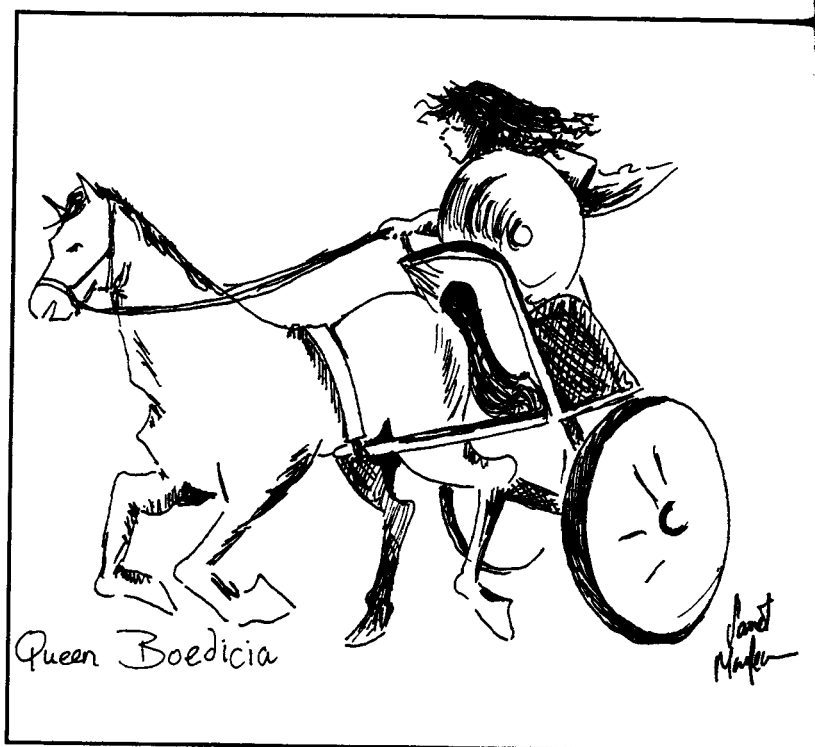
The opinions of the people of the Parish presented in this Report are based on the returns to the Methwold Parish Questionnaire. The complete detailed data, including every individual comment, from all returns are listed in an Appendix. A copy of this Appendix is available to anyone who wants one (see back page).

The aim has been to present an authoritative document which is readable and informative, and which will also serve as a useful reference. After a brief history of Methwold, each aspect of life in the Parish is then dealt with in turn where local opinion is interwoven with relevant background information, and commented on by the Steering Group. Because of the need to publish this Appraisal Report as quickly as possible the background information may be incomplete, and some details may be incorrect.

All interpretations expressed in this Report, including the Conclusions and Recommendations, have arisen solely from the deliberations of the Steering Group. This Steering Group, with its lack of experience in local government or in top management, may be naive and ill-informed in some areas, if so, perhaps allowances can be made and excused as over-enthusiasm.



Catuvellauni; the Iceni retained their customs and were exempt from Roman taxes. But when the Iceni king, Prasutagus, died in 60 AD the local Roman Procurator broke the agreement with the Iceni and ruthlessly imposed Romanisation, allegedly flogging the King's wife, Boadica and raping the King's daughters. The incident triggered off the revolt headed by Boadica, supported by other tribes who had experienced Roman suppression; the Roman garrisons of Colchester, London and St Albans were destroyed and all inhabitants massacred. The rebellion was brutally suppressed by the Romans in 61 AD, rebels were slaughtered and the remaining Iceni tribes people were herded into forced labour to drain the Fens.



The next 250 years were peaceful and prosperous. East Anglia, aided by Fen drainage and inland waterways, running as far as York, supplied corn to the Roman Legions. The Romans built a floating causeway of logs over the Fen marshes from Denver to Peterborough. This area produced wool, pottery, pewter, woven cloth and salt (from Denver). The remains of a Roman villa and outbuildings (kilns, sheds) have been found between Methwold and Brookville, indicating a villa of brick and flint complete with bathrooms and underfloor central heating; this villa might have been a sheep farm or merely a retirement home. A Roman sword and evidence of a mosaic floor have been found near the Hythe. Roman coins have been found in Methwold and Brookville.

Raids by Angles and Saxons started about 350 AD at a time when the Roman Empire began to decline. Roman Britain gradually disintegrated; the Fen drainage system collapsed as Romans were recalled home, the last troops departing in 430 AD.

Angles and Saxons arrived in increasing numbers, to conquer and settle, apparently leaving their homelands deserted. Their savage policy of genocide and slavery of the locals

caused a mass migration of Celtic Britons westward towards Wales and Ireland; local Celtic art, customs and place names were completely wiped out.

The Angle-Saxons, or Anglians, differed from the earlier Britons, preferring uplands to the Brecklands and settled in the rolling wooded areas, or wolds. Methwold was possibly settled by a group known as the Buntings, initially in the Thornham Road area, moving to the Buntings Lane area, finally settling in the centre of the present village; the reasons for the moves were probably due to flooding and moving to slightly higher ground.

Many current place names originated with the Anglo-Saxons: - ham, -ford, -wold, -ing, -ton, -well, all indicated an Anglo-Saxon settlement.

Methwold, previously Medelwolde, Methelwalde, Methelwolda, denotes a settlement in the middle of the wolds. Hythe means 'landing place'; Methwold Hythe was a port on the edge of the waterways of the fens; Hilgay and Southery were islands in the fens. Severals means a collection of small settlements. (Brookville did not get its name until the 1900's.)

East Anglia prospered from 600 AD with its wool industry, trading with Wessex, via the Icknield Way, and across the North Sea with Europe.

Danish raids from around 835 AD devastated East Anglia: towns and ports were looted, European trade was severed, and a punitive tax, the Danegeld, was imposed. Within a few years Danes moved in as settlers; these Danes were assimilators, merging in with the native Anglo-Saxons, but preferring town-life as distinct from the Anglo-Saxons who preferred rural farming life. A Danish spear head was found in a Methwold field. Ownership of Methwold, Mundford, Northwold and Feltwell were all given to Ely monastery.

East Anglia was restored to Anglo-Saxon rule, and into a unified England, in 917 AD by the Wessex dynasty of Kings stemming from Alfred the Great.

For administrative purposes the (County) Shires were established throughout England, each Shire under the authority of a Sheriff. The Shires were broken down into Hundreds.

A Hundred was the area inhabited by 100 free families, alternatively the area of 100 Hides, where a Hide was the land which could support a (freeman) peasant and his family. A Hide is also recorded as 120 acres, but it is thought that

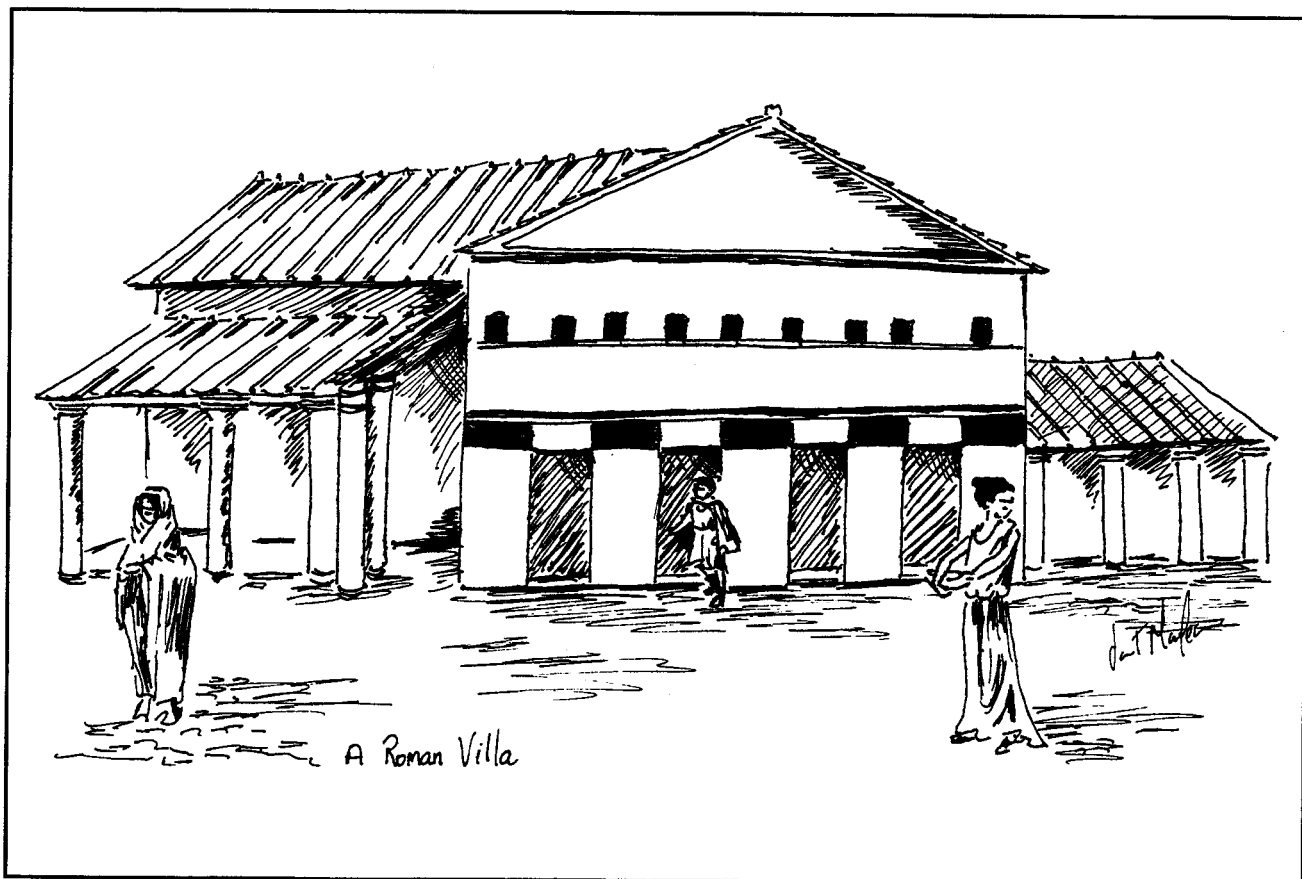
the acreage could be greater if the quality of the land was poor. Methwold was part of the Grimshoe Hundred which covered Hockwold, Feltwell, Northwold, Cranwich, Mundford, Santon Downham, Weeting; in total 66 500 acres. Grimshoe and Grimes graves are thought to refer to a Saxon, or possibly a Danish, general. The name Grimshoe has persisted over the years; the Grimshoe Petty Sessions moved to Methwold Court House, now the Linden Nursery, 1901.

A Parish was an ecclesiastical area, containing one church, which could be administered by one priest.

By the early 1000's England had become sufficiently weakened that the Danes were able to return and take the crown of England; East Anglia did not suffer unduly, perhaps because of the larger number of people of Danish descent, although Thetford was looted a couple of times.

The last major invasion by 'foreigners' from Europe was by the Normans who defeated the armies of the Danish King Harold at Hastings in 1066 AD.

William I took possession of all land in England,



which was divided up primarily between the Norman Barons and the Church. West Norfolk, together with part of South Yorkshire was 'owned', on behalf of the King, by his brother-in-law, William de Warrene, who lived mainly in Sussex. Stewards were installed to supervise the interests of the absentee landlord.

By the time of the publication of the Domesday Book in 1086, an inventory of the whole of England, the Methwold area had divided into three Manors, William de Warrene remained as the Lord of Methwold while a de Plaize became the Lord of the Manors of Methwold (Brunwell or Bromhill or Broomhill, pronounced Brummel) and Methwold Hythe.

A Manor usually coincided with a Parish, and consisted of manor house, village cottages, church, the manor farmed land, three fields for the villagers (with crop rotation each three years, wheat, oats and fallow for grazing), and a common meadow for hay; marsh and poor quality land were set aside as common ground for grazing and for cutting heating turves.

According to the Domesday Book Methwold

Manor contained no freemen, 18 villeins, 13 bordars, 24 serfs, 21½ mills, 7 fisheries, 48 oxen for ploughing, 4 horses, 12 cattle, 64 pigs, 800 sheep, 27 hives of bees. (Methwold and Feltwell formed the centre of honey production in Norfolk).

A freeman paid rent for his land in the three fields but owed no labour service to the Lord of the Manor. Villeins, bordars, serfs were all virtually slaves who had to provide prescribed days of labour on the manor farmland, and could be sold or transported to other places. A villein could rent ¼ of a Hide of land, a Bordar less and a Serf none.

The extensive Methwold (rabbit) Warren covering 1500 acres, along the Brandon Road, was probably established in the Norman period, although folklore suggests that the warren was in existence in the time of the Danes. The early Normans had difficulty with 'th' so Methwold became Mewol or Muelle; Muel rabbit, noted for its delicious flavour, has been widely popular over the centuries, apparently it was still being sold in the London Smithfield Market in the early part of the 1900's.



In 1206 the Manors of Methwold (Broomhill) and Methwold Hythe were given by the de Plaize family to the newly built Broomhill Priory. It is thought that this Priory was built on land opposite the Primary School; the existing Brumble Barn is said to be a Tithe Barn of the Priory (perhaps Brumble is a corruption of Brummel).

With three Manors there should be three Manor Houses and three Churches:

the Manor House for Methwold was in the present Recreation Ground, and the Church was the precursor of the present Church;

presumably the Priory was both the Manor House and Church for the Methwold Broomhill Manor;

the location of the Hythe Manor House is not known, but the Church was to the right of the Methwold to Hythe Road near Abbey Farm.

The exact boundaries of the three Manors are not known but the Methwold (Broomhill) Manor extended over the 'airfield' area.

In 1348 Methwold Manor was left by will to the Earl of Lancaster, who became the first Duke of Lancaster; the other two Methwold Manors remaining with the Broomhill Priory. The second Duke of Lancaster, by virtue of marriage to the daughter of the first Duke, was John of Gaunt, the third son of Edward III, who 'fathered' the line of Lancastrian Kings (Henry IV, V, VI) by his first wife and 'fathered' the later line of Tudor Kings and Queens by his third 'wife'. On the death of John of Gaunt in 1399 his lands passed to his son who became Henry IV, and so the Duchy of Lancaster passed into the hands of the Crown.

Recurrent outbreaks of the Black Death over the period 1349-75 decreased the population and gave the peasants a measure of economic leverage. Attempts by the magnates led by John of Gaunt to reverse and suppress the peasants gains in 1380 triggered the violent Peasants Revolt in 1381. A group of locals went on the rampage, attacking wealthy properties in Weeting and Didlington before proceeding to destroy John of Gaunt's Manor house in Methwold and all of its records.



A Norman House

The feudal system finally came to an end in the 1400s. But the lot of the peasant did not necessarily improve. New methods of farming, in particular developing pasture land, required larger farms which were formed by the richer land-owners buying out the poorer ones and by encroaching on, and enclosing, common land.

Coming to the Tudor period of the 1500's. according to folklore, Cardinal Wolsey, Lord Chancellor for Henry VIII, started his career as vicar of Feltwell where he served a spell in the stocks for drunkenness in public. To raise revenues for his various ventures, including the foundation of Colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, Wolsey abolished 29 monastic houses, including Broomhill Priory, and confiscated their revenues. Shortly afterwards, Wolsey fell from favour, Henry VIII then gave the lands of the Manors of Methwold (Broomhill) and Methwold Hythe to Christ's College, Cambridge.

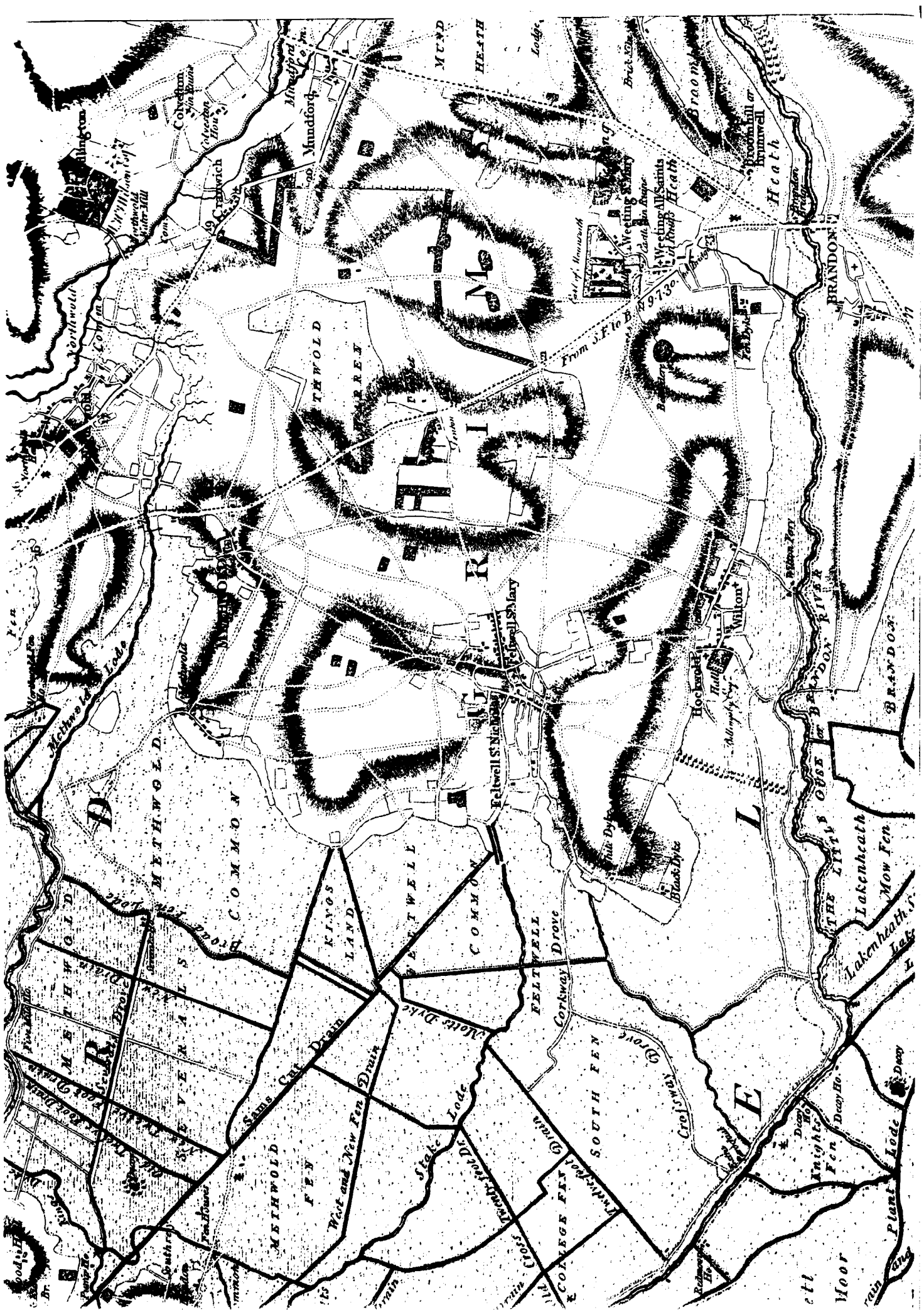
Charles II visited Methwold in the late 1600's, dining on Muel rabbit, viewing a cockfight behind the Cock, and granting exemption from all road and bridge tolls (if this Royal Decree has not been rescinded, claim exemption next time you go over the Dartford Bridge).

Through the 1700's the lot of farm labourers continually deteriorated; low wages, high prices, continuing enclosure of common land and unrestrained market forces reduced a rural population to one of itinerant wage labourers. Furthermore drainage of the fens destroyed ditching, the traditional occupation of the 29-week winter.



A map of the local area in 1795, taken from Faden's map of Norfolk, is shown opposite, the hatched areas denote higher ground. Note the large area covered by the word 'Methwold' from the Warren in the east to the Severals and Fen in the west.

Methwold was 'enclosed' by Statute in 1807, losing its Common and half of its profitable rabbit warren. Later in 1843 a law was passed which demanded that for every 6000 acre enclosed, 132½ acres should go to allotments and 49½ acres to recreation. The allotments were situated between the Mundford/Brandon Roads and Hythe Road/Buntings Lane.



Methwold's fortunes through the 1800's followed the ups and downs of the agricultural economy, as usual it was down for the poor, especially about the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1847, and up for the rich, the land owners. Many agricultural workers looked to Trade Unionism to better their situation, most of the prominent leaders of this new movement were Primitive Methodists. After a bitter eight month action in 1873 the National Agricultural Labourers Union was broken.

Brookville came into being at the turn of the century. The Goodrich family, a local Methwold family, which included a carpenter, the publican at the Swan, and a farmer, owned land around 'Brookville' and the Glebe. As a venture in the mid 1880's 130 acres of land around 'Brookville' was to be sold off in 2 or 3 acre plots at £35 per acre (not insignificant amount) aimed at enticing affluent city types away from their urban rat-race to take up a life of self sufficiency in a rural Colony, growing and selling fruit and tobacco. On the basis that there are only about 10 substantial brick buildings from that period in Brookville the scheme did not attract too many well-off types. Most of the plots were taken up by local people (whether the price was reduced or the plots rented is not known) who built shacks or lived in disused railway carriages (at least one of which still remains).

