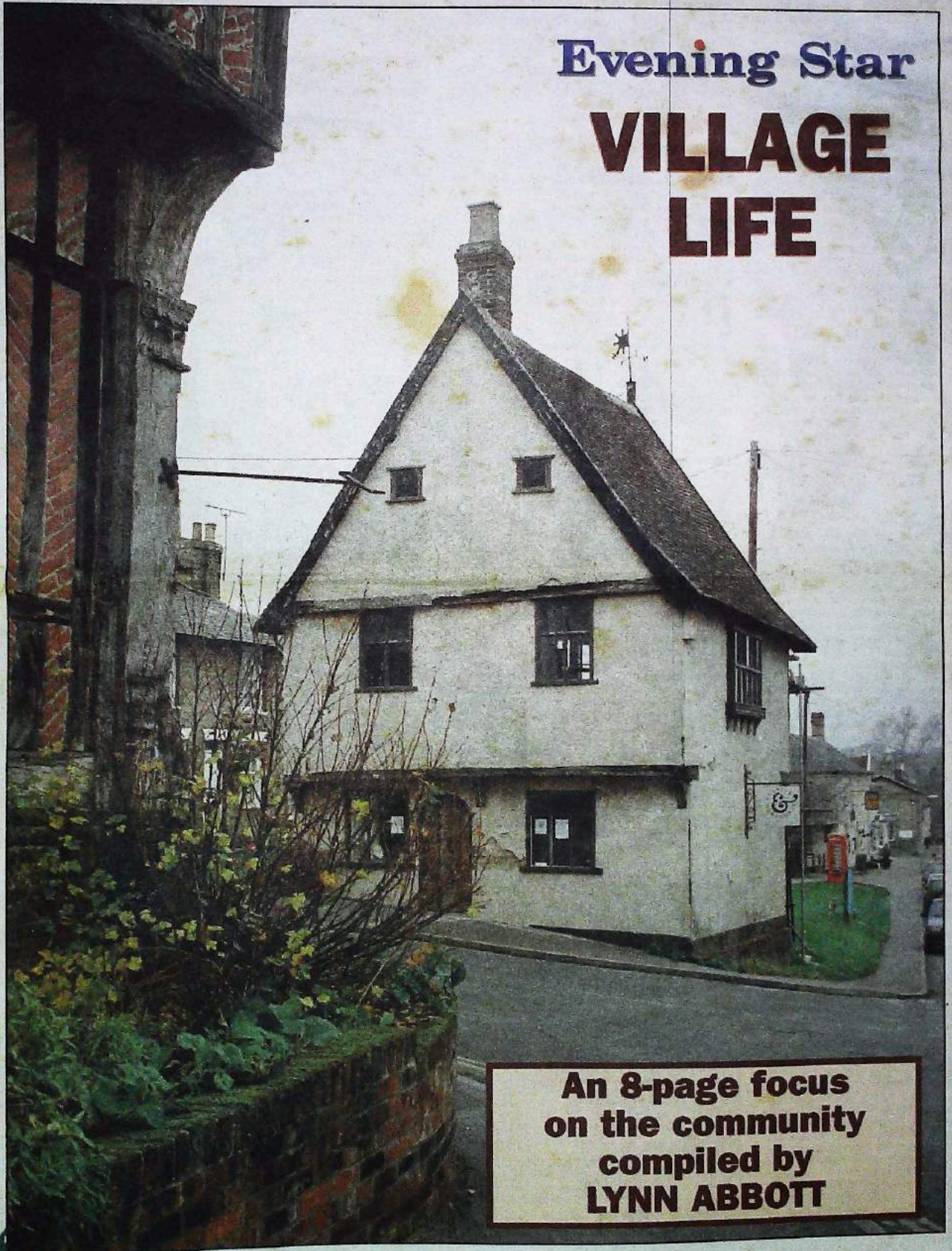


DEBENHAM

Evening Star

VILLAGE LIFE



An 8-page focus
on the community
compiled by
LYNN ABBOTT

Wise owls with an ear for everyone else's troubles

WHEN you have good friends and neighbours the world does seem a happier place.

Add to these ingredients a home in Debenham and what else could you possibly need out of life?

There is nothing more, believes Mim and Dora Sparrow who still live in the pretty cottage where they were born 84 and 83 years ago.

Their home in Chancery Lane lies behind the bustling main street which runs through the village but it could be in another world, it is so peaceful.

Which is more than can be said for the activity inside their 16th century cottage, there's always someone popping in for a chat and a cuppa and everyone of their friends and neighbours are given a warm welcome.

These days Mim, real name Emily, and Dora cannot see too well so any little jobs which need close scrutiny are put to one side until they have a visitor.