The Colony was well established by 1893. In the passage way of the Social Club there is a full page from a North London (Finchley) newspaper, advertising the products of the Colony. A supportive journalist who visited the Colony in 1893 despaired of the residents because they seemed more obsessed with spiritualism and phrenology (locals have apparently always regarded 'Brookvillians' as nutters; in later times there was an 'inventor' who tried to convert a motor car into a helicopter, and couple a plough to a motor bike).

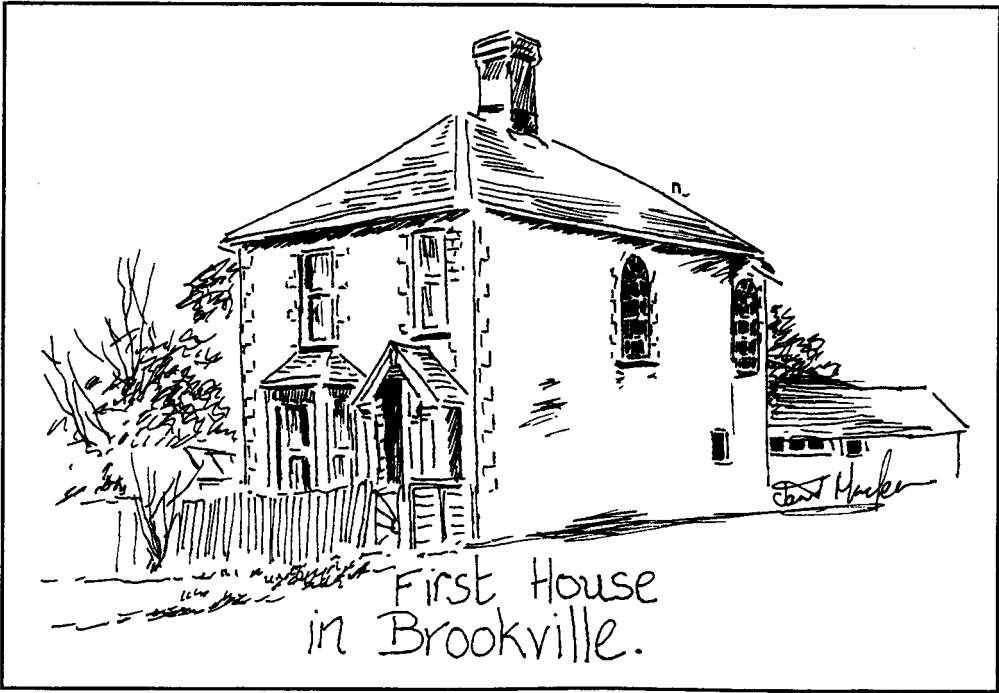
The Colony was not a success, several explanations have been given, all of which imply a lack of business acumen: each small plot was not viable on its own, the fruit was not transported to London sufficiently quickly, and when the fruit reached London their marketing was inadequate. Nevertheless a community was created.

Who conjured up the pretentious name Brookville, and when, is not known.

Brookville was initially in the Northwold Parish but transferred into the Methwold Parish in the early 1950's.

The map opposite of Methwold village shows some of the traditional place names, pubs and buildings

Further aspects of more recent history of the Parish are described through the following pages.





LAND

Agricultural land in the Parish increased as the fens were gradually drained.

In 1604 800 cattle were grazing on the Methwold Severals while 1700 sheep and 350 cattle grazed on the Methwold Common.

The construction of the fen dyke system by Vermuyden for the Duke of Bedford in the 1630's, including a new dam at Denver, flooded the Common and the Severals. Abraham Younge, an ancestor of our local historian, John Younge, petitioned against this flooding (he had to be careful, a petition signed by three people constituted treason). In the Civil War, in 1642, the fens were deliberately flooded to hinder any attacks by the Royalists. With the restoration of the monarchy the fen drainage was reconstructed in 1650, including the drainage of the Severals, the Common and Feltwell Fen.

By 1845 Methwold had eliminated all of its marshland, the Parish comprised 7921 acres of arable land, 4969 acres of meadow and 65 acres of woodland (12,955 acres in total). Nevertheless there were periodic floodings, for example the 'Great Drown' in 1852/3. The Methwold and Feltwell Drainage Act of 1909 enforced the maintenance of the drains and the hunting of moles; to cover expenses a severe local tax was imposed.

As shown in the map in the frontispiece, nowadays Methwold Parish extends from the Thetford Forest in the east, the Denton Water Works at the Brandon/Feltwell road junction and the Feltwell-Southery road in the south, across the Severals in the west to the Wissington Sugar Beet Factory in the north, and includes the three villages of Brookville, Methwold and Methwold Hythe.

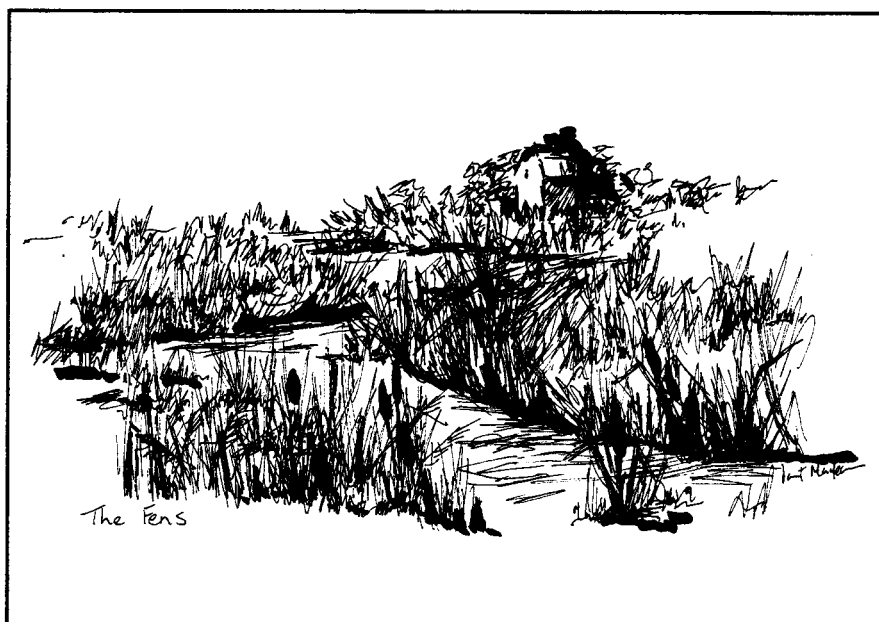
Methwold Parish is the second largest Parish in Norfolk in terms of land, extending over 12,280 acres. Methwold was the largest Parish until a boundary change in 1988 when a chunk of land was transferred to Southery; Feltwell is now (just) the largest Parish.

The Parish currently has approximately 20 farms ranging from about 60 acres to about 1000 acres.

Exactly who owns land is difficult to establish. Britain is one of the few countries which does not have a land register (that is why you have to do a 'search' every time you buy or sell your house) although in Britain two Counties, Middlesex and Yorkshire, keep, or at least used to keep, a register of deeds.

Most farmers own their farm lands.

Some of the 'airfield' area and pockets of Methwold Hythe are still owned by Christ College, Cambridge.



It is thought that there is no longer any land owned by the Crown through the Duchy of Lancaster. Queen Victoria sold off part of the Severals, the Forestry Commission bought land from the Crown in 1937, and the Parish Council bought Lower Green from the Crown in 1993.

POPULATION

Methwold's population since 1800, according to Census returns:

| | | | | |
|------------|------|------|------|------|
| year | 1801 | 1851 | 1871 | 190 |
| population | 865 | 1669 | 1430 | 1254 |
| year | 1931 | 1951 | 1971 | 1991 |
| population | 1296 | 1393 | 1423 | 1309 |

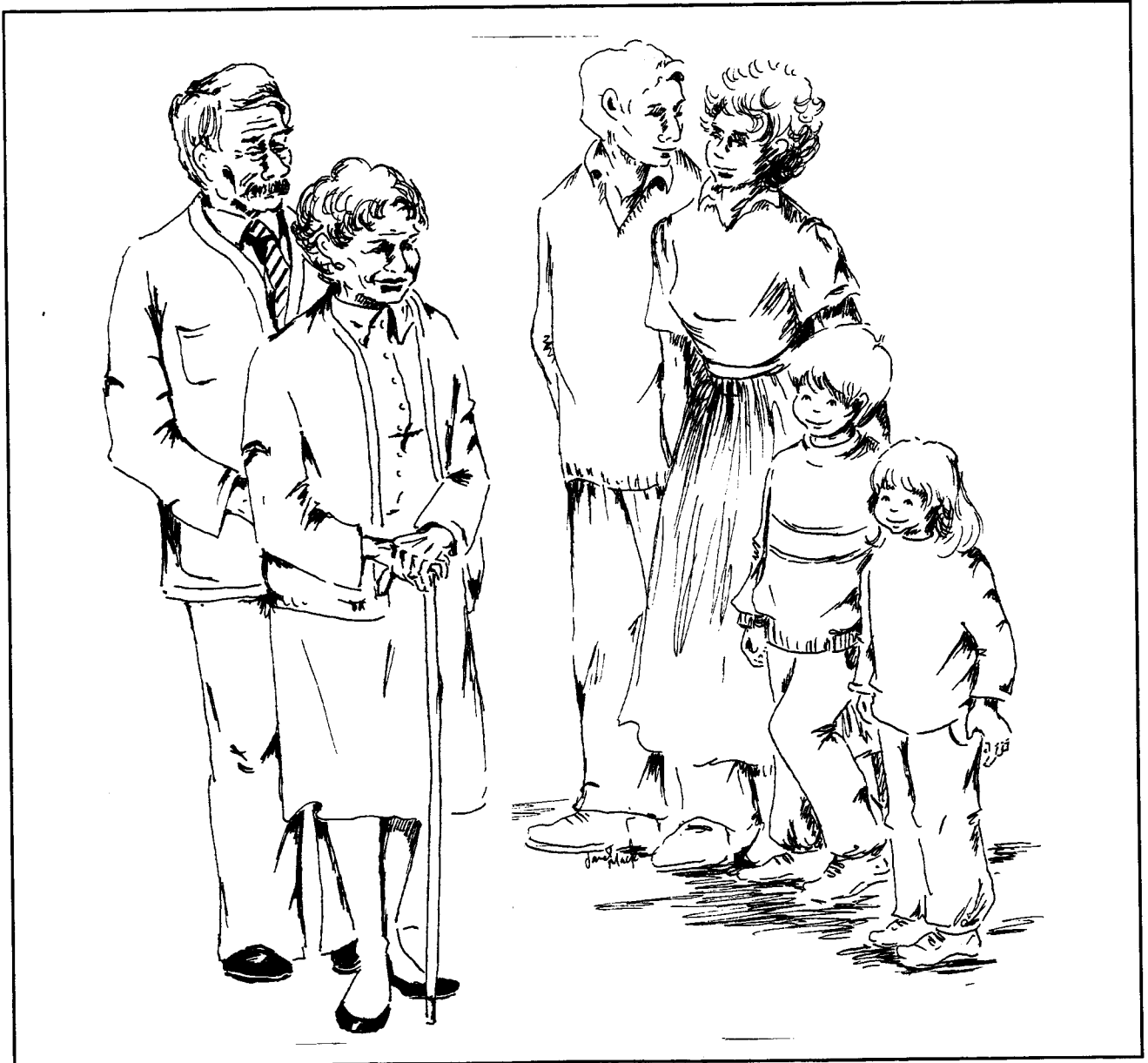
The dramatic increase up to 1850 was due to the 'agricultural revolution' of more labour intensive farming, however, a substantial number of people in 1851 were paupers. After 1851 the new railways opened up opportunities to travel so there was a migration from the rural areas not only to the urban areas, particularly London, but

to the ports for embarkation to the new worlds of Canada, America and Australia.

The population peaked in the early 1970's and had been gradually reducing ever since. The population number of 1309 in the 1991 census includes American families living in the Parish in that year.

Although the Parish is one of the largest in Norfolk the Parish has the lowest density of population, an average of 1 person per 10 acres.

Approximately 30% of families living in the Methwold Parish in 1994, were born and bred in the Parish. Some families, for example, the



Sayers, Wortleys, and Younges, go back over three centuries.

Approximately 45% of families have arrived in the Parish within the last 20 years.

About 15% of the population left the Parish over the last 10 years from families still living in the Parish; the main reasons for leaving the Parish are:

- lack of suitable accommodation,
- lack of suitable employment, especially for those who attended higher education,
- change in family circumstances (marriage, divorce).

Presumably this 15% of the population were primarily young people who left home to begin their adult life elsewhere, a significant proportion of the younger generation.

Altogether the percentage of the population leaving the Parish over the last 10 years is closer to 25% when the departure of whole families, which could not be ascertained from the Appraisal, are included.

However, this 25% departure has been compensated by a slightly smaller number of arrivals. The main reasons for newcomers moving into the Parish are:

- attractive rural area, and its location,
- to take up employment,
- attractive cheaper housing to buy.

It is somewhat surprising that employment brings in newcomers, presumably they fill more specialised jobs.

For the age distribution of the population in the Methwold Parish in 1994, excluding most American families, in approximate percentage terms:

- 22.5% are under 20 years of age,
- 25% are between 20 and 40 years of age,
- 30% are between 40 and 60 years of age,
- 22.5% are over 60 years of age.

The 22.5% of over 60's (a somewhat lower percentage than that quoted in the 1991 census) is a reasonable proportion. There is a drop in relative numbers as ages decrease; in 20 years time over 30% of the population will be over 60 years of age (this trend is a national trend).

The one disturbing population statistic is that the number of children below the age of 5 years old is significantly less than the number of children between the ages of 5-10 years old.

What is not known, and what would be of interest, is how the age distribution of those leaving the Parish compares with the age distribution of those moving into the Parish.

In 1994, out of a total of approximately 500 Households:

- 20% of Households consist of 1 person,
(11.5% of Households consist of a single elderly person over 65 years of age),
- 40% of Households consist of 2 people,
(10.5% of Households consist of 2 elderly people),
- 18% of Households consist of 3 persons,
- 14.5% of Households consist of 4 persons,
- 1.5% of Households comprise a single parent,
- 23.5% of Households have children under the age of 16.

It follows from the above figures that approximately 25% of elderly people live in Households with younger people.

In conclusion, the relative high turnover of population, approximately 25% over 10 years, primarily determines the age distribution. If this rate of turnover continues then it is difficult to predict the age distribution in the Parish in future years.

One welcome consequence of this turnover of population, coupled with the fact that the Parish consists of three separate villages, is that the Parish does not suffer from the intrusive claustrophobia and insularity often associated with closely knit rural communities.

HOUSING

In medieval times, before the Tudors, Manor Houses were substantially built of stone and flint. The medieval village dwellings were primarily wood and thatched, and easily destroyed by fire.

Tudor buildings combined brick with a wooden frame. The Old Vicarage opposite the Church dates from the 1500's; in its time it has served as a factory and workhouse.

A Jacobite Mansion, built presumably in the late 1600's, used to stand behind the church. Exactly why this building has been demolished while earlier buildings still stand is not known.

The histories of most of the old properties surrounding the Church and Fairhill do not appear to be well known; perhaps the Historical Society could find out more about them.

The present flint, stone and chalk cottages appeared in the 1880s; slate roofing came with railways after 1860, bringing the slate from Wales.

Six almshouses were built down the Old Feltwell Road in 1880 at the bequest of an ex-resident,

William Coote, who had made his fortune in Australia.

The first council houses, on the Stoke and Hythe Roads, were built in the mid 1930's; Herbert Drive was built about 1947 (these were intended, like pre-fabs, to be temporary but are still standing, nearly 50 years on), the remainder were built in the early 1950's. In total about 120 Council dwellings were built.

At the present time there are approximately 530 dwellings in the Parish. Of these dwellings, approximately:

34% are detached houses,

22% are semi-detached houses,

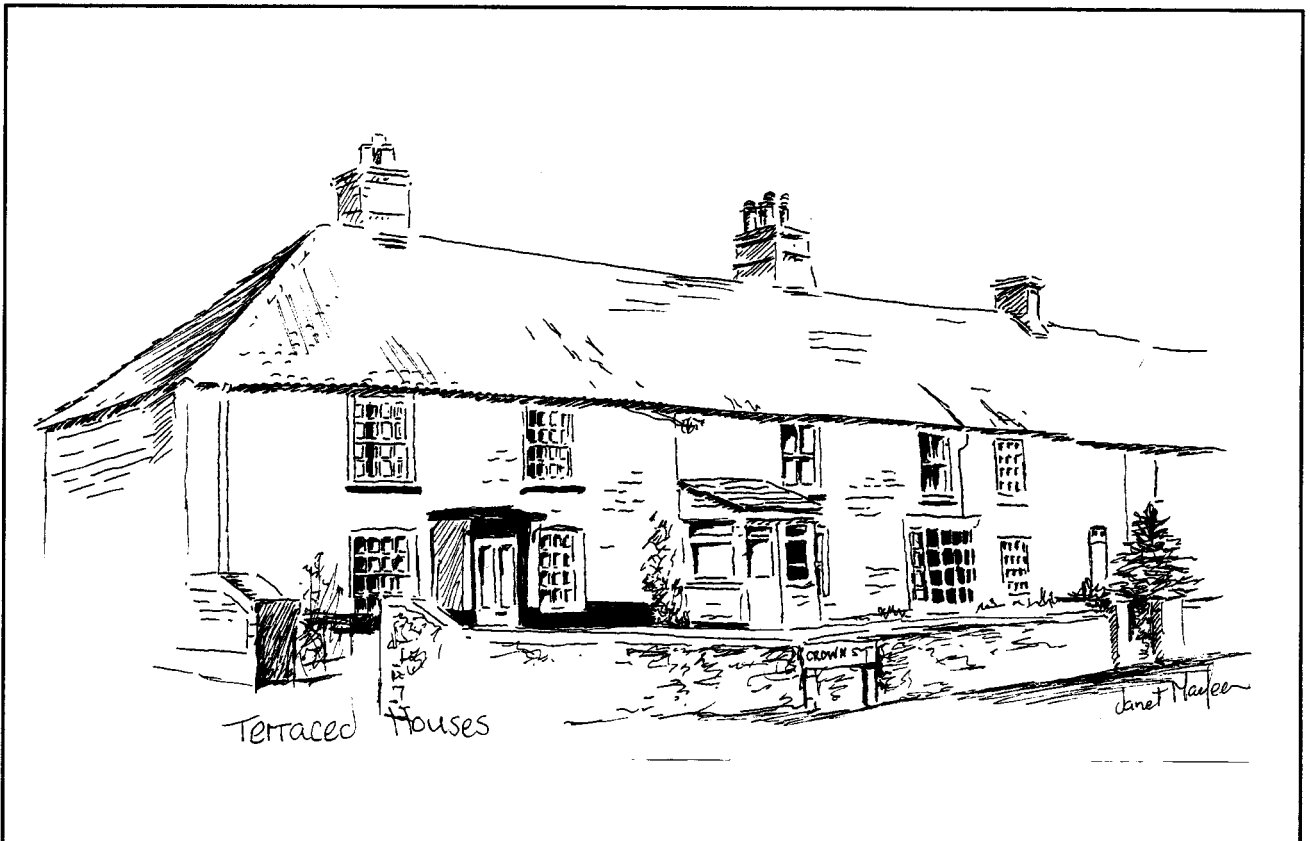
9% are terraced houses,

28% are detached bungalows,

7% are semi-detached bungalow,

while, according to the Questionnaire,

70% are privately owned,



14% are Council rented,

7% are private rented,

6% are private rented to transient Americans,

there are 8 tied cottages.

The relatively large percentage of private rented accommodation, especially to the locals, is surprising.

In the 1980's, as part of Margaret Thatcher's vision of a property owning society, Council properties were offered for sale, and the building of new Council properties ceased. To date 44 dwellings have been sold off to Council house tenants, not necessarily to sitting tenants (some Council property has been sold to Council tenants living outside the Parish).

One of the more contentious decisions was to sell off old peoples' bungalows to their elderly tenants. A number of these privately owned bungalows came on the market as their owners died or moved elsewhere, and are now occupied by younger people.

To assess the current housing needs of the Parish, according to the Questionnaire, there are

31 Households living within the Parish who are looking for alternative accommodation in the Parish either now, or expect to within the next 2 years.

The types of accommodation being sought in the Parish are primarily:

places to rent (flat/bedsit, Council house, Council bungalow),

low cost starter homes to buy,

but also

small/medium properties to buy.

sheltered accommodation with a warden

There are, at least,

2 Households on the Council waiting list

8 Households unable to get on the Council waiting list.

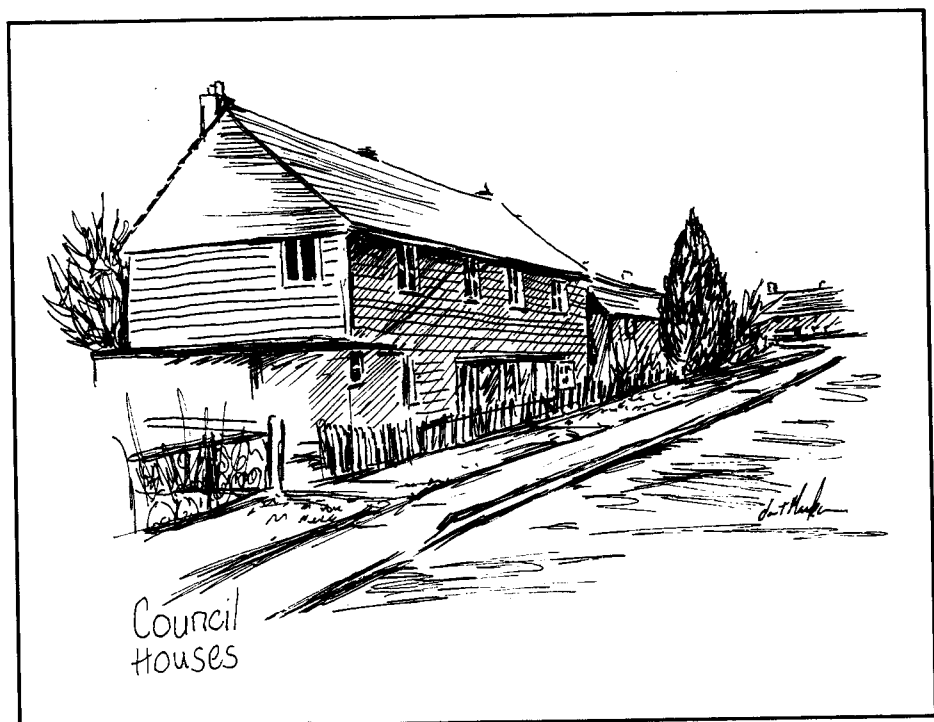
In November 1994, from Council records, there were 13 people across the Borough on the Council waiting list, seeking housing in Methwold as first choice. Last year the turnover of Council dwellings was 5.

Currently a typical rent for a two bedroom dwelling is around £32 per week. Under the present Government policy, rents are not subsidised; families on income support or benefits have their rents paid, but families on low income, or with savings of more than £8,000, who are ineligible for income support or benefits, have to pay the full rent.

There are a number of building developments in the Parish.

The Clough Farm development, below the Primary School, is now complete; it comprises barn conversions and executive houses.

The Cowlshaw site (approximately 0.4 acre) on the High Street is currently under development; 7 houses are to be built on this site, some are



designated low cost starter homes.

Permission has been granted to build 4 Executive houses in the hollow of the Chalk Pit. There is much local puzzlement and indignation at this decision because it is a site of historical interest with potential for a more environmental usage, access is limited, mists linger for long periods during winter months, and the sewerage from the Cowlshaw site is to be pumped into the Pit.

A long standing planning permission has been granted to build approximately 40 mixed houses on a site from Old Feltwell Road to Petch Corner, although there are still disputes concerning access.

A Housing Trust has expressed interest in building properties to rent and starter homes if a suitable site can be found. Such Housing Trusts partly involve private money which requires a profit, rents of the smallest properties are about £45 a week.

There has been controversy over the meadow by the side of the recreational ground, opposite Methwold Post Office. The owner wishes to build on the meadow, an unsightly patch of overgrown nettles with a broken down gate on the main road. Although there is opposition to any development from those living close by and

from others who fear the spoiling of the views there is some local support for partial development.

Housing for the years 1988-2006 has been laid down by the County in its Norfolk Structure Plan 1993. The Borough Council has the responsibility of implementing that part of the Plan which is relevant to West Norfolk; 13,500 dwellings are to be built in King's Lynn and West Norfolk of which 3,500 will require new land, the other 10,000 dwellings to be placed by infilling. It is not known whether a specific number of dwellings has been allocated to Methwold Parish.

For the purposes of housing developments all villages are divided into three main areas:

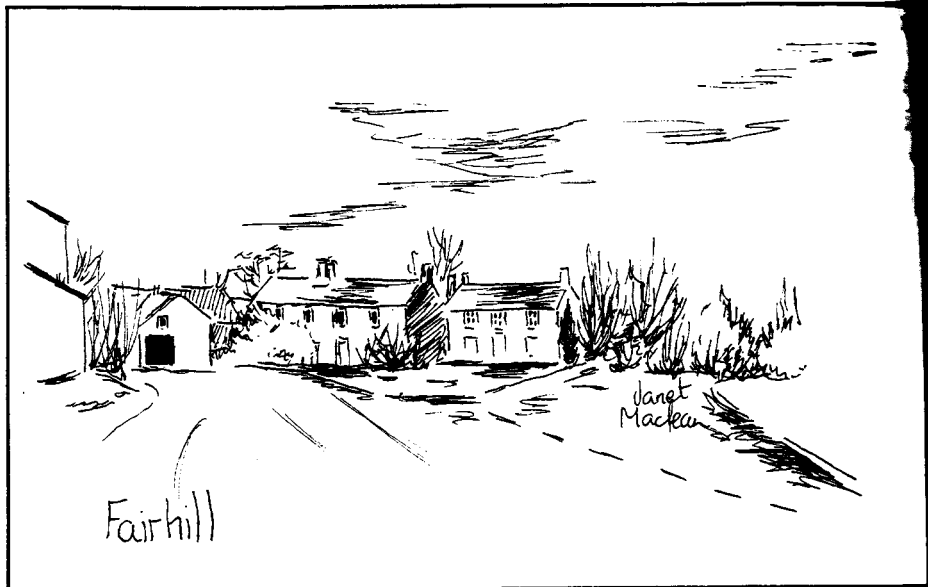
new dwellings will normally be allowed (this type of area is already well built-up, for example, Elden Lane - Hythe Road - Herbert Drive, Lancaster Close, Thornham Road, the main road through Brookville, the centre of the Hythe)

new dwellings may be allowed but a strong case needs to be made (this type of area is already reasonably built-up, most of Methwold village comes into this category)



even though Methwold village is designated a Conservation Area)

new dwellings will not be allowed although existing buildings may be extended and converted, or where new buildings replace older buildings (this area is sparsely built-up, for example, Lancaster Park, the rest of Brookville off the main road).



Accommodation becomes vacant as Households move out of the Parish. According to the Questionnaire there are:

48 Households within the Parish looking for alternative accommodation outside of the Parish either now, or expect to within the next 2 years.

The accommodation being sought is primarily medium sized properties to buy.

Unfortunately it is not known what type of property is being vacated by Households as they move outside of the Parish, and so it is not a simple or straightforward exercise to assess the housing needs of the Parish.

From the Questionnaire the overwhelming opinion of the people is that each of the villages of the Parish should only marginally expand in order to retain their individual rural character; it was virtually unanimous that priority for housing development should be aimed at those currently living in the Parish.

It would seem that these opinions are being ignored by the current housing developments.

A related issue concerns the design features of new housing recently built. There is widespread dismay, even anger, at the types of modern houses built on the High Street (for example, where the old cart shed used to be) and Millgate Street which are incompatible, in design and

materials, with the surrounding old buildings. This development has destroyed, for all time, part of the heritage of the village. The people of the Parish deserve an explanation and assurance that lessons have been learnt. It is by no means obvious that the designation of Methwold village as a Conservation Area provides adequate safeguards.

On the other hand the renovation of buildings in Globe Street and the Clough Farm development has been designed with sensitivity and regard to tradition.

This Section concludes with a number of questions:

why has the Borough Council not initiated the building of any dwellings for rent since the 1950's, especially when 35% of Council dwellings have been sold off?

does the Parish Council have a housing policy?

(this question is posed because current developments appear to be piecemeal, and contrary to what the people want)

does the Borough Council have a housing policy for the Parish?

how often has the Borough Council overridden Parish Council recommendations in regards of development proposals?

EMPLOYMENT

Traditionally farming has been the main source of employment. In 1967 the numbers of farm labourers were:

292 full-time, 49 part-time, 250 casual.

Over the last 30 years the development of herbicides and insecticides and the mechanisation of drilling, harvesting and handling, has led broadly to a tenfold decrease in required farm labour.

Although farming in itself is no longer an employer of any consequence the main local industries are still rooted in the land in an agricultural and horticultural economy, with three major industrial firms in the Parish, namely the Wissington Sugar Factory, Howard Long International and Darbys.

WISSINGTON SUGAR FACTORY

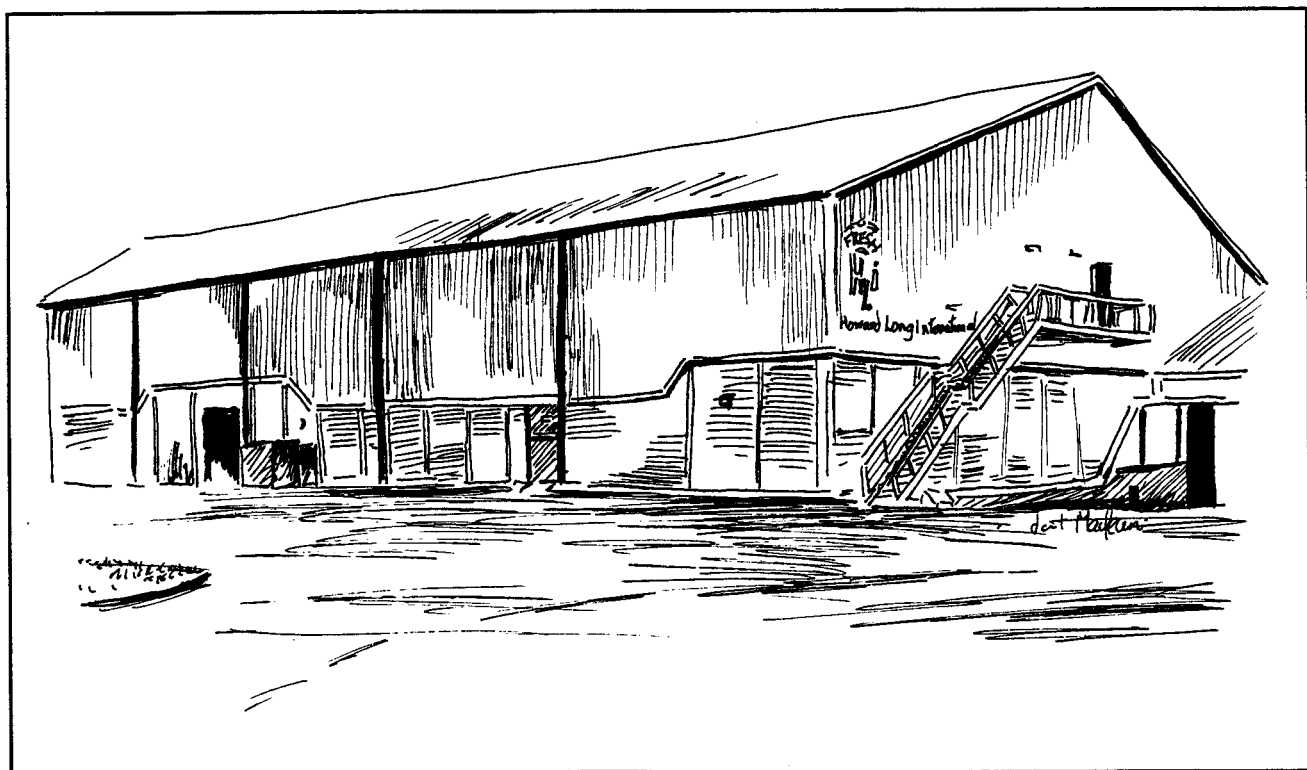
Wissington Sugar Factory was built in 1927 to process the local crop of sugar beet. With the recent closure of the King's Lynn Saddlebow complex the Wissington Factory has been improved and expanded at a cost of £50 million;

when fully operational the Factory, with its staff of around 350, will be taking in about 1000 lorry loads of beet (1,500 tons) a day which produces 2000 tons of sugar, 1000 tons of animal feed and 250 tons of molasses (a syrup used in growing yeasts, and an ingredient in animal feed).

HOWARD LONG INTERNATIONAL

Jeff Waterfall, a member of a Wissington farming family, took over a hangar on the airfield alongside Brandon Road as a cold store in the early 1960's, and over the years built up a business (Mr Fresh) of prepared salad ingredients. After the premature death of Jeff Waterfall the plant was taken over by Shropshires in 1987, another Wissington farming family, and then in 1980 by Howard Long International, an American based firm.

Howard Long have invested £5.6 million; turn-over has increased from £3.5 million with 180 employees in 1987 to £25 million with 450 employees in 1993. This firm now supplies all the salad needs of the McDonald restaurant chain; Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose, Littlewoods,



Budgens and Gateway are also customers. Having established a lead in a highly competitive market the future strategy is to consolidate rather than continuing to expand, and to anticipate and possibly influence the changing pattern of salad combinations, their fads, fancies and presentations.

In the summer months 35% of the lettuces for Howard Long are grown within the Parish; the giant mobile sorting tent in the lettuce fields in the Wissington area is an impressive piece of machinery.

DARBYS

During the second World War the Government reclaimed areas of the fen which were primarily scrub with broken down drainage. Most of this reclaimed land was handed over to others to farm except for 500 acres close to Broad Fen which was farmed by the Norfolk War Agricultural Committee. In 1945 Francis Darby was brought in to manage this farm primarily as an experimental farm, testing out crops and techniques suitable for the black peat soils.

In 1951 this Government farm land was handed back to its original owners. However the ownership of 150 acres could not be traced, so it was offered for sale and was bought by Francis Darby who was then joined by his younger brother, Hugh Darby. Initially the business concentrated on soft fruit plants but expanded into ornamental shrubs, with the acquisition of part of the airfield down Old Feltwell Road and also into vegetable and salad production, with the acquisition of a number of farms on the Several. The vegetable and salad business was sold in 1979; other farms have been bought in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Darby Nursery Stock Ltd, formed in 1961, has subsequently developed into possibly the largest specialist container grown shrub and tree nurseries in the UK, with an annual output of some 2 million plants from its sites down Old Feltwell Road and the Broad Fen Farm in the Hythe (covering in total 70 acres, including 8 acres under glass or polythene), a turnover about

£4 million per annum, and employing around 100 full time staff and 200 casual and contract staff for the six summer months. Looking to the future the emphasis will be on optimising the output from the present acreage.

Other small firms in the Parish include:

Kebrell Nuts and Bolts, in the old Drill Hall.
Wheel and Tyre Services, down Buntings Lane.

Fenspeed Haulage, behind the Fire Station
G B Quality Foods, off the High Street.

Mayer, Sommerfield and Neville, Haulage in the Hythe.

O.W. Wortley & Sons, Potato Merchants down Thornham Road.

Turning to the employment of Individuals, according to the Questionnaire:

for those Individuals over 21 years of age:

445 are in employment,

where

28 are 'employers' of 3 or more people
(a family has been counted as one 'employer')

82 are self-employed (9 of which are female)

259 are full-time employed (104 of which are female)

72 are part-time employed (58 of which are female)

3 are undergoing training,

3 are in higher education,

while

39 are unemployed;

for those Individuals in the 17-21 age bracket,

31 are in full-time employment,

14 are in part-time employment

27 are in full-time education,

11 are on training schemes

4 are unemployed.

The Questionnaire did not contain questions on types of jobs because in a small community a job description, together with family details, could identify a family.

The businesses of the 28 employers (of more than three people) include farming, building, electrical installations, funeral services, imports and vehicle repairs. Some employers who live in the Parish have their businesses or plant outside of the Parish, their businesses include small manufacturing and haulage.

There is a relatively large number of self-employed.

Self-employed males include:

builders, plumbers, electricians, decorators, shopkeepers, publicans, gardeners, window cleaners, financial advisors, solicitor, smallholders, financial advisors, coal merchant, jeweller/craftsman, secondhand car dealer.

Self-employed females include:

shopkeepers, hairdressers, beautician, secretaries, artist.

With regard to how far people travel to work, approximately:

60% of Individual's work, or are based, in the Parish or neighbouring Parishes,

8% of Individual's work, or are based, in either the Thetford or Brandon areas,

4% of Individual's work, or are based, in either the Lakenheath/Mildenhall or Downham Market areas,

8% of Individual's travel more than 30 miles to work.

Of the 43 Individuals unemployed:

26 are male, 17 are female,

28 are in the 40-59 age bracket,

27 have been unemployed for more than 1 year.

For those Individuals who have dealt with the DSS within the last 3 years, their opinion on the help received in obtaining the full range of benefits and job opportunities and training through the job centres:

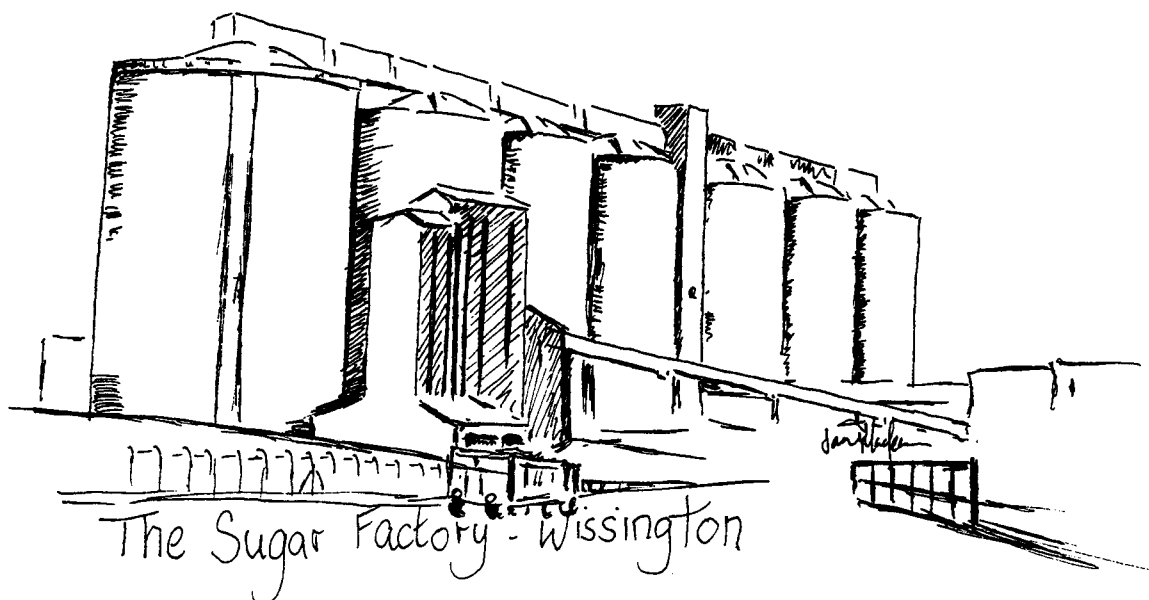
23% are fully satisfied,

50% are reasonably satisfied,

27% are dissatisfied,

Among those dissatisfied, some were extremely dissatisfied, a cause for concern.

The Parish Council should monitor the employment situation and ensure that the unemployed receive the best advice and service.



RETAIL

SHOPPING

In 1937 the shops in Methwold village consisted of:

4 butchers, 3 general stores, 2 bakers,
2 fried fish dealers, 1 watch repairer,
2 grocers, 1 tobacconist, 1 fancy goods,
1 chemist, 1 boot repairer, 1 photographer,
together with a branch of Barclays Bank.

By 1960 there were a few shops less.

Since 1960 local shops have closed at an alarming rate due to increasing car ownership and the ability to travel into the nearby towns, particularly to the superstores.

In 1994, the shops consist of:

in Methwold village,

1 butcher,
1 general store,
1 confectioner/store,
1 pet/hardware/greengrocery,
1 post office/cards/stationery/gifts;

a newsagent/confectioner intends to open soon;

in Brookville,

1 post office/general store;

in the Hythe, there are no shops.

At the present time, for their main shopping,

45% of Households go to Thetford,

15% of Households go to Brandon,

15% of Households go to local shops,

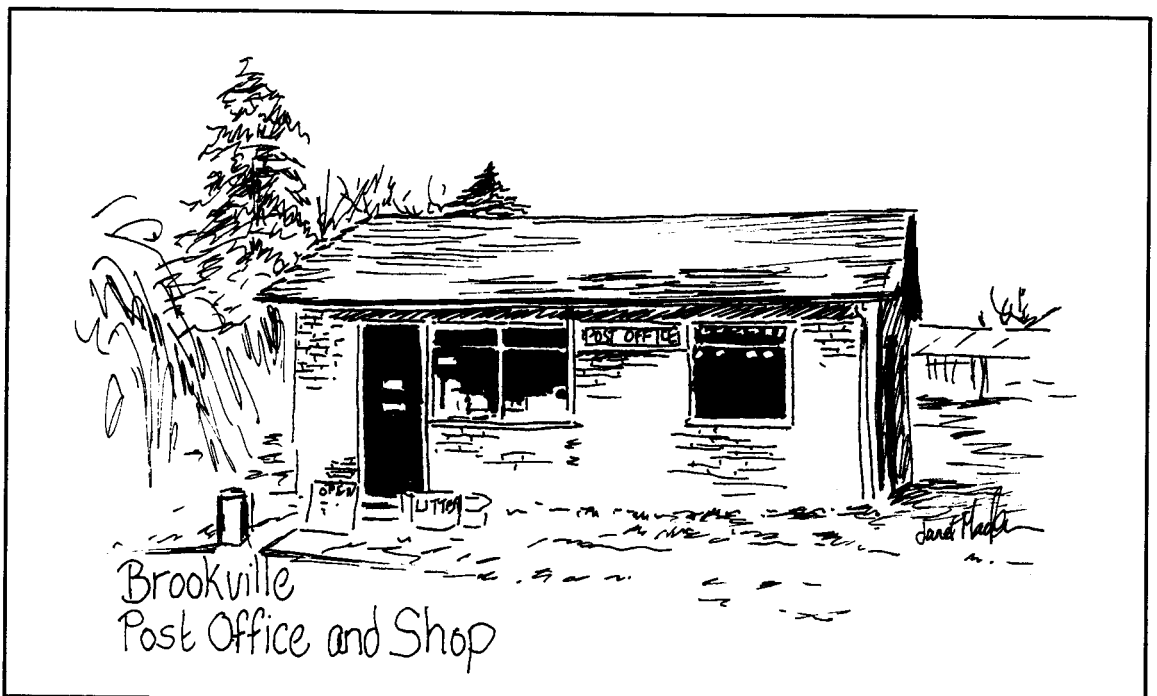
13% of Households go to King's Lynn,

6% of Households go to Downham Market.