"We never have to wait too long before someone pops in to pick up lost stitches in our knitting," said Mim: "Or fill out a form for something or other," added Dora.

But the reason they have such a huge circle of friends is because they are the ones everyone turns to if they need advice or a listening ear.

Comments such as: "They are two lovely ladies"; "I always know where to come if I need someone to talk to" or "Mim and Dora will know about that" are common phrases of testament to their standing in the community.

Well, they have been around for a long time - they remember when cows grazed alongside what is now the main road and when passengers on the motorised bus often included chickens and rabbits - and apart from having to work away from home while "in service", have lived in this cottage all their lives.

When their parents Frances and Charles Sparrow moved into Chancery Lane their cottage was one in a terrace of three and had been extended backwards from its original one up, one down residence built about the late 1500's.

During the early 1950's the neighbouring cottages, which had become derelict, were demolished.

Their father was a member of the village fire-fighting team and Mim can remember the clinking sound of horse harnesses as they came along the lane pulling the water tender.

"I used to feel very frightened when I heard the horses knowing dad was going to a fire and I would huddle under the covers at night hoping he would be all right."

In those days the fire tender, which was housed where the bank now stands, had to rely on a farmer providing the horses to pull the equipment on a cart and the whole system sprung into action when the church bells "jangled", heralding a fire in progress.

Schooldays began for Mim and Dora at the little infants school behind Shulver's garage which had originally been built for boys only as the Sir Robert Hitcham Endowed School.

After this they went to the present Sir Robert Hitcham primary where Mim left at 14 but Dora had to stay an extra year because the leaving age had been increased to 15 by then.

Dora, "the shy one", became a housemaid, first in Ipswich and then in Felixstowe before joining the WAAF's.

"I then came home to look after mum and dad and worked in various shops in Debenham before working at Henry Abbott's in the hardware department," said Dora.

Her "livewire" sister worked at Aspoll Hall, now the Cyder House, looking after children. She then worked all over as a nanny, and other people's children became a way of life.

"Until fairly recently I did baby-sitting for people in the village. I do miss looking after children," said Mim who admits to never being able to say 'no' to a request for help.

She still tears about Over 60's, helps with the church bazaar at St Mary's and with flag days at Eye Hospital League of Friends.

When they were younger they loved to dance, even the comparatively quieter Dora enjoyed tripping the light fantastic at the Foresters Hall.

"There was always something good going on there, it was very lively," said Dora.

Debenham had at least five dairies providing milk and delivery carts with churns on the back would do the rounds each day.

"We used to get the 12-hour milk," said Dora: "It was cheaper because the cream had been skimmed off before we bought it."

The sisters remember the first cars to be owned in the village belonged to the doctor and one farmer. And they will never forget the first charabanc (motorised coach) to give a service to the village.

"It was operated by Ernest List who also had a coalyard and lived at the bottom of our lane," said Mim.

"If he was going on an outing somewhere and had some spare seats he would ask mum if we could go. We often went to Thorpeness and he rowed us on the Mere, we had lovely times."

Mr List also ran a bus service to Ipswich and doubling up as a carrier's, they never knew the species of their fellow passengers!

"We thought nothing of sitting there and finding cages of chickens and rabbits also on the bus. It was a normal way of life," said Mim.

Their fingers are still nimble enough to knit and sew - Mim often won needlework competitions at school - and their brains are bright enough to enjoy scrabble games.

The only problem is one that Dora simply calls: "a nuisance", and that is their failing eyesight.

But they have much to be thankful for and it surrounds them every day, here in Debenham.

WELCOME to Debenham, the final look at out of town living in our Village Life series. Thanks to its residents past and present the story of this lively and picturesque community is told.



MEMORIES: Mim and Dora Sparrow, and inset, High Street as it was. Pictures: JOHN KERR

'I was very frightened when I heard the horses knowing dad was going to a fire... I would huddle under the covers hoping he would be all right'



WAY IT WAS: Outside Rumsey's saddlers' shop in 1900. Leonard Aldous, left, with William Curtis Rumsey (Lilian's father), great uncle Lionel Rumsey, Lionel Curtis, her great great uncle with saddle makers Mr Sayers and Mr Grimes. The small boy who can be seen is cousin Stanley Rumsey.

Tales of those old days still ring a few bells with Lilian

HAPPY days in Debenham are recalled by Lilian Caudle who was born here and grew up in the village.

The daughter of William and Rosie Rumsey, Lilian not only remembers the eight bells of St Mary Magdalene Church of which her father was captain of the ringers, but the days when she was organist there.