Local retailers have difficulty in reconciling the above usage of local shops with their experience.

Virtually all Households use local shops but mainly for last minute or small items, nevertheless the complete disappearance of local shops would impose inconvenience. Local shops are regarded as an important feature of a rural community.

With the bulk of shopping now being done out of the Parish, local trading is only marginally profitable, after the ever-increasing overheads of



business tax and insurance have been paid. To stay in profit local shops need more trade. Those people who say that they regard local shops as extremely important should be prepared to spend a bigger proportion of their money in local shops; costs of some items can be less than the supermarkets.

The future of a Methwold village general store looks bleak. Sainsburys have been approached but offered only sympathy.

Maybe a profitable business could arise by merging somehow the Post Office and a General Store.

The Parish Council should take a more active interest, in collaboration with other agencies such as the Norfolk Rural Community Council, to establish exactly what is the present situation and to see what options are available to help retain a viable store. It would be far better to take action now rather than wait until the store disappears and then try belatedly to do something about it.

MONDAY MARKET

Methwold Market has a long tradition. A weekly market was established about 1200, held initially in the church yard, but it had ceased to exist by medieval times. A Tuesday market was reintroduced in 1618 by Charter from Charles I but was gone within a hundred or so years. The weekly Monday Market began trading in livestock and corn sometime before 1845, and continues to this day.

The Methwold (Auction) Market, held within the walled enclosure off the High Street, attracts on average approximately 60 people each week from mostly outside of the Parish. On Bank Holiday Mondays there is an extra large turnout when an auction of antiques is also held in St George's Hall.

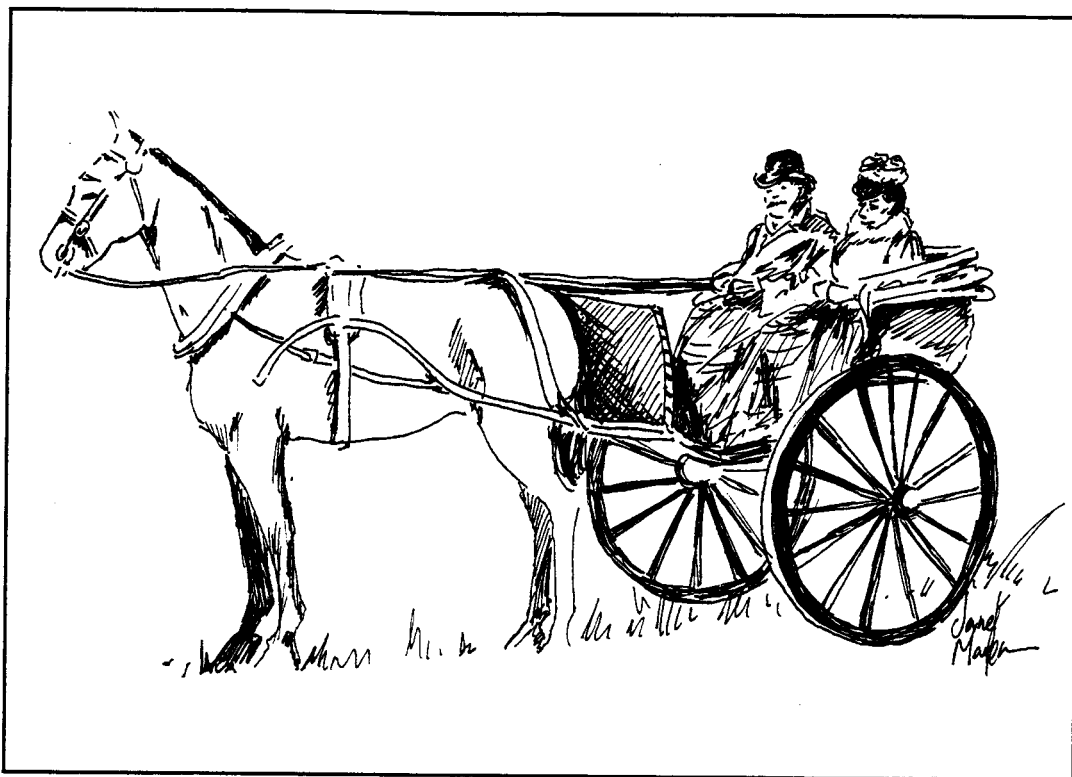
Within the last few months stalls have started appearing in the George Pub forecourt on Mondays, extending the scope of the Monday Market but potentially further eroding local trade.

Apart from the Monday coffee/cake stall in the Chapel Hall run by volunteers to raise funds for the Church and Chapel, the Monday Market does not inject much money into local shops, the George or the Social Club.

The main complaint about the Market concerns car parking. It is irksome that the free parking behind the Fenton Room is not usually taken up, possibly because of poor signs; a hand poster exercise has been undertaken recently. The congestion of car parking is acute on Bank Holiday Mondays, a potential safety hazard.

The lack of a public toilet, a talking point over many years by the Parish Council, is still an embarrassment.

TRANSPORT



PRIVATE TRANSPORT

In the Parish at the present time:

13% of Households have no vehicle,

30% of Households have 2 or more cars,

27% of Households have bicycles,

there is an excess of 600 motor vehicles,

with the closure of Cowlshaw's petrol pumps in 1992, there are now no petrol pumps,

there is one used car dealer, on the Brandon Road at Cock Corner, who does not offer car servicing or repairs,

there is no garage, some car servicing is available,, most cars are taken out of the Parish for servicing.

BUSES

The present bus services are:

to King's Lynn: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday
depart Methwold 9.31, return King's Lynn 1.30

to Bury St Edmunds: Wednesday
depart Methwold 9.05, return Bury 1.30

to Brandon : Thursday
depart Methwold 9.46, return Brandon 12.30

to Downham Market: Friday
depart Methwold 9.23, return Downham 1.00

to Thetford: Friday
depart Methwold 9.48, return Thetford 12.30

to Norwich : Saturday
depart Methwold 8.55, return Norwich 3.00

to Swaffham: Saturday
depart Methwold 9.26, return Swaffham 11.45

In addition it is possible to travel into Methwold in the morning on the School buses.

Senior Citizens can obtain concessions, up to a maximum of 70p off the standard return fare, by purchasing a card from the Council Offices at King's Lynn.

The above Bus Service essentially fits in with the School Bus Service; buses are available after Schools start at the beginning of the day but have to be back in Methwold before Schools finish.

Recently a dial-a-bus for the 'less mobile' has been introduced.

From the Questionnaire,

12% of Households use the present bus service regularly,

30% of Households use the present bus service occasionally,

while

another 35% of Households would probably use an improved bus service.

The most common request for an improved bus service is for afternoon buses and evening buses, although trekking around neighbouring villages can be tedious. Additional afternoon buses will not necessarily increase the total number of passengers. Evening buses would give more opportunity for individuals to visit sports centres, cinemas and concerts. Improved bus services will only be forthcoming if local people are prepared to actually use them.

The provision of an adequate bus service is a complex problem, matching provision of buses with actual demand, availability of buses, and interfacing the needs of neighbouring villages. Only after a thorough and detailed study would it be possible to see how the service could be improved.

There is a lack of bus shelters (to the annoyance of vandals). Some time ago the Community Association proposed a bus shelter but wherever a location was suggested someone objected, the bus shelter never materialised.

TAXI

There is one taxi service in Methwold.
(Suttons tel. 728337)

RAIL

The Great Eastern Line from London-Cambridge-Ely-King's Lynn through Downham Market was opened in 1847; the Ely-Norwich line through Brandon was opened earlier in 1845.

The Stoke Ferry Branch Line, connecting with the GER at Denver, opened in 1882; it closed to passengers in 1930 but a freight service was operated until 1965.

The private Wissington Light Railway, which extended to Southery and Felthwell and reached Methwold in 1906, provided local farmers with ready transportation of crops and produce to the Sugar Beet Factory and the Stoke Ferry Branch Line; this private Railway closed finally in 1957.

In more recent times, prior to the electrification of the King's Lynn-Ely-Cambridge-London line the trains, although infrequent, were extremely comfortable with tables to sit at, and with a buffet car. Nowadays, with a more frequent service and a rapid journey time of 90 minutes to King's Cross from Downham Market, the trains are less comfortable and with no refreshments.

There is a limited service to Norwich from Brandon station.

West Norfolk is pressing for improved rail links with Stansted Airport and with the connecting termini in London for access to Europe through the Channel tunnel.

TRAFFIC

Road traffic appears to be increasing primarily due to more heavy lorries; nowadays there is:

a turn-round of approximately 50 lorries a day at Howard Long,

a turn-round of approximately 12 lorries a day at Darbys,

a turn-round of approximately 35 lorries a day down Thornham Road,

a throughput of approximately 40 lorries a day by Favor Parker,

together with ever larger farming machinery and tractors.

More correctly the above paragraph should read 'day and night' for it is the night traffic, especially through Brookville, and not just from the above firms, which causes considerable distress.

There is a widespread opinion that the speed of traffic, cars and lorries, through all three villages is excessive and dangerous, and that there should be a clampdown. Most of the speeding in Methwold and the Hythe is by drivers living in the Parish, whereas speeding through Brookville and on the Brandon/Stoke Ferry Road is also by drivers passing through.

Many people pressed for an extension of the speed limit which exists along the Stoke Road through Brookville. While this Appraisal has been in progress a 40 mph has been granted and installed. However it has taken nearly 15 years of Parish Council badgering for a speed limit to appear.

There is pessimism that any speed limit will be ignored, and so have little effect. Initial impressions are that the Brookville speed limit has had a salutary effect; the police have also made their presence felt.

Other people, and the Parish Council, press for a speed limit through the Hythe continuing on to Methwold.

Although speed is dangerous in itself the increased noise associated with speed along the main road in Brookville, especially by lorries, is reaching unacceptable levels. This problem is particularly acute at night when empty lorries rattle through.

There are many complaints over the excessive use of narrow roads (eg Old Feltwell Road, Thornham Road) by large lorries and large farm machinery. Darbys accept that their lorry traffic is a nuisance to some residents and would lend their support to a road link between Brandon Road and Petch Corner; such a road would be compatible with any housing development off Old Feltwell Road.

Cars parked on roads appear to be a problem in Methwold Hythe; off-road parking such as lay-byes would help.

ROADS

The maintenance of roads are the responsibility of the County. A cynic has suggested that the

quality of road surfaces (and not just roads but most services) improves as one gets closer to Norwich and the County Council Offices.

The sweeping of roads is the responsibility of the Borough Council; roads with kerbs are scheduled to be swept twice a year.

Over 50% of Households regard road maintenance, road gutter and drain cleaning, as a poor standard.

Overall road maintenance appears to be of patchwork variety. In particular the quality of the road surface and general unevenness of the main road through Brookville is a major contributory factor to the noise problem.

The resurfacing of roads by layering chippings on tar might be economical but damage to paintwork and windscreens is costly. Too many motorists ignore the recommended speed limits, although a 10 mph limit over an extended distance is rather ridiculous.

The Mundford road remained chipping-hazardous more than a month after resurfacing.

Just over a year ago £250,000 was spent on improvements to the Stoke Ferry Road past Methwold High School and the building of a new cycle track. This modification has been well over 10 years in the pipeline from the days when far more cyclists used this stretch of road.

Public opinion on this project is mixed but in broad terms any improvement is thought to be marginal, if at all:

accidents still occur, possibly because the 'improvements' seem to encourage faster driving,

many people ask why the dangerous bends were not taken out,

no allowance was made for parking in front of the cemetery,

weeds soon began growing up through the tarmac of the cycle track, making it exceedingly dangerous for cyclists; this has now been repaired, presumably costing more money.

The last two observations are disturbing, implying incompetence either by the County in its specifications and supervision, or by the contractor.

It is recommended that the Mundford Road, which is the only east road connection in and out of Methwold be upgraded:

the road is barely wide enough for heavy lorries and school buses to pass,

there is a considerable increase in traffic, Thetford is now the main location for shopping and Howard Long and Darbys have expanded,

there are no central white lines,

the road is not gritted in bad weather.

STREET LIGHTING

The provision of street lighting is the responsibility of the Borough Council. However the Borough delegates this responsibility to the Parish Council for which the Borough Council pays 40% of the costs. This arrangement gives the Parish Council more control in the siting of street lights and their maintenance.

It is suggested that further street lighting is required outside the Primary School, between Petch Corner and Brumble Barn, and at the top end of the Old Feltwell Road.

PAVEMENTS (also known as FOOTWAYS)

Maintenance of pavements is the responsibility of the County; some pavements are unsafe because of potholes, especially for elderly people.

Pavements are never swept.

Although chippings on a resurfaced road are usually swept up, chippings thrown up onto pavements are just left indefinitely, an extreme nuisance to all pedestrians but dangerous to elderly pedestrians and children on small bicycles.

Many people complain about the selfishness of lorry and tractor drivers travelling at high speeds in wet weather, splattering mud all over pavement and verges, and over pedestrians.

A pavement is required between the Hythe and Methwold.

VERGES

The maintenance of green verges by the side of roads where there is no pavement is the responsibility of the County. Over 65% of Households regard verge maintenance of poor standard.

SERVICES

HEALTH SERVICES

In the past in Methwold village, a dentist visited until 1948, and there was a doctor and visiting optician up to the early 1970's.

The current organisation of the local Health Service comprises:

the Norfolk Family Health Services Authority which arranges the provision of family doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists;

(although there is government pressure on doctors to become independent 'fund holders' few rural doctors have done so; a doctors' surgery receives a sum of money based on number of patients with a weighting for the elderly, maternity care, child immunisation etc., but money can be deducted if targets such as cervical smears, are not met);

the North West Anglia Health Authority, a National Health Authority Trust, is responsible for the King's Lynn, Peterborough and Wisbech Hospitals and the provision of community based services such as community nurses, health visitors,

school nurses, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

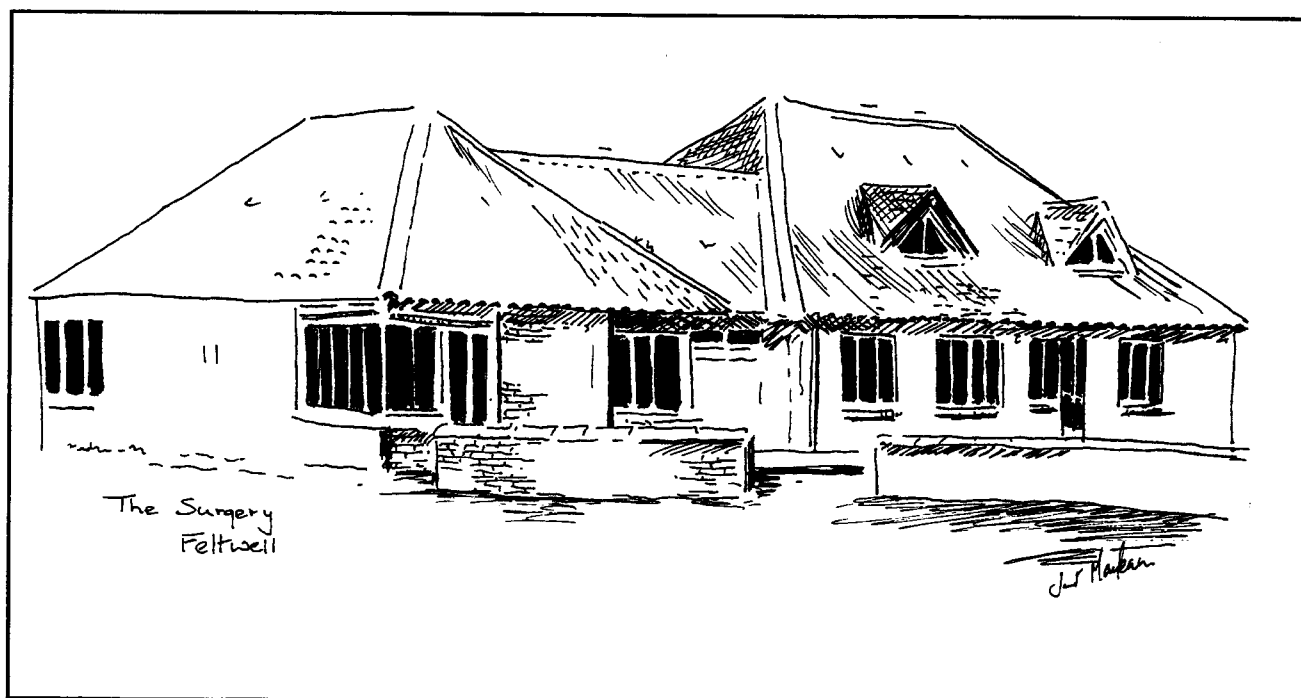
Nowadays there are two surgeries covering the Parish, one in Feltwell (Drs McLean, Nisbet; tel: 0842 828481), the other in Boughton (Dr Bolam, Mack: tel: 500331); both outside of the Parish.

About 90% of Households in the Parish are registered with the Feltwell surgery, which has approximately 4000 patients. Each week there are 5 morning surgeries (8.30 to 10.00 am) and 3 evening surgeries (Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 5.30 to 7.00 pm) at Feltwell and 2 evening surgeries (Monday and Thursday, 4.00 to 5.00 pm) in Methwold.

The overwhelming majority of Individuals are satisfied with the treatment and service from their Doctors. However, there is a significant number of Individuals who experience difficulty in attending their Doctors' surgery because of

inconvenient evening surgery hours at Methwold which overlap with working hours,

the location of the surgery when transport is not available.



Similarly, the overwhelming majority of Individuals who have been either in-patients or out-patients at a NHS Hospital over the last 5 years were satisfied with their treatment and service.

As far as waiting for admission to a Hospital;

23 Individuals have been waiting for less than 1 year,

5 Individuals have been waiting between 1 and 2 years,

2 Individuals have been waiting more than 2 years.

Of the remaining Health Services (district nurse, health visitor, ambulance, maternity care, chiropody, optician, dentist, loan of medical equipment) the majority of Individuals were satisfied with the service received.

At least 69 Individuals have experienced difficulty in arranging dental treatment on the NHS, a symptom of the breakdown in the provision of dental services on the NHS.

Surprisingly no return mentioned the ever-increasing cost of prescriptions, or of eye tests, or of dental charges.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services aim to care for children-in-need, the disabled, and the elderly-in-need. The Social Services are the responsibility of the County Council and administered in this area by the Western District Office at King's Lynn, integrating with the services of the local GPs, community nurses and health visitors, hospitals, residential homes.

There have been many reorganisations of the Social Services over recent years. Currently Social Services act as an 'assessor of needs' and as a 'putter together' of 'care packages', only 15% of Social Services monies may be spent on the direct provision of care by the Social Services themselves, the rest has to be spent in the private or voluntary sector. The emphasis is on providing care to enable people to continue living in the community as long as possible.

For Households which have dealt with the Social Services within the last 3 years:

50% thought that the Social Services responded quickly,

80% thought that the Social Services provided satisfactory support. (some were satisfied even though the initial response was thought to be slow)

a number were not happy with the service received.

From the Questionnaire there is a small number of elderly Households which feel that they require more care support. Sadly the most requested support is 'someone to talk to'; in addition meals on wheels, home help, and additional care are still sought.

The DENTON DAY CENTRE was formed in 1977 and is managed by a committee of volunteers and funded by the Social Services. It caters for 25 older people from the local area, not just from the Parish. Every Wednesday these members are transported by volunteers to the Fenton Room where they are offered a hot lunch and light refreshments; activities include crafts, quizzes, bingo and occasional trips out. The financial support is under review as a consequence of Government spending limits.

With the current emphasis on care in the community, consideration is being given by the Social Services to open a Day Centre 5 days a week, with a core professional staff, taking in 15, primarily elderly frail, people a day. The proposal is to extend the Fenton Room to provide bathing facilities, disabled toilets, clinic rooms etc. Exactly how this new Centre will interface with the Denton Day Centre is not clear.

In the VOCAL PROJECT a group of young adults with severe learning difficulties meet each Tuesday at Methwold High School to learn the skills of every day living, dealing for example, with money, shopping, meal planning and cookery. An innovative feature of this project is the involvement of school and its pupils, as part of the School curriculum.

Hopefully the Social Services are fully aware of all the people in the Parish who require support,

both the disadvantaged and their carers. The Social Services could inform the Parish how far the needs of the Parish are being met by the provision of the Social Services, and by the complementary contributions of the Voluntary Services.

VOLUNTARY SERVICES

Approximately 25% of Households have sought advice from the Citizens' Advice Bureau or from the Social/Voluntary Services over the past 5 years. This number is surprisingly high, although some enquiries may have been relatively straightforward. But this high number suggests the need to make readily available in the Parish access to counselling and support services.

It has not been possible to find out how far Voluntary Organisations contribute to the welfare of the Parish. It is difficult to keep track of the extremely large numbers of such bodies, and new variants keep appearing.

TELEPHONE

At least 28 Households do not have a telephone (7 are households comprising a single person).

There were virtually no adverse comments on the telephone service, not even the cost.

There are 4 telephone kiosks in the Parish:

- on the main road through Brookville,
- on the corner of Millgate Street/High Street,
- on Herbert Drive,
- at the cross roads at the Hythe.

The last 3 are the old red box kiosks. The Parish Council is trying to retain the old red box kiosks, arguing that they fit in with traditional settings.

Approximately 30% of Households use a kiosk but mostly occasionally.

Experience of the telephone kiosks is that they can be smelly, vandalised, not working, without directories, and without access for disabled.



ELECTRICITY

Electricity was first installed, via a generator, in the Ex-Service Mens Club in 1932, and connected to a grid in 1936. The major expansion of provision of electricity to all households occurred over the years 1948-58.

Approximately 10% of Households are dissatisfied with their Electricity Services.

The most common complaint is that the supply is uncertain, with frequent breakdowns, which can cause problems with computer systems, freezers, digital systems and economy 7 systems; reasons for breakdowns are never publicised although the reasons are obvious when electrical storms strike. A recent letter from Eastern Electricity published in the Methwold Times effectively says 'hard lines for living in the country'.

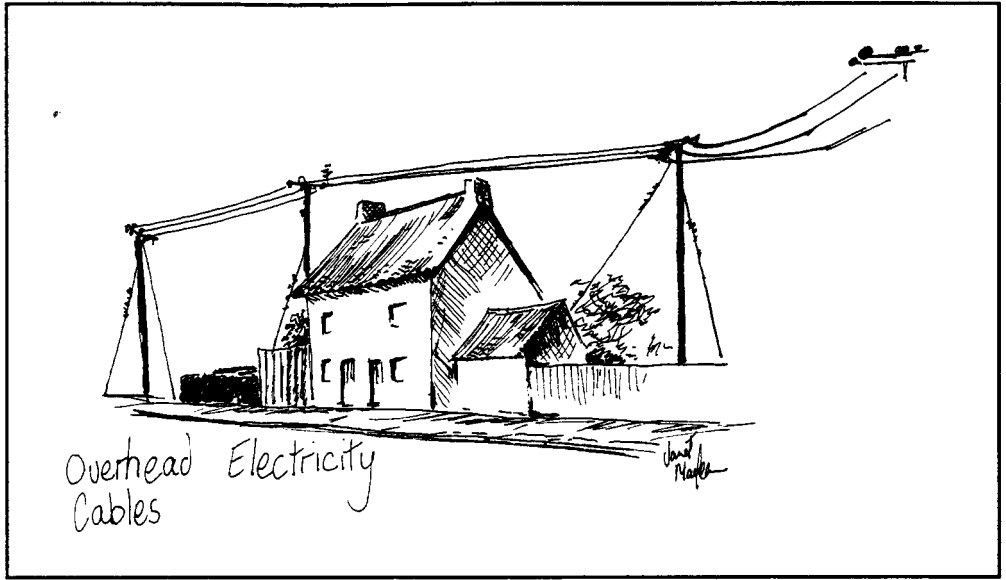
Several Households feel that overhead cables are an eyesore and a factor in the breakdowns.

Prices for electricity are regarded as being too high.

WATER SUPPLY

The water supply for the Parish comes from the source works at Denton Lodge, developed in 1936 by Downham Rural District Council with a team of Welsh miners (the well has a depth of 61 meters with a diameter of 4 meters). Periodic modernisation of the pumping systems and refurbishments have been carried out over the years; in 1989 an auxiliary booster was constructed which is fully automatic in operation and responds to water demand.

A full study of the water supply and distribution by Anglian Water in 1992 indicated no problems, including water quality. The next study is



scheduled for 1997.

Nevertheless approximately 16% of Households are dissatisfied with their water quality. The main complaints are that the water is frequently poor in colour, taste and smell; some Households either filter their tap water before drinking, or drink only bottled water.

Before this Appraisal began Anglian Water had issued a statement that water meters would be installed on all properties, but has since changed its mind; its current intentions are unclear.

Most Households are against water meters. Whilst it is true that a water meter is an effective mechanism of paying for what water is used and brings home an appreciation of the amount of water used, charges will not go down because Anglian Water has to raise the same amount of money as well as install all meters. It is also pointed out that

the meters will be installed on the boundary of a property so any leaks within a property will be the householder's financial responsibility,

water meters disadvantage large families, low income families will be tempted to save money.

A small number of Households already have water meters; some claim lower bills, some higher ones, some satisfaction, some dissatisfaction.

Many Households complain that Anglian Water abuse their monopoly by overcharging and making unbelievable statements. Water Authorities have been accused by the National Consumer Council for abusing their monopolies with high dividends for shareholders, artificially high share prices, and high salaries and perks paid to top executives. OFWAT, the Government body responsible for regulating the Water Authorities, has imposed price controls on Anglian Water, namely a 10% reduction in prices in real terms by the year 2000; according to press reports Anglian Water has made the whinging reply that in that case there will be no improvement in water quality.

SEWERAGE

Most Households rely on septic tanks. Herbert Drive and neighbouring Council houses have a 'mains' drainage in which sewerage goes into a tank at the back of Hall Farm which is emptied periodically.

A similar 'mains' sewerage system was to be installed in Lancaster Close ; pipe systems were put down, and prospective buyers were promised a 'mains' sewerage system. Following the local government reorganisation in 1978, responsibility was transferred from the Downham Rural Council to the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council who abandoned the scheme, to the chagrin of the people who had already bought property.

Most Households empty their septic tanks once every one or two years; some Households empty their tanks four or more times a year while other Households never empty their septic tank.

Approximately 12% of Households need 'mains' sewerage as a matter of urgency; another 35% would prefer a 'mains' sewerage but no urgency.

It is not known whether the 12% of Households who require mains sewerage as a matter of urgency all live in the same area. Around Lancaster Close there is a geological condition which does not allow soak away, some Households cannot have a washing machine.

Although the Parish Council has discussed this

matter of sewerage many times, a number of Households still remain severely disadvantaged.

REFUSE COLLECTION

Refuse collection is the responsibility of the Borough Council and carried out by subcontractors.

Approximately 40% of Households are dissatisfied with the refuse collection. The overwhelming reason is that the collection day is a Monday, thus rubbish is not collected for 2 weeks every Bank Holiday (over the 1993/94 Christmas and New Year, refuse was not collected for 3 weeks).

Other complaints refer to:

- poor quality of bags,
- inadequate number of bags left,
- overspill rubbish not picked up,
- bags bunched together by refuse collectors on pavements cause obstructions to pedestrians and to prams and wheel chairs,
- bags not accepted.



Several Households ask whether wheely bins would be a better system. The Parish Council has recently debated this proposal and have come to a preliminary conclusion that wheely bins would not be preferred. *His*

Each Household produces on average 3/4 of a ton of rubbish a year; recycling reduces the amount of landfill required and saves mineral resources and energy in manufacture. There is only a bottle bank in Methwold, at the Social Club. Other banks for paper, cans, textiles are at Brandon (Leos), Thetford (Tesco's), and Downham Market; the general bank facility at Wereham/Crimplesham also accepts motor oil and fridges/freezers.

By the year 2000 25% of refuse must be recycled. According to the Questionnaire 80% of Households would be prepared to keep items separate when refuse is collected so that refuse can be recycled later, conditional on adequate bags or containers being made available. Where this is being tried out there are complaints because the itemised bins are not collected every week.

The collection of litter is done by the Parish Council. Litter bins are emptied by the Borough Council.

POSTAL SERVICES

The first Post Office in Methwold was located at the Cock in 1845, it later moved to Millgate Street; the Post Office has been at its present location since just before World War II. The Brookville Post Office opened in 1912.

According to the Questionnaire the majority of Households are satisfied with their local Post Office, although about 10% of Households expressed dissatisfaction.

One query has been raised, why cannot road fund licences be obtained at the local Post Offices?

The suggestion that the post box in Millgate Street should be moved back to its original site (because it is a traffic hazard when trying to post letters) has been implemented while the Appraisal has been in progress.

The majority of Householders are satisfied with their Postal Services. Those expressing dissatisfaction have either lost post, or received their post late, or do not receive a second post, or complain at the way in which postal vans are driven and parked.

If postal services are privatised, either partly or totally, at some future date, it is of vital importance that our rural post offices and postal services be retained. Parish Councils should relate this message to their MP and to the Royal Mail in no uncertain manner.

POLICE SERVICE

A Police Station and Court Room (now the Linden Nursery on the Stoke Road) opened in Methwold in 1901. The Court held Sessions until 1969.

An Inspector's House and a Constable's House were built adjacent to the Court House in 1935. A second Police House was built at the corner of Mundford Road in 1956.

With the closure of the Court in 1969, the police contingent was downgraded by replacing the Inspector by a Sergeant. Two years later in 1971 the responsibility for the Parish was transferred to Downham Market. Local policing ended in 1986 with the closure of the police house on Mundford Road.

Nowadays, 3 Constables and 1 Sergeant based in Downham Market are responsible for the Denton Ward (Parishes of Methwold, Northwold, Feltwell, Hockwold) as well as Wereham and Stoke Ferry for 16 hours each day; the other 8 hours are covered by a Response Car which responds to 999 calls. In addition a Traffic Beat Officer and a Detective Sergeant plus two Detective Constables based at Downham cover the whole of the Downham beat. County Traffic Police also respond to road accidents.

From the Questionnaire the number of thefts and/or burglaries per year from households is increasing; within the last year 20 Households (4%) have suffered burglaries, or thefts, from their property.

The incidence of vandalism on private property is about half that for thefts or burglaries but with the same upward trend with time.

Although details of industrial crime have not been sought, in the early spring of 1994 ten small tractors were stolen from Darbys.

The most heartbreaking theft in 1994 was the forcible entry into the Church and the removal of a 1400's chest.

Vandalism in the Parish has taken the form of broken equipment, broken windows, etc; graffiti has been observed in the childrens playground, telephone kiosks and cemetery.

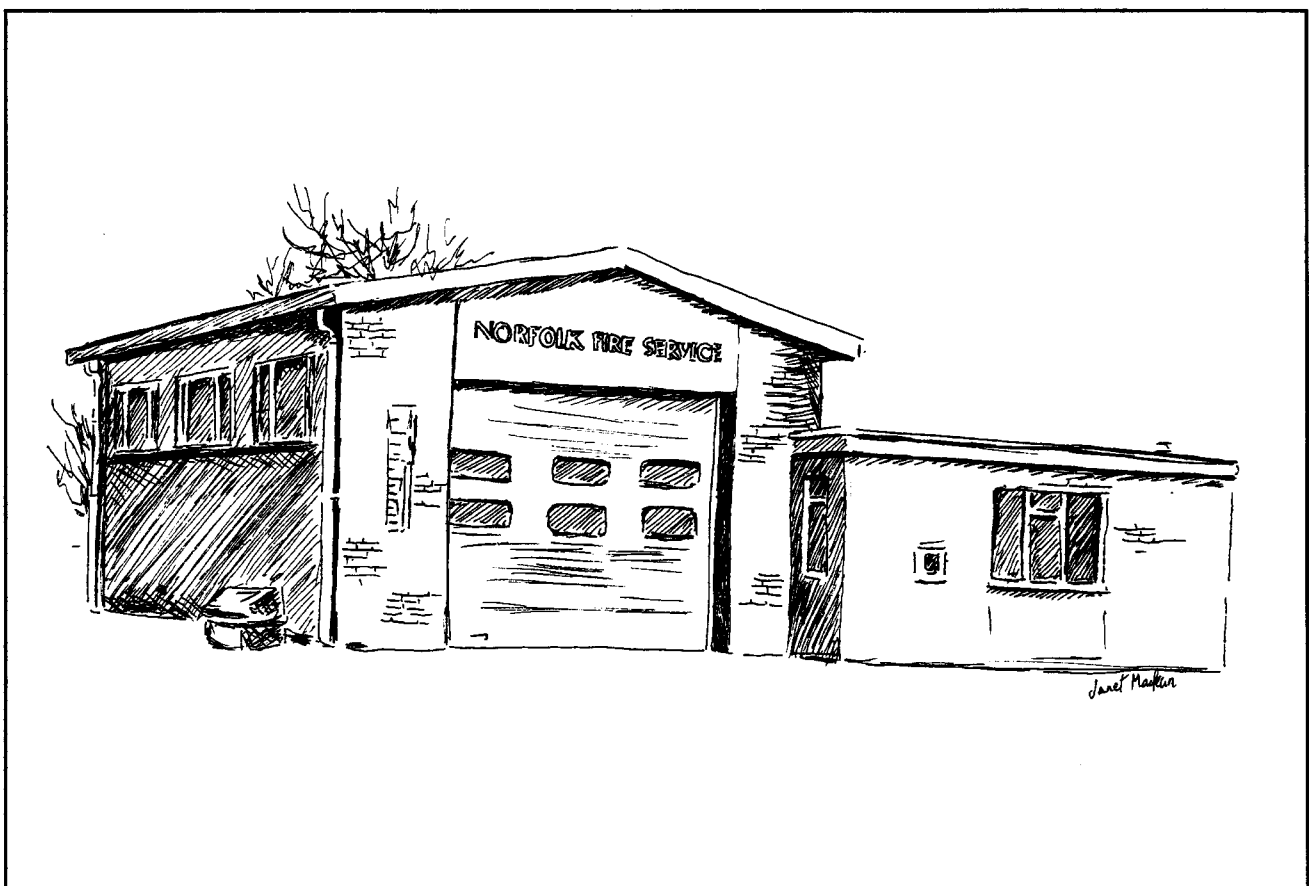
There is no information on how many of the perpetrators of the above crimes have been apprehended, warned or successfully prosecuted.

Over 50% of Households regard the current level of policing as unsatisfactory, another 30% have reservations. Although considerable Government resources have been put into the Police Forces nationwide, insufficient resources seem to trickle down for the grass roots policing favoured by communities.

To compensate for lack of police on the 'beat' communities are encouraged to set up Neighbourhood Watch schemes, local farmers already have such a scheme. Alternatively part time, unpaid Parish Constables could be appointed; a Parish Constable is a trained Special Constable who would deal with nuisance, minor crime, crime prevention, liaison with schools and patrol on foot or pedal cycle for a minimum of 4 hours a week; the Parish Council would have to pay a not insignificant contribution towards the costs of cycle, uniform, communication equipment, etc.

FIRE SERVICE

Before 1936 each Parish was responsible for its own fire fighting, in Methwold it took the form of a large number of buckets housed in the Pound, adjacent to the Recreational Ground. By act of parliament in 1936, fire fighting cover and equipment was provided by the Downham District Council, paid for out of the local rates; Methwold was designated a centre for a Fire Brigade to cover 13 surrounding villages within



Whittington, Methwold and Feltwell. This Fire Station was located in Cowlshaw's workshop.

During World War II all Fire Brigades were nationalised with standard equipment and rank structure. Since the war the Fire Services have been the responsibility of the County.

The present Fire Station, on the site of the old Bell pub, was opened in 1968. Methwold is a Retained Station with 10 volunteers on call 24 hours every day of the year; all volunteers have permission from their employers to respond immediately to all call-outs.

Up to 1940 the call-out system was by maroon launched from the Station, and then up to 1972 by siren and house bells, and now by personal beepers.

Last year the local Fire Brigade attended in the local area:

- 13 chimney fires,
- 7 small fires, mainly rubbish,
- 19 barn fires,
- 13 road accidents,
- 5 genuine false alarms,
- 11 malicious false alarms,

and

31 incidents outside of the area.

EDUCATION

PRE-SCHOOL

There are a number of places where children under 5 years of age can be left by their parents and supervised by registered supervisors: in a play group children mainly play, in day care and in nurseries play is laced with elements of education, in nursery education the emphasis is on education.

In the Parish there is one Nursery, Linden Nursery (tel. 728419). It is not known if there are any other registered childminders.

Out of 34 Households with children under the age of 5 years:

5 leave their children regularly with a carer,

16 would like to leave their children with a carer, but do not do so primarily because it is too expensive.

There is widespread opinion that more day care places should be made available at a reasonable price, possible subsidised for the less well off. From last October parents on Family Credit are entitled to money if they leave their children with registered childminders or nurseries.

A Mothers and Toddlers group of up to 14 mothers meets weekly in the Chapel Hall on Tuesday afternoons at a cost of 50p per mother. More mothers would probably attend if transport could be provided. Because of the importance

of such groups perhaps there are grants available to help defray expenses and buy equipment.

One suggestion is that the playbus should come to the village.

All 4 year olds are now being admitted to the Primary School for one or two afternoons each week.

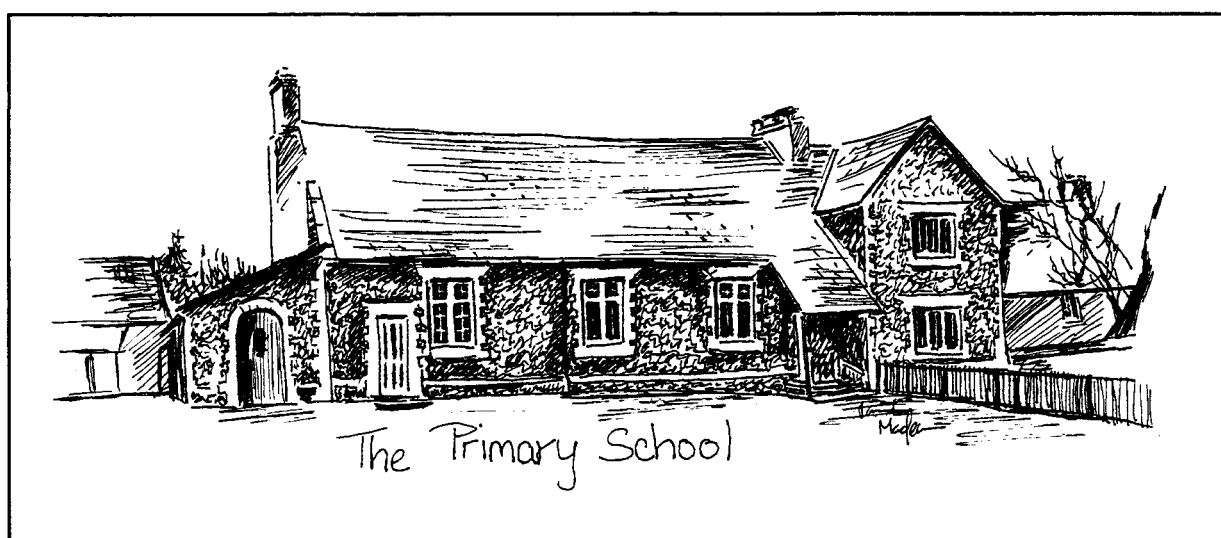
PRIMARY SCHOOL

The first school, a shanty in the chalk pit, was provided by the Duchy of Lancaster in 1812. It was replaced in 1858 by a national Church school; an Infant Section was added in 1874, with further extensions in 1898 and 1903. When the seniors left in 1958 the School became the Primary School; there has been further modernisation in recent years. With its 4 classrooms it has room for a maximum of approximately 120 pupils.

Current numbers are 94 pupils, 4.5 teaching staff, 2 support staff and 1 caretaker. According to this Appraisal the numbers of pupils are expected to fall in future years.

For Households having children currently attending Methwold Primary School, or children who have attended Methwold Primary School in the last 5 years:

46% regard the Primary School as good,



46% regard the Primary School as reasonable,

8% regard the Primary School as poor.

It is suggested that there is some bullying, and a lack of emphasis on manners and politeness (possibly more a reflection of modern society at large).

The School is involved with the Church and the Community, raising monies for charities (guide dogs, hospice, homeless, Help the Aged) and entertaining at concerts and at the Denton Day Centre.

METHWOLD HIGH SCHOOL

Methwold High School was opened in 1957 as a Secondary Modern School for 11-16 year olds. The catchment area goes around Boughton, Gooderstone, Foulden, Mundford, Weeting, Hockwold, Feltwell, Methwold and Stoke Ferry.

There are places for 700 pupils. At present the roll is 630 pupils with 46 teachers, 7 support staff and 1 caretaker. Pupil numbers are expected to fall to about 580 in 1998 before starting to rise again. To sustain numbers it is hoped to start a VIth form; if all goes well the first pupils will enter in September 1995.

Close links have been forged with local and County companies, industrial and commercial, contributing to the overall educational ethos and benefitting the senior pupils on the brink of future employment or higher education.

Community projects include practical help for the elderly, help for the play group, help for the disadvantaged, designing and building artifacts for the community, and raising money for charities.

For Households having children currently attending Methwold High School, or children who have attended Methwold High School in the last 5 years:

40% regard the High School as good,

30% regard the High School as reasonable,

30% regard the High School as poor.

The high percentage of disgruntled parents is a cause for concern.

The most common complaints are a lack of discipline, poor standard of appearance and behaviour, including bullying, truancy, and drugs, together with a few adverse comments on academic standards and attitudes.

As far as overall academic standards are concerned, according to the 1994 National League Tables, the High School performance in the GCSE examinations is above both the county and national average. This performance is a commendable improvement over that in previous years.

The Parent Teachers Association comprises 19 parents and 4 staff; it organises the uniform shop, the diary of events, parent's newsletter, and homework monitoring. The PTA, plus the Friends of Methwold High School, raised more



than £4,000 last year from dances, village summer fayre (not to be confused with the cacophonous Travellers Bank Holiday rave-up) and other events, which contributed to transport costs and school trips.

COMMENT

Pressure has been put on schools to opt out of the fire of County Council control into the frying pan of Government control. Although 27 Norfolk Schools have opted out neither of the two local schools have done so, it would be of interest to know why.

Both local Schools are now given more 'freedom' by having to operate within an allocated budget, which is based primarily on pupil numbers. School Governors have the collective responsibility of managing all of a school's affairs within that allocated budget. Being a Governor has become a time-consuming and demanding task, requiring managerial and accounting experience to deal with large sums of monies (which for the High School exceeds £1.5 million).

While this Appraisal has been in progress a policy to reduce bullying has been agreed between the High School and the neighbouring Primary Schools.

As far as the local community is concerned both local Schools keep a low profile. Nowadays schools have little spare time to devote to 'public relations' and maybe the local community does not show sufficient interest to what is happening in our Schools, or in education in general. The means of establishing a more active dialogue between the schools and the local community could be explored.

ADULT EDUCATION

Adult Education (evening) Classes have been offered under the auspices of the County Council at the High School and in surrounding villages over the last 20 years. A local branch of the W(orkers) E(ducational) A(ssociation) also provides a Course each year.

There are problems organising evening classes in sparsely populated rural areas: a course has to attract at least 12 attendees for that course to be financially viable, a local qualified and inspirational teacher has to be found, there is a long time lag between organising the range of classes in the Spring and the presentation of those classes in the Autumn, a popular class one year tends to absorb all the local interest so there is little interest the following year.

About 50% of Households are of the opinion that the Adult Education Classes are insufficiently publicised. But this criticism cannot be levelled this year because the brochure for the full set of Courses throughout the County has been circulated to every house in the Parish.

Over the last 5 years

10% of Households have attended an Adult Education Course, or Evening Class in the Parish

15% of Households have attended an Adult Education Course, or Evening Class, outside of the Parish (many of these are the same Household).

30% of Households state that they would be interested in attending Evening Classes if suitable courses were offered.

The main suggestions for topics for Evening Classes are:

languages (business languages),
range of handicrafts,
lace making,
flower arrangement,
modern office skills,

with the comment that fees are rather high.

With many retired people maybe daytime classes would be attractive; St George's Hall, the Fenton Room or the Chapel Hall might be suitable venues.

Another suggestion is a closer integration with Parents' Associations. Classes on the School curriculum (helping parents understand their childrens' homework), on living together, on parenting (it has been many peoples experience that this Class is needed well beyond retiring age) all reinforce the strengthening of family life.

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SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

SPORT

Formal sport activities currently available in the Parish are listed.

Football

Methwold Hythe

2 Senior Teams in Divs 2, 3 of the Lynn & District League, play on Saturday afternoons at High School,

1 Senior team in Thetford Sunday (Morning) League, also play at High School,

1 Junior team (5 - 14 years of age) trains twice a week on the recreation ground.

(Rick Bunten, tel 727 150)

Methwold United

1 Senior Team in Div 2 of the Lynn &

District League, play on Saturdays on Recreation Ground,

1 Senior Team in Thetford Sunday (Morning) League.

(Michael Legge, tel 728101)

Indoor Bowls

every Tuesday evening at St George's Hall, except during summer months, current membership 20.

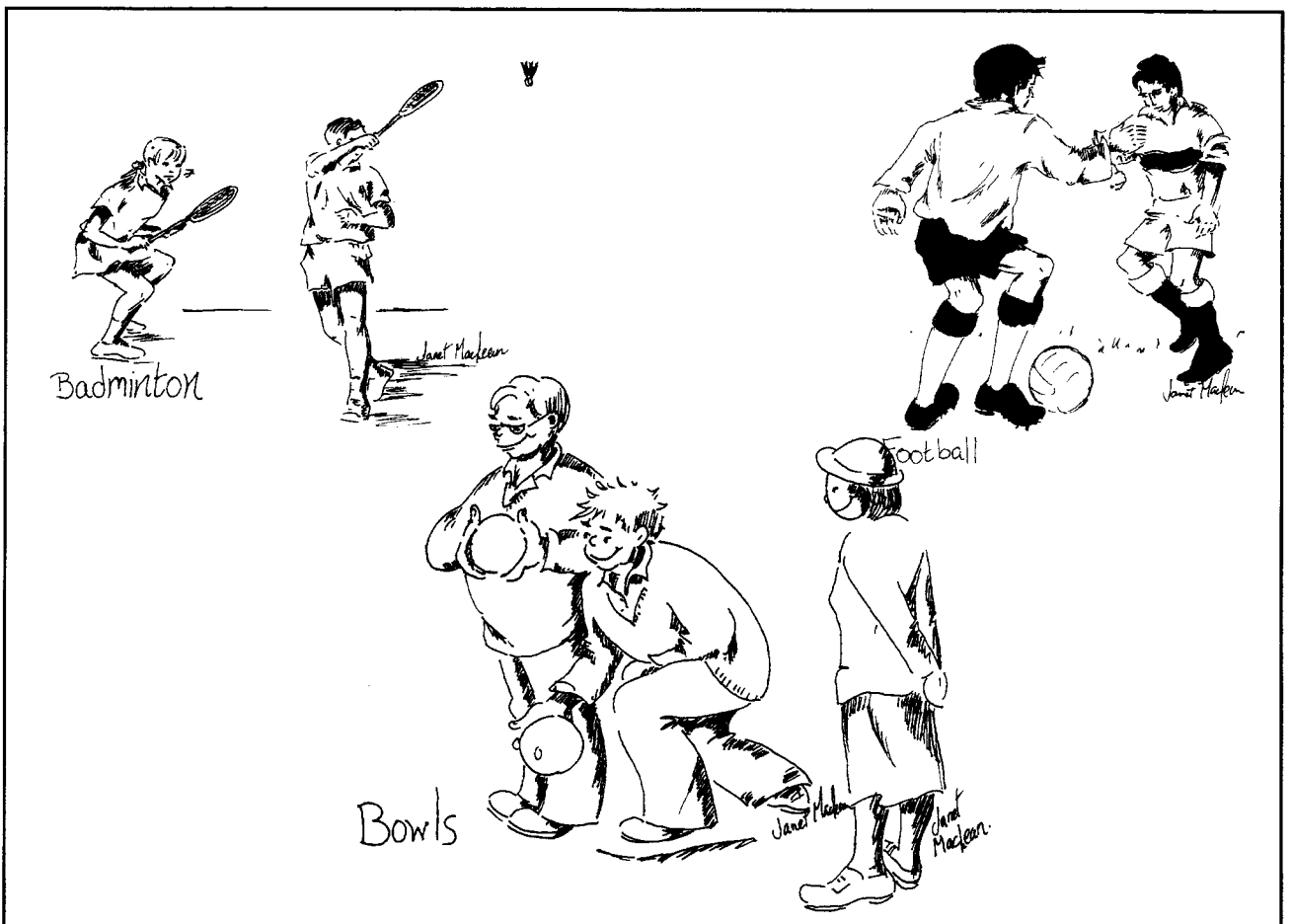
(Gordon Fuller tel 728 344).

Outdoor Bowls

a private rink.

Badminton

every Monday evening at St George's Hall except during summer months, competes in local leagues, current membership 24. (Gordon Fuller, tel 728 344).



Netball

a new club (Judith Clement, tel 728 926)

Shooting

meets in the Glebe; rifle shooting on Monday and Thursday evenings, pistol shooting on Wednesday evening, junior rifle shooting on Monday evening.

(Ken Griffen, tel 728438)

Snooker

2 tables at Social Club.

Pool, Darts

at George, Green Man and Social Club.

There used to be a cricket team, but because of a crumbling concrete strip and 'personality' difficulties the team disbanded in the 1960's. Local cricketers now play in neighbouring village teams.

The Methwold High School has the following facilities:

a small heated outside swimming pool,
gymnasium,
4 hard and 2 grass tennis courts,
2 cricket nets,
netball court,
football pitch,
rugby pitch,
hockey pitch.

Apart from the football pitch at present none of the other school facilities are used by outsiders, although they have been in previous years.

The main sport venues outside Parish are listed:

Swimming

Feltwell, Downham Market, King's Lynn, Thetford (currently being rebuilt), Norwich.

Indoor sports arenas

Downham Market, King's Lynn, Norwich.

Bowls (indoor)

Stoke Ferry, Brandon, Lakenheath.

Bowls (outdoor)

Weeting, Hockwold, Feltwell, Brandon.

Tennis

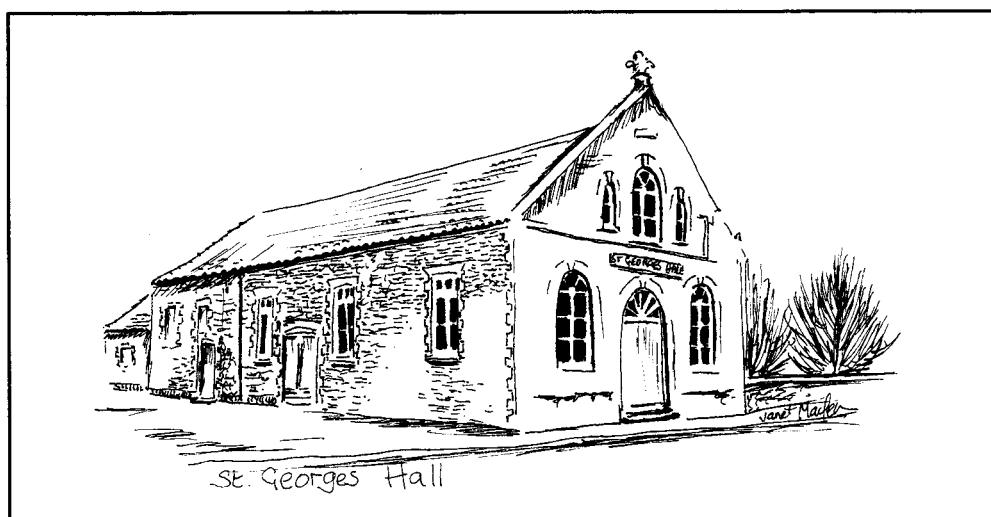
Downham, Thetford, Brandon.

At the present time up to 40% of Households say they participate in sport either inside or outside the Parish. These numbers look high; it is possible that Households have included, quite rightly, cycling and walking the dog.

The above numbers are even more surprising when it is noted that in many of the Parish sporting activities listed above the majority of membership comes from outside of the Parish.

The main suggestions for additional outdoor and indoor sporting facilities in the Parish are for:

bowling greens and club,
swimming,
tennis;



other suggestions are for:

cycling club,
keep fit,
squash,
martial arts,
table tennis.

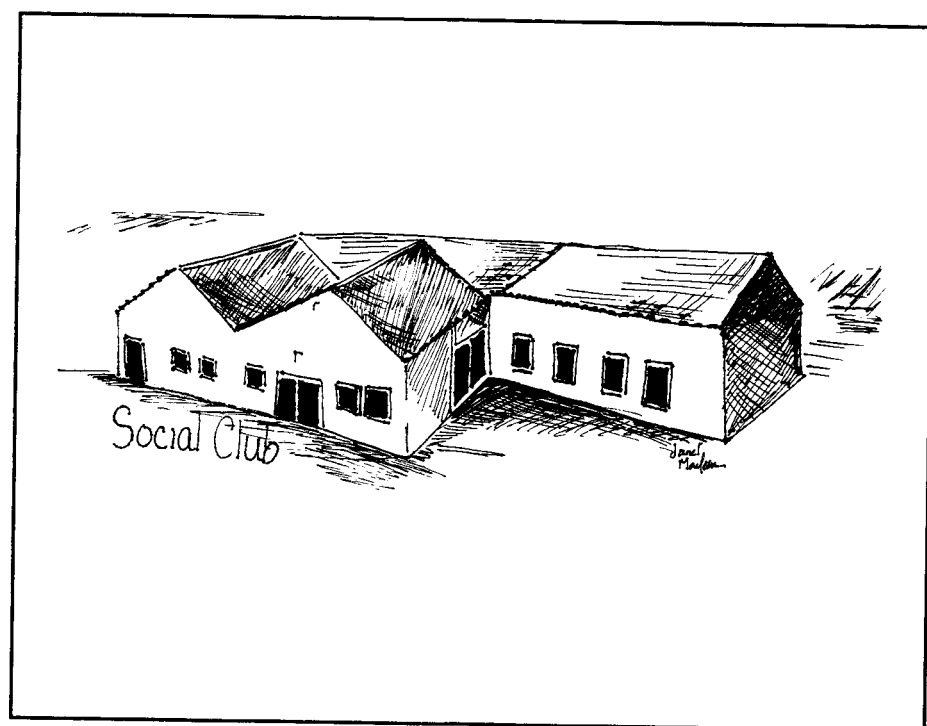
Consideration should be given to whether or not an informal local area Sports Council might be set up to rationalise and promote opportunities for sport in the area (Denton Ward, Stoke Ferry), to assess what further facilities are desirable, to negotiate for the necessary funding, and to organise local transport.

citizens, was formed in 1962. Currently it has approximately 60 members which meet on Monday afternoons in the Fenton Room. Once a month a lunch is cooked and served. The club goes on visits, about 7 a year, to such places as stately homes, large garden centres, interesting towns, etc. An annual horticultural show and Christmas lunch and social for all senior citizens are organised. Money is raised for the medical equipment fund. A cause for concern is the need for more prompt access to medical help and support when it is required in emergencies.

Historical Society (David Thomas, tel 728 152)

The Society was formed in 1984 with aim of stimulating interest and activity in local history; membership has crept up slowly and currently there are about 20 members. Meetings are held on the third Monday evening of each month at 7.30 pm at the Social Club; during the Summer months outside visits replace meeting. Topics this year have included the history of airships, the origin of photography, British Rail, and archive films; visits have been made to King's

Lynn Guildhall and the Bury Museum. The Society is keen to build up its store of local reminiscences.



SOCIAL CLUBS

The Social Groups currently active in the Parish, together with contacts, are listed.

Afternoon Club (Vi Samwell, tel 728 466)

An over-60s club, with approximately 25 members, meets on the afternoon of the first Friday of each month in the Fenton Room for a chat with quizzes, a little Bingo and a cup of tea. During the summer months trips are organised, primarily to coastal towns.

Busy Bees (Hazel Gray, tel 728 488)

The Busy Bees, a club primarily for senior

Social Club (tel, 728 703)

In 1921 ex-servicemen pooled their war gratuities to lease St Georges Hall for 33 years, forming the Ex-Servicemens' Club. Social activities included dances, concerts, billiards and weekly cinema. During World War II the Club ran dances at the Drill Hall, attracting servicemen from Cranwich Camp and Methwold Air base, building up funds for future developments.

In the 1950s the lease expired, ground and property adjacent to St Georges Hall was bought and a timber building constructed. The name changed to the Social Club with its licence and need to widen membership to females.

In the late 1960s into early 70s further land was purchased, but difficulties with planning permission over access prevented further development. Due to the efforts of the Parish Council in the late 70s, planning permission was obtained, the demolition of a cottage allowed access.

The present Social Club has grown over recent years; the bar and main lounge opened in 1982, the hall (the 21 Room) in 1984, the new billiard room in 1990, and the small lounge in 1992.

Currently the Club, registered as a non-profit making Society with a Board of Trustees, is open every evening and lunchtimes on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. It has approximately 350 members with a minimum age of 16. It runs football, snooker and darts teams, Friday evening bingo, a dance/cabaret every Bank Holiday Sunday, and is a meeting place for several Societies.

Future plans seek to extend the range of social clubs and activities. There is adjacent land with potential for further development,

West Norfolk Aviation Society (Richard Allen, tel 500 243)

The Society was formed in 1991 to accommodate the considerable interest in aviation, especially the history of aviation. A buoyant membership of 65 comes from a wide area (Downham, Swaffham, Narborough) and is made up of ex-servicemen, with memories to recall, and younger enthusiasts; current membership is about 60. A regular professional newsletter and annual journal is published; a lending library of members' books is available. Meetings are held on the third

Tuesday evenings of alternate months at the Social Club at 7.30 pm, alternating with Sunday visits to Aerospace Museum. Topics for meetings this year have included autogyros (Ken Wallis), experience of a Medical Officer, Norfolk Military Airfields, Flight thru' the Ages; visits have been made to the Science Museum in London, Shuttleworth Collection, Museum of Berkshire Aviation, and Midlands Aviation Museum near Coventry, this last visit included a flight in a Dakota.

Womens' Institute (Freda Lakey, tel 728 138)

Womens' Institutes actually started in Canada where women in remote homesteads came together to exchange ideas on home management (and gossip); the concept spread to Wales and then to rural England. The National Organisation of Womens Institutes is non-political but it claims political clout as a pressure group representing rural middle class female opinion.

Methwold Womens' Institute started in 1926 to support and encourage rural crafts and projects, and to support local charities. Membership has declined over recent years, standing at present about 20 members. Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month at the Fenton Room at 7.30 pm, each meeting involves a speaker and a competition; topics this year have included bee keeping, environmental health, decoupage (3D cards), local artist, Japanese silk flowers, Bury Hospice, while competitions have included a decorative jug, pictures made of leaves, baby clothes (for premature baby unit at King's Lynn Hospital), poem for Christmas. The Institute welcomes new members.

Dance Club (S Coulson, tel 728 435)

A Dance Club of approximately 100 members meets in the evening of every third Saturday in the month at Methwold High School.

Howard Long has a thriving Social Club for employees, families and friends.

A number of Social Groups used to exist but are no more:

- community association/fete committee,
- gardening club,
- judo club,
- tug of war team.

Their demise was due mainly to lack of continuity of volunteers.

Approximately 40% of Households participate in social activities either inside or outside of the Parish. It is not known what social activities are attended outside of the Parish.

Suggestions for new clubs are:

- luncheon club,
- whist drive,
- handicrafts,
- computer games,
- rambling,
- gardening,
- photography,
- drama,
- music,
- chess

also

something more lively, a night club!

PUBLIC HOUSES

The pub has been the traditional focus of village social life.

In 1883 the pubs were:

in Methwold village:

Bell, Chequers, Cock, Crown, Globe, George (originally George and Dragon), Windmill (also for a time a tramps doss house).

in the Hythe:

Green Man, Best Beer under the Sun

in Brookville:

Swan

The Crown, Globe, Windmill and Best Beer under the Sun, closed in the 1930s.

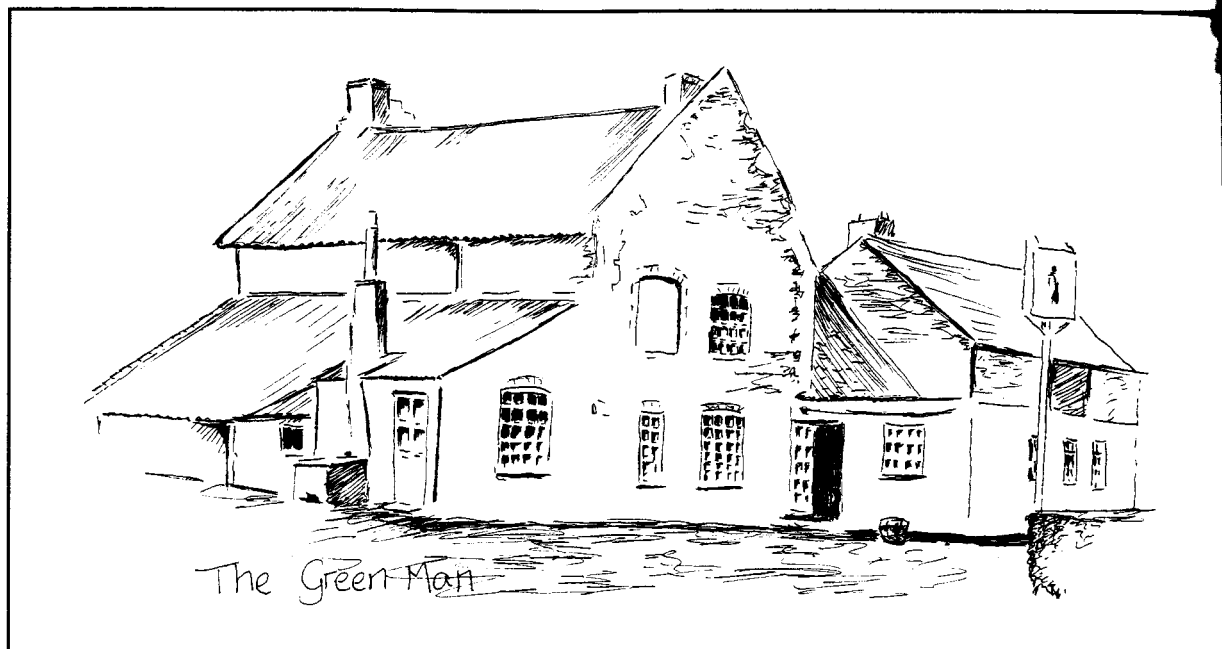
The Bell, Chequers and Cock closed in the 1960s,

The Swan closed in 1985.

In 1994 only 2 pubs are left, the George and Green Man, the Social Club serves as a third pub.

Managing a pub these days is a tough commercial business with franchise, business rate tax and insurance to pay. To make a profit pubs have to offer meals, accommodation and provide entertainment. Although each pub has a nucleus of regulars, not necessarily locals, much more local support is needed to keep both





pubs viable (the real ales are highly recommended).

At the George, an energetic Cockle Club organises events and activities to raise money for charities.

ENTERTAINMENT

Approximately 15% of Households attend discos, dances, cinemas and concerts; and about 8% of Households attend plays; most of these entertainments are outside of the Parish.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Local libraries are at Downham Market, Brandon, Thetford and King's Lynn. The magnificent Library Building at King's Lynn was one of over 1000 libraries built in the UK by the Scottish/American philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie.

An excellent Mobile Library visits the Parish:

Brookville

every 4 weeks, on a Thursday, next date, March 2nd (Brookville P O 2.50 pm)

Methwold

every 2 weeks, on a Tuesday, next date, Feb 14th (Cock Corner 1.50 pm, Lancaster Close 2.10 pm, Fairhill 2.40 pm, Herbert Drive 3.15, Elders Place 3.30 pm, Red House 3.50)

Methwold Hythe

every 4 weeks, on a Thursday, next date March 2nd, (Council houses 3.35 pm, Green Man 3.55 pm)

Just under 20% of Households use a library regularly and another 25% use a library occasionally; these numbers are surprisingly high.

In retrospect an attempt should have been made in the Appraisal to find out about reading habits (magazines, books), purchase and renting of tapes, CD discs and videos.

COMMENT

The Parish is well served by the number of halls available for social functions: Social Club, St George's Hall, Fenton Room, Chapel Hall, Primary School, and High School. There is also a derelict Church Hall.

A number of Households have expressed interest in music, concerts, drama, plays and painting, none of which are currently catered for in the Parish. These types of minority activities may well be better encouraged and co-ordinated over a wider area, say Denton Ward plus Stoke Ferry, by an informal Arts Council which could also act as a focus for applying for arts grants. There is already a Feltwell Arts Council, perhaps its opinion should be sought.

ENVIRONMENT

One of the attractive features of the Parish is its closeness to Thetford Forest. This Forest started as a job creation scheme during the depression years of the late 1920s, labourers were brought from the cities, housed in Cranwich camp, to begin planting the trees. It took a considerable time before the right types of trees for the soil were found, and rabbits were culled at 500 per day. Nowadays the Forest extends over 50,000 acres; about 1 million new plants are planted each year, of which approximately 200,000 will be allowed to mature in time before being chopped down for timber. The threat by Government of privatisation has receded, at least for the time being.

Up to 80% of Households say that they use the Parish public footpaths and bridleways, mostly occasionally; slightly less say that they use the Forest public footpaths and bridleways. The Questionnaire was not as clear as it might have been in distinguishing between footpaths and pavements (sometimes referred to as footways).

Virtually all Households would welcome the publication of maps, indicating the public footpaths and bridleways in the Parish, including those which enter neighbouring Parishes (eg along the Ouse). These footpaths and bridleways should be sign posted.

Environmental nuisances are the periodic smells, especially those which are not the traditional rural smells, and low-level aircraft noise, which could be eased a by slight change in the flight path.

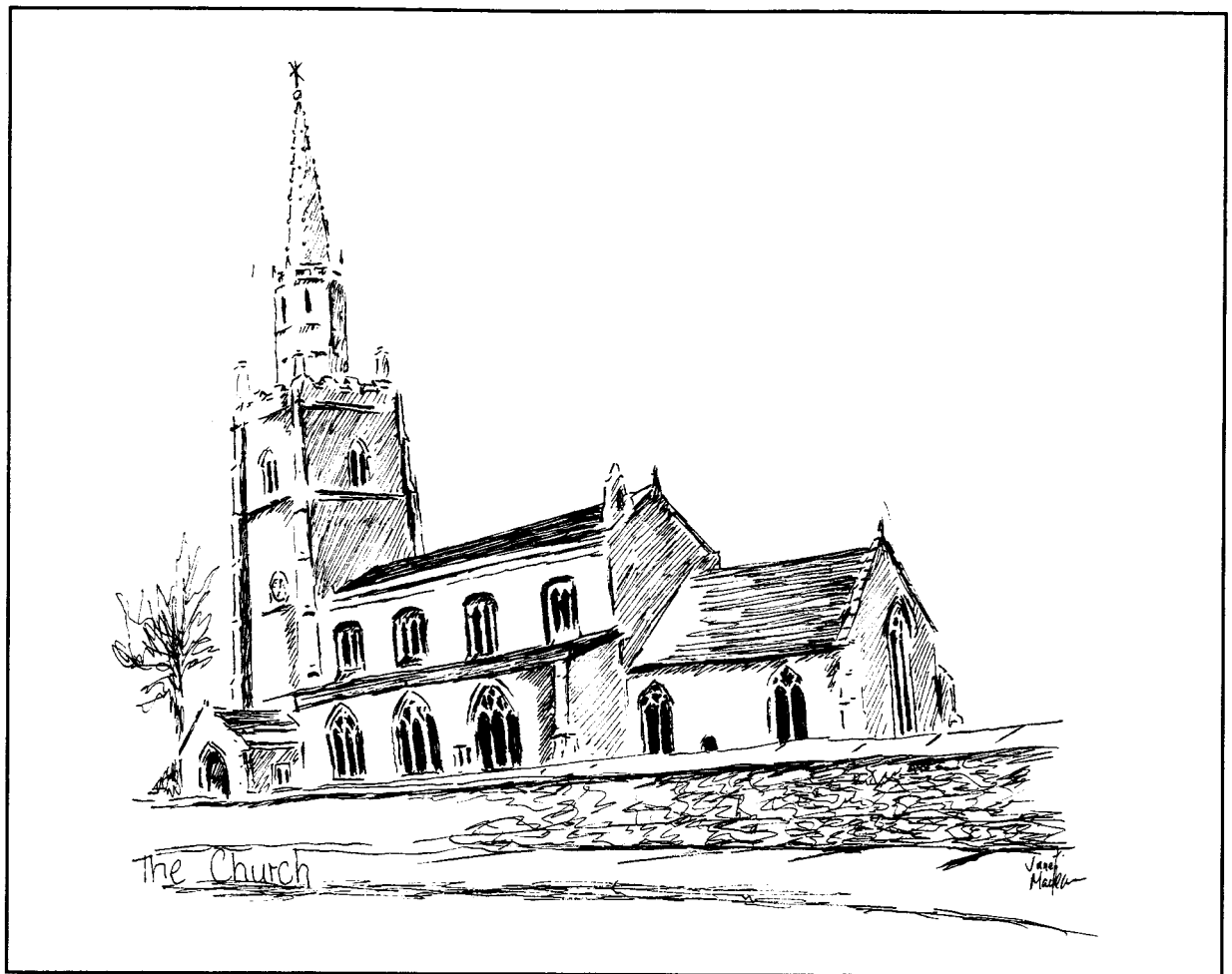
It is of interest to record that Robert Spinks is developing a wildflower meadow down the Thornham Road.

The Borough Council has recently published a document entitled 'State of the Environment Report' which brings together the combined expertise of the Council itself, the National Rivers Authority, Anglian Water, Friends of the Earth, and others to summarize the current state of the environment of West Norfolk. This data provides a standard from which future improvements, or otherwise, can be measured.

This Appraisal has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to local Environmental matters.



RELIGION



CHURCH

Methwold's St George Church was built in the early 1400s, with its slender spire and unusual corona; it is highly likely that there was an earlier church on the same site. The six bells which date from 1630 had to be taken down in the 1960's because of structural defects in the spire.

Methwold Hythe Church of St Helen, possibly built in the 1200s, whose remains are close to Abbey Farm, was already derelict long before the early 1700s. There was also a church and priory on the Severals, and a church at Poppylot on the fen.

There is no Roman Catholic Church in the Parish.

From the Questionnaire:

35% of Households regard the Church as an important historic building which is

central to the heritage of the village; the recent success in fund raising to repair the church corona is a testimonial to that feeling,

30% of Households think that the Church is important for baptisms, weddings and funerals,

12% of Households feel that the Church is important as a place of worship, but not necessarily for themselves.

At present the Church congregation is small, except for the special services at Easter and Christmas. There is a choir, but no Sunday School or Youth activities. The vicar retires in 1995 and there is uncertainty that there will be adequate funds to afford a replacement.

CHAPEL

The Wesleyan Chapel on Crown Street (and its 'school' down Chapel Lane) was built in 1831, and the Primitive Methodist Chapel, now a private dwelling was built somewhat later; the two Manses were next door to each other down the Stoke Road. The Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists united in 1932 even though there were complex differences, essentially Wesleyans were middle class and the Primitive Methodists working class (as already stated the local branch of the agricultural workers trade union was organised mainly by Primitive Methodists).

Although the Chapel is the poor relation with respect to the Church, there is a cordial relationship between Chapel and Church.

The number of worshippers at the Chapel is sparse, and most of that sparse congregation comes from Northwold, Brookville and the Hythe. There is no work with youth and children. The minister's term of office terminates in the near future.

The Chapel is resourced by voluntary giving and the regular Monday morning coffee session, and concerts. To shore up finances in the immediate future more lettings of the Hall would be beneficial. Ideally the Hall could be sold and the Chapel converted to an all-purpose building but the presence of an old graveyard and other factors prevent this.

From the Questionnaire:

18% of Households regard the Chapel as an important historic building,

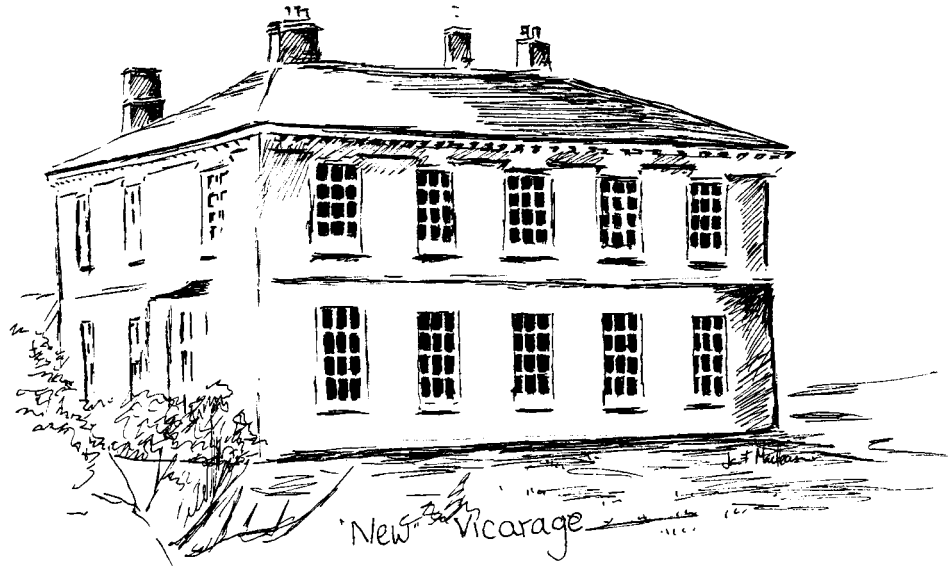
15% of Households think that the Chapel is important for baptisms, weddings and funerals,

7% of Households feel that the Chapel is important as a place of worship, again not necessarily for themselves.





'Old' Vicarage



'New' Vicarage



Present Vicarage

INFORMATION

Local news and information are gleaned from local radio, regional TV, local Newspapers (King's Lynn Advertiser, Thetford and Brandon issue of Bury Free Press, Downham Mercury), and from the Methwold Times.

From the Questionnaire 65% of households take a local newspaper.

A Methwold Times was organised from the early 1970s by the Community Association. After about ten years it lapsed before being taken up by the present group of dedicated volunteers and distributors. The Methwold Times, funded by subscriptions and advertisements, is published monthly, it is distributed free of charge to every house in the Parish; it is read fully by virtually all Households; it is generally welcomed; it is regarded as informative.

Suggestions for improving the Methwold Times are:

better presentation and reproduction,

more current local news and issues,

more fulsome monthly diary of events,

a more lighthearted approach (make us laugh, happy endings),

quizzes, crossword, short stories.

There is now a database established in Norwich call Icon which claims to list local organisations, health and welfare services, leisure facilities, and which can be accessed through the Thetford, Downham Market and King's Lynn Libraries.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

National Government decides overall policies. Local Government implements those policies (sometimes enthusiastically, other times reluctantly) and manages the day-to-day running of our community, within an allocated budget.

At present Local Government comprises three tiers:

Norfolk County Council,

King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council,

Parish Council.

There is a Government review in progress on whether or not to change these three tiers of local government to two; an interim recommendation is that the three tiers should be retained.

County and Borough Councils monies come primarily from Government and also from the domestic Council Tax which is levied on each household.

The County, Borough and Parish Councils each decide annually what revenue it wishes to raise through the Council Tax. The County and Borough estimates cannot exceed a maximum amount laid down by Parliament, known as capping; at present the County is capped but the Borough is uncapped. The Borough collects the Council Tax on behalf of the three Councils.

Norfolk County Council

The County Council consists of 84 elected Councillors and 17,500 (equivalent) full time staff, with an annual budget of £600 million.

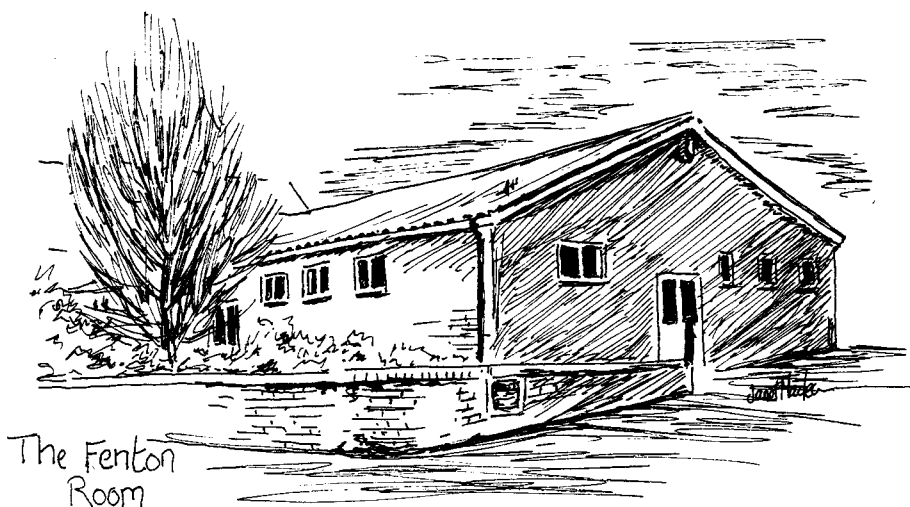
It is responsible for:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Education | Social Services |
| Planning | Transportation |
| Police | Fire Service |
| Waste Disposal | Waste Regulation |
| Trading Standards | Museums Service |
| Coroners | |
| Library and Information Service | |
| Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages | |

There is no dominant political party in control of the County Council with no formal alliances between the parties; because Labour won the most votes at the last County election Labour Councillors now chair all Committees.

Methwold is represented on the County Council by one Councillor for the Feltwell Ward (ie the Parishes of Methwold, Hockwold, Feltwell, Northwold, Stoke Ferry, Southery, Boughton, Wretton, Wereham, West Dereham); currently our County Councillor is David Buckton, (Liberal Democrat), from Hockwold.

According to the Questionnaire the County Council is an unknown quantity. Virtually no



information filters down to the people of this Parish on what the County decides, how it decides it, or what it does, and what it does do in this Parish, for example about speed limits, road maintenance and alterations, is not highly regarded.

King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council

The Borough Council consists of 60 elected Councillors and 650 (equivalent) full time staff, with an annual budget of £42.5 million.

It is responsible for:

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Housing | Refuse Collection |
| Local Planning | Street Cleaning |
| Environmental Health | |
| Leisure Facilities | |

Conservatives dominate the Borough Council with 65% of the seats.

Methwold is represented on the Borough Council by the three Councillors for the Denton Ward (the Parishes of Methwold, Hockwold, Feltwell and Northwold); currently they are Martin Storey (Conservative) from Feltwell, Carol Sharp (Conservative) from Northwold and David Buckton (Liberal Democrat) from Hockwold.

From the Questionnaire little is known about the activities of the Borough Council, only 17 Households know the names of the three Borough Councillors. The Parish Council may be kept informed of Borough Council business and decisions, but if so, that information is not passed on.

There is a feeling that the Borough Council pays little heed to local opinion, particularly in the area of planning.

Methwold Parish Council

The number of Parish Councillors is decided by the Borough Council; Methwold Parish Council has 13 elected Councillors (all coming up for re-election in 1995). Party politics play no part in Parish affairs.

The part-time salaried staff comprises a clerk, a

worker, primarily responsible for litter, and a caretaker.

The annual budget is about £30,000 which is made up of the Parish tax, or Precept, monies from the Borough for undertaking specific jobs, and revenues from bookings of St Georges Hall/Fenton Room. The Parish Council has a reserve fund for contingencies.

The Parish Council owns the Fenton Room/St George's Hall complex, the Recreation Ground, the Pound, the Greens and the cemetery and the new cemetery field (behind the existing cemetery).

By statute a Parish Council is responsible for:

- the closed churchyard,
war memorial,
and is the burial authority.

Although not a statutory duty the Parish Council maintains the lands which its owns.

In addition Methwold Parish Council acts as an agent for the Borough Council responsible for

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Community Halls | Pavements |
| Street Lighting | Off-street Parking |
| Litter | Recreation Ground |
| Allotments | Bus Shelters |
| Footpaths | |

The Borough contributes 40% of the costs of these commitments, the Parish provides the rest.

The Parish Council has an advisory role only in dealing with planning applications, the Borough Council makes all the decisions.

Last year the Methwold Parish Tax, or Precept, was

£28.61 (for a Band D property),

which is added on to the County and Borough Precepts of £514, to make up the total Council Tax. The revenue to Methwold Parish Council from its Precept is £11,500.

For comparison the Precept for neighbouring Parishes are:

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| Feltwell | £13.65, |
| Hockwold | £16.33, |

| | |
|-------------|--------|
| Northwold | £9.20, |
| Stoke Ferry | £9.26. |

The Methwold Precept is the highest in West Norfolk, the Parish Council should explain why.

Although the detailed minutes of the Parish Council meetings are reported in full in the Methwold Times:

only 35% of Households feel that they are kept sufficiently informed on Parish Council matters.

Also

50% of Households are satisfied with the way the Parish Council spends its money,

30% of Households do not know how the Parish Council money is spent.

The main comments in the Questionnaire on the Parish Council are:

the high Precept is a matter of concern, and whether the Parish benefits accordingly,

general lack of information on Parish Council objectives, strategies and activities,

dates and times of meetings and agenda should be made available in Methwold Times in advance,

Council not receptive to public attendance at its meetings,

there is a gulf between the Parish Council and the people.

There are two sides to the gulf between the Parish Council and the people. Councillors complain that the people of the Parish are apathetic, citing lack of public attendance at Parish Council meetings and difficulty in recruiting volunteers in Parish affairs (at least one Councillor thought that this Appraisal would be unsuccessful because of lack of volunteers and public response). On the other hand the people of the Parish feel let down by the Parish Council by a sense of remoteness and for not getting to grips with the tawdry appearance of some of Methwold village.

This gulf is unfortunate because on most issues the Parish Council and peoples' aspirations are much the same; Parish Councillors are part of the community and are fully aware of what is going on.

Parish Councils necessarily have to spend most of their time dealing with the minutiae of Parish business (vandalism, grass cutting, cemetery upkeep, street lighting, tendering, planning applications, curtains for the Fenton Room, etc), little time is left for initiating and promoting the broader interests of the Parish.

Borough and County Councils can call upon an extensive bureaucracy of staff to support them with professional help and advice whereas Parish Councils have to do everything for themselves, although part of the Borough Council brief is to provide professional back-up to Parish Councils. Perhaps it would help the Parish Council if a broader participation by the people in the airing and discussions of topical issues could be organised, this could be introduced in a number of ways:

by bringing outside people on to Standing Committees of the Parish Council; at present there are small Hall, Footways and Footpaths and Planning Committees without outside representation; perhaps the number of Standing Committees could be increased to cover housing, transport, environment, services, etc;

ad-hoc advisory working groups comprising Councillors and local people could be set up to make detailed analyses of issues as they arise (eg wheely bins, proposed Day Centre, transport);

establish a Parish Forum to debate wider issues as they arise.

To further improve matters the Parish Council should make more of an effort to tell the people what it is about, the problems that it encounters, and to trumpet its successes, a summary listing of the minutes of the Parish Council Meetings does not really suffice. A little public relations would go a long way towards restoring a rapport.

YOUTH

The group, the Pirates, where the under 11 years of age met weekly, has recently closed.

A Youth Club, also closed a few years ago.

In the Questionnaire the Youth Survey was answered by:

53 (out of 74) in the 11 - 16 age group

28 (out of an estimated 35) in the 17 - 18 age group.

As might be expected the main leisure pursuits of the two age groups differ significantly:

the elder age group spend time in the pubs/Social Club, watch television, and go into nearest town.

the younger age group watch television, wander around and play computer games.

Surprisingly, hardly any of the younger age group mentioned the Methwold Scouts, a thriving local Group for both sexes (for further information contact Mo Hobbs, tel 728 617).

The majority of both age groups would welcome the opportunity of being able to participate more in sport, particularly swimming. But the younger

age group, in particular, would require transport to go outside the Parish.

The majority of both age groups would also welcome an evening meeting place with a coffee bar, (loud) music and games.

Groups of youngsters do wander round the Methwold village in the evenings, apparently aimlessly. Many people have suggested that with nothing to do these youngsters turn to vandalism and that 'something should be done for them'. But wandering around has always been part of the normal growing up process for most youngsters (known as the 'monkey run' in the north), without any serious adverse effects, at least judging from our local middle age and senior citizens.

Nevertheless the possibility of reopening a Youth Centre should be seriously explored. Two problems exist, finding enthusiastic and committed organisers, and finding a venue. In many parts of the country a Youth Club is attached to the neighbourhood High School. The advice of the County Youth Service should be sought.

AMERICAN RESIDENTS

Because there are many American families from the Air Force Bases at Mildenhall and Lakenheath residing in the Parish for a short spell, usually of two to three years, it was thought appropriate to invite them to participate in this Appraisal with a separate survey.

From the 20 American families, out of approximately 30, which answered this survey:

most were in rented accommodation,

only occasionally used local shops, local labour, attended local events, and visited pubs and local restaurants,

thought that most of the services were good,

had visited places of local interest (churches, cathedrals, coastline),

on the whole were impressed and gratified with the friendliness of neighbours,

enjoyed living in a rural area,

will take home pleasant memories,

Even though our American visitors are far too polite to criticise us, the general opinion of contentment of living in our community is thought to be genuine. But there is a sense of isolation from the local community, which is a pity; maybe an effort could be made to encourage and welcome our American visitors into local groups.

FUTURE

According to the Questionnaire most people of the Parish find much to commend in the Parish; the church, the old buildings in the centre of Methwold, the relative tranquility of a friendly rural area, a pleasant area between the forest on one side and the open fens on the other, and a convenient location with access to a range of towns and to the Norfolk coast.

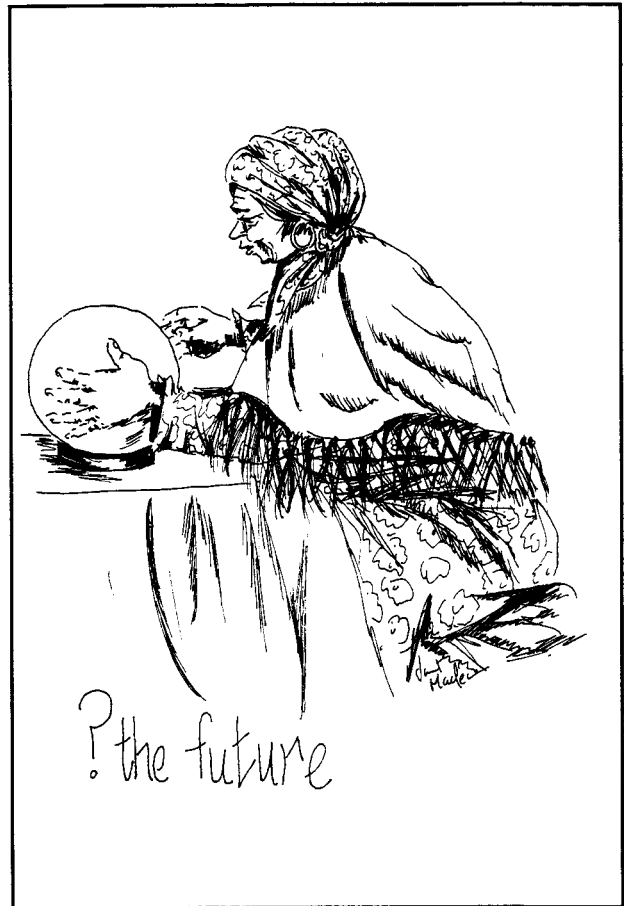
On the other hand according to the questionnaire the list of unattractive features in the Parish is three times longer than the list of attractive features. Allowing for the fact that what is attractive to one person is unattractive to another (for example, the Monday Market, the Chalk Pit) the most common complaint is that Methwold village gives the appearance of a village in decline with the closure of shops and general air of scruffiness. To paraphrase one comment "the village must be decaying because more undertakers are moving in".

In broad terms the people of the Parish would like to see:

Methwold cleaned up,
only a limited expansion of housing but aimed at the disadvantaged in the Parish,
a balanced community with regard to age,
the curbing of excessive speeding, especially by lorries through all three villages,
more done for the unemployed possibly by the expansion of small businesses,
more done for the youngsters.

Looking to the future, if the Parish merely attempts to maintain the status quo and remains passive, decline is a real possibility. The way forward is not to be too prescriptive but to be able to

respond positively as occasions arise,
to mitigate potential set-backs if they materialise and secondly



to identify and support any development initiatives.

Potential set-backs are:

the loss of the village store,
any contraction in either Howard Long or Darbys who both operate in highly competitive markets,
further closures of Lakenheath and Mildenhall.

Funding support for development initiatives is available from Borough, County, National and possibly European Agencies.

This area of West Norfolk has been targeted as a Priority Area by the (Norfolk) Rural Development Commission which is the Government Agency responsible for improving life in the English Countryside, covering jobs, businesses, childcare, transport, village shops.

It is not known whether the Parish has benefited from this initiative so far.

In addition the Norfolk Rural Community Council has the responsibility, and funds, to promote smaller scale rural activities.

Unfortunately the Parish has been excluded from the area designated worthy of investment by the EEC; our neighbours Stoke Ferry, Downham Market are included. There is a chance that the Parish might gain some benefit from a spill-over effect; this will involve close contact with project proposals from Stoke Ferry.

Local farming is dependent on the decisions of the EEC as it comes to grips with its Common Agricultural Policy. Already some land in the Parish has been 'set aside'. With crops of sugar beet and salad vegetables required for Wissington and Howard Long, perhaps local farming may not be seriously affected.

It is of crucial importance that this Parish be well informed of what is on offer and how the Parish can benefit.

When wider issues are debated it has to be recognised that the Parish itself is too small a political unit to make much impact, so Methwold has to combine forces with its neighbours; the Borough Denton Ward (Methwold, Northwold, Feltwell and Hockwold) is a more acceptable size. In the future, although the four Parishes have their distinctive identities and insularities, the Denton Ward has to establish itself as a cohesive unit to promote its interests.

Over the last few months a start has been made with the establishment of an ad-hoc committee, the so-called Denton Forum, which brings together members of all four Parish Councils, the Borough and County Councillors, and Officers from the Borough Council and other Services, under the auspices of the Borough Council. This Denton Forum is pursuing a number of local initiatives which were suggested at an open meeting in May, 1994.

Consideration should be given on how the Denton Forum should evolve into a permanent Standing Committee with clearer long term objectives and strategies.

It is questionable whether the Denton Forum will be able to generate the right kind of substantive project proposals. The Borough Council has the responsibility for formulating development plans and strategies for West Norfolk as a whole; it would be of interest to know the Borough development plans for the Denton Ward. Perhaps there needs to be a mechanism, or think-tank, to identify potential growth areas for the Denton Ward; one suggestion is to set up an Advisory Group of the top industrialists, farmers and professional people in the Denton Ward who have a vested interest in promoting its prosperity.

Over the next ten years technological advances could well change our way of life; bringing modern technology to the countryside may be well-received by the funding bodies.

Genetic engineering will produce new strains of virus free crops with built-in long term freshness, and with vegetable oils replacing fossil oils, maybe this Parish is well placed to be at the forefront of such developments. However this technology could well reduce employment.

Access to information highways will allow more people to work from home via their personal computer. Those people who will then only have to go into the office in London, or anywhere else, once or twice a week, may find the villages of the Parish attractive places to live. Such people could bring in younger families and contribute to the vitality of the Parish. It would be important to ensure that the most modern information highway systems are available in the Parish.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section the main conclusions and recommendations are listed, most arise from the earlier text, although one or two are new thoughts.

No significance should be given to the order of these conclusions and recommendations. Some recommendations could be acted on in the near future while others are more speculative and long term.

responsibilities for the appearance of the village, and within that context, lay out a strategy for improving that appearance

secondly identify the other responsible bodies so that pressure can be brought to bear.

- 1 Compared to many parts of the UK (for example, inner urban areas, and village communities which relied on mining or steel), Methwold Parish is fortunate to be relatively free from any major problems.
- 2 Most people are content with the Parish as an unspoilt rural area with historical associations, pleasantly situated between forest and fen, coast and towns; and driving around rural Norfolk can still be pleasurable. Although no major expansion, in terms of housing or industry, would be welcome, it is accepted that the Parish cannot stand still but must evolve with the times.
- 3 For a small community it is lively with many social activities, due it must be admitted to a few energetic and committed individuals.

Even so, many people have expressed interest in more social clubs covering a wider range of activities. The Social Club could explore these suggestions.

The amounts of money raised for the schools, spire fund, medical fund, firefighting equipment, hospital, hospice, McMillan nurses, and many traditional charities is a credit to the Community.

- 4 The majority of people feel that the centre of Methwold village is scruffy and tawdry. The Parish Council should:

first explain the extent of its



- 5 There is small core of disadvantaged people (unemployed, unsatisfactorily housed, elderly, etc) who do not enjoy living in this Parish; they need to be identified and helped.
- 6 New housing keeps appearing in a piecemeal fashion. The Parish Council, together with the Borough council, should formulate a Housing Policy and Strategy, for the three villages, which first and foremost meets the needs of those living in the Parish. This Appraisal has gone some way in identifying those needs.

- Consideration should be given to whether or not it is desirable, and then feasible, to monitor the housing situation.
- 7 There is widespread dissatisfaction with the Refuse Collection.
 - 8 There is dissatisfaction regarding the quality of service, costs and attitude of Anglian Water.
 - 9 There is dissatisfaction with the frequent breakdown of electricity services.
 - 10 There is widespread resentment with the attitudes and excessive profiteering of the private utility services (water, electricity, telephone); it appears that democracy is the choice between being ripped off by private monopolies or by public-owned monopolies in the form of taxes.
 - 11 Sewerage remains a serious problem for a small number of households; there needs to be a clearer understanding of the options available to help resolve this long standing problem.
 - 12 Consideration should be given to the setting up of an informal Sports Council, covering at least the Denton Ward, to co-ordinate sporting activities and facilities, negotiate for funds and organise transport.
 - 13 Consideration should be given to the setting up of an informal Arts Council, covering at least the Denton Ward, to co-ordinate arts activities, negotiate for funds and organise transport.
 - 14 Consideration should be given to the resurrection of a Youth Centre.
 - 15 There is probably little demand for more buses during daytime, although some afternoon buses would be appreciated.

There is a total lack of public transport in evenings; evening transport would be a dedicated service, to sports centres, to cinemas, to concerts.
- Perhaps a Transport Working Group could assess exactly the transport needs of the Denton Ward and how those needs might be satisfied.
- 16 The general quality of road maintenance and upkeep is not highly regarded.

The Mundford Road should be upgraded (widened, white lines, gritted), this road is used increasingly by lorries and cars since Thetford has been identified as the main shopping centre for the Parish.
 - 17 The majority of people are satisfied with their doctor, health visitors and hospitals; some people have difficulty in arranging transport to the surgeries outside the Parish, others find the times of the Methwold evening surgeries inconvenient.
 - 18 The creation of a 5 day-a-week Day Centre for the frail elderly is supported on the understanding that the current Denton Day Centre continues; the ramifications of this development on all current activities in the Fenton Room/St Georges Hall, and possible future activities, should be fully explored.

This development is important because

it may be possible to add, at minimal costs, other facilities, for example a public toilet and advice centre,

bringing investment to Methwold increases the perception of Methwold across the Borough and County.
- The plight of some elderly in this sparsely populated area is a matter of concern, especially if the level of financial support is reduced.
- 19 Crime (burglary, theft and vandalism) is on the increase. There is a lack of awareness of the current policing policy, and future options. Communications with the people by the Police must be improved.

There is evidence that drugs are being taken although its extent is not known, at least to the Steering Group. Perhaps the Parish Council should initiate a debate on what the local attitude and policy should be and what might usefully be done to contain drug usage.

- 20 The closure of the shops in Methwold village and the bleak future of existing shops is a matter of grave concern; there is virtually total agreement that shops are vital to the life of a village.

To safeguard existing local shops in the immediate future, people of the Parish should spend more money at the local shops and less at the supermarkets.

Consideration should be given to whether or not a Charity shop would be feasible or desirable, with proceeds to local causes?

Looking to the near future, if 'market forces' cannot be relied upon to solve this problem, some kind of intervention is needed; more easily said than done. Perhaps the Parish Council should take a lead with a small working group to make itself fully acquainted with the facts, to find what subsidies and grants for 'village shops' are available, and suggest possible ways ahead.

- 21 Although the Church as a building is admired and cherished, the Church as a place of worship is in an uncertain state with small congregations and rising expenditure. Concerts help vitalise the Church and defray expenses. There is a Church Hall which is close to being derelict. The retirement of the vicar next year poses yet more problems for the Parochial Church Council.

The Chapel is in an even sadder state, although the Chapel Hall has the potential of being used more for village activities and making some money.

It is difficult to see how the Parish, through its Parish Council, can help to sustain the Church and Chapel.

- 22 Serious consideration should be given to whether tourism could be exploited.

The historic centre of Methwold is an attraction; a pamphlet describing the historical backgrounds of places of worship, houses and properties in a walk around the village centre should be written by the Historical Society.

Could a museum be established, for example by resurrecting the derelict Church Hall?

Are there sufficient local crafts to pool their wares in a central place? Would a combined museum and craft shop be feasible?

However, public services, like toilet and signposting, would be essential.

- 23 There is a gulf between the Parish Council and the people of the Parish which, in the opinion of the Steering Group, is not deep; all Councillors have extensive knowledge and appreciation of the Parish and work conscientiously to reflect the wishes and interests of the people.

But the gulf is a real one, with 'blame' on both sides. It could be eased by an improvement in communication. The Parish Council needs to make more effort to explain, in the Methwold Times, some of the main issues, omitting much of the day-to-day details. But communication is a two way process because the Parish Council needs guidance on what information is required.

In addition the Parish Council could investigate ways by which people could participate in discussions of matters of interest. The recent rather curt dismissal by the Parish Council of the introduction of Wheely Bins is possibly at odds with the opinions of the people.

The reason for the high Precept needs an explanation.

- 24 Both the Borough and County Councils are virtually unknown quantities in this Parish, hardly any one knows the names of their elected representatives, and there is virtually no knowledge of what these Councils do. Much of what they do locally does not inspire much confidence, for example, in planning decisions by the Borough Council and in road alterations by the County Council.

The antics of both Borough and County Councils in the way they have each pursued their self-interests in the debate on the reorganisation of Local Government, and the large sums of (our) money they have spent on their respective campaigns, has eroded their standing and respect.

Whatever the outcome of the Norfolk Local Government review, Councils now have a long haul ahead to restore their credibility.

The people of the Parish deserve to be better informed on matters which affect them by the Borough Council and County Council. There is a need to know about the main issues being debated (our elected representatives should tell us, and how they vote) and the decisions made (but without the self-congratulatory gloss so often superimposed by the public relations side of all Councils).

- 25 One of the main themes of this Appraisal is the need to improve communication. The key to communication is the Methwold Times.

It is recommended that the Methwold Times should try to move up a gear. At present the Times is passive in the sense that it depends primarily on copy that is submitted to it. The Times could become more active by going out to gather in, and report, local news; this would entail building up a network of contacts with a reporter 'doing' the rounds. There are other suggestions in the Appendix for 'improving' the Times.

The Methwold Times would also be the vehicle for transmitting relevant information from the Parish, Borough and County Councils, and also from other Bodies such as the Police, Health Services, Voluntary Services etc.

In extending the range of the Times in this way, which does not necessarily imply an increase in the number of pages, it may extend the range of income. It is a fundamental principle that the Times continues to be circulated to every household in the Parish without charge.

It has been proposed recently that the Times should be replaced by a Denton Community Newsletter with space allocated to Methwold news. This proposal is completely rejected. The Times should continue as it is with editorial control and organisation in local hands; the Borough Council, and the other bodies listed above, would forward regular contributions.

- 26 The moves to establish the Denton Ward as the cohesive unit for advancing the future development of this part of Norfolk is strongly supported.

Every now and again large sums of monies, often over £1 million, are made available by Government through its various agencies for rural developments. These monies are usually awarded by competition whereby an area such as Denton makes a bid with a project proposal which is then considered in conjunction with all other bids; competition is usually fierce. The time between the announcement of a 'competition' and the closure date for submissions is short; within this short period of time it is not possible to come up with a credible proposal and write it up. The name of the game is to have a number of different well thought out and researched projects in the pipeline which can be honed to meet the conditions of any 'competitions' when they are announced.

The key is in the preparatory homework on formulating realistic projects. It is therefore important to have a framework and organisation which can respond with authority and competence.

- 27 Consideration should be given to the establishment of a multi-purpose Advice/Information Centre.

A significant percentage of Households in the Parish have sought professional help and advice. It is assumed that this level of advice will be sought in the future. There is a problem of knowing where to turn to for advice, especially with the large number of existing Voluntary Organisations with new ones appearing all the time.

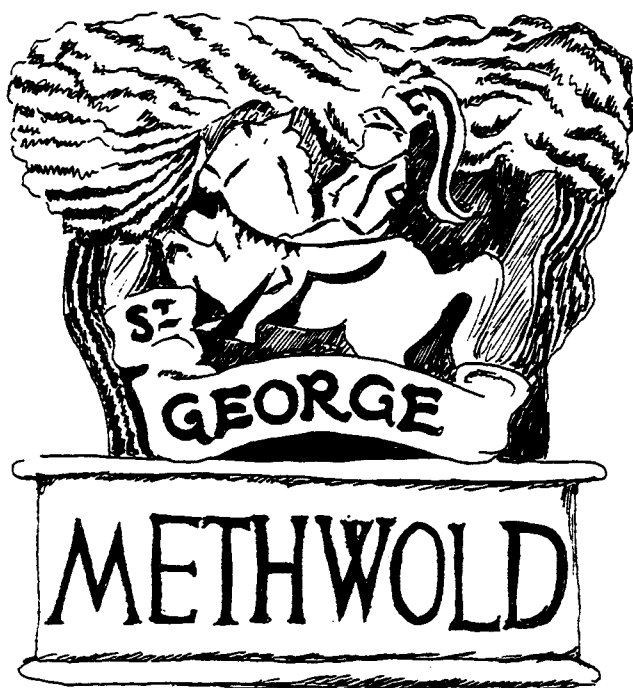
An Advice Centre in Methwold would not provide advice directly but would be a place where people in need would go and, with the aid of a cup of tea and a sympathetic ear, identify where the most appropriate sources of help and advice are located and make suitable arrangements.

Already some services, for example the DSS, Social Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, have mobile units so it would be useful to have a place in the Parish where these mobile units could meet, in confidence, those in need.

But an Advice/Information Centre could have a wider role as a place where information could be exchanged. The Centre could keep abreast of the statistics of the disadvantaged in terms of unemployment, housing, social needs etc and so keep the Parish Council, Borough and County Councils, and Service Agencies up to date on local needs and more importantly on predicting future trends. At the same time the endless reams of information on new developments and changes from all of the above bodies could be fed into the Centre and properly absorbed into the system.

Furthermore the Advice/Information Centre might be expected to keep track of policy statements coming out of Government and the EEC, and interpreting them in local terms. This information would then serve as an important background to the deliberations on Denton project proposals.

To be fully effective in all of these roles, a network of Parish Advice/Information Centres could be established each with a work station connected to one mainframe computer with a full database. Bringing access to information to rural areas might be the sort of project favoured by funding bodies.



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A copy of the Appendix can be obtained on demand free of charge.

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