This was also the church where she married her late husband, Lieut Cyril Caudle, RN, in 1950 and where her daughter also joined the team of ringers three years ago.

Her paternal grandparents had died before Lilian was born and so their role was taken up by her great aunt

and uncle, Lionel and Alice Rumsey. "Great Uncle Lionel farmed some smallholdings at Amos Barn, Sparrows Nest and Bulls Barn. He had an orchard and meadows off Gracechurch Street where I seemed to spend all my days playing with my cousins and friends," said Lilian. Her great uncle was also a saddler and harness maker and her father was apprenticed to him. Lilian, a retired nurse and now living in Ipswich, loved the Elizabethan houses, the dusty country roads, the farm lands and friendly neighbours. "It truly was a very happy and idyllic place to grow up in," she said.



★ **DEBENHAM**, lying low in the valley around the River Deben, has often been prone to flooding. This photograph shows the sight residents woke up to on the morning of August 6, 1956.

DEBENHAM BRIEF

How we came to get such a name

DEBENHAM, with a current population of 1,810, gets its name from the Anglo Saxon *deopan hamme* - deep and low-lying enclosure.

In 1216 the town was granted market status with the ruling it was held on Mondays. Six years later permission was given for a fair to be held and at this time market day was changed to Friday.

Traders who used their loaf

ALLARD and Son's bakery, once in Chancery Lane, offered a do-it-yourself service to customers over and above the fresh bread cooked on the premises. Anyone could take along their own cake or pudding mixture and Mr Allard would cook it for them in the long brick ovens. Buller Peck's builders was also the undertaker and coffins were made on the premises.

If anyone needed to buy a horse harness or have their boots and shoes repaired, Aldous and Hammond was a place to go and the village sign is placed where the blacksmith's shop once stood.

His unusual bedtime story

SOME village memories: "My dad, John Hall, was born in Debenham 71 years ago, the eldest of eight children. Among the stories he tells us is how he and at least one of his brothers had to sleep in the garden shed because their house was not big enough." - Kevin Hall, of Ipswich.

Memories are made of this

"We lived in the middle cottage in a row of three in Gracechurch Street," said Mary Marsh, nee Knights. "At harvest time we went into the fields with a stick hoping to catch a rabbit or two."

"There are two very fond memories of my life in Debenham. One was when we had to hand-rear pippins, tiny pligs, by feeding them with a bottle."

"The other lasting memory is of buying barley sugar on a string from Granny Clarke's shop," added Mary who moved out of the village when she went into service at the age of 14, but who goes back as often as she can to visit her brother who is still a resident.

Ron recalls the pub floods

RON Fox of Ipswich always spent his school holidays with his Aunt Liz and Uncle Jim who kept the Cherry Tree. His most enduring memories are of water, namely the River Deben.

"In the winter the river was always overflowing and it completely covered the bottom floor of the pub. Everyone had to move upstairs but the barrels of beer were left to float about."

"My Uncle Harry also lived in the village and had a farm up London Road Hill. The river had huge pike and I used to hold a stick with the end in the water and the pike would snap the end off like it was a matchstick."

You name it, Harry did it

HARRY Perry was a very busy man. He was also a man of many talents. "He was a postman in the neighbouring village, a gardener and had an evening hairdressers business which he ran from the house just off Gracechurch Street where I was born," said his grand daughter Pauline Dye of Ipswich.

"Men would come from miles around to gather with their bikes all propped up against the bank near our house. Grandfather, who died in 1951, played in the village band; he had a knowledge of bee-keeping; was an expert rose pruner, a beautiful painter, the list is endless."

Cissie recalls war efforts

"**THE** wartime Youth Squad had to work collecting paper and tins for salvage, and that was a messy job" said resident Cissie Clover, squad leader for a time. The proceeds bought wool which was used to knit garments for local boys fighting the war. Youth Squad boys did DIY jobs for residents.

Cissie's mother, 93 when she died in 1983, took in laundry and charged fourpence for washing and ironing a sheet. "She also skinned and jointed rabbits for sixpence" said 76-year-old Cissie, nee Oford.

A wartime day when she had run for cover

A tiny two-up, two-down terraced cottage in Back Lane (now Great Back Lane), was the home of Joan Wilkins.

Nearly 70 years later Joan has changed address but Debenham has always remained home. She went to the village school, was christened and confirmed at the parish church where she also married her husband, Hav, in 1950.

Hav comes from Clopton and although he is not a Debenham original, Joan said her husband, a successful result of a blind date, feels he is almost a native.

"Much has changed around the village," said Joan. "Once we could boast over 40 shops including three grocery and drapery shops, two butchers, two bakeries, two fish shops, three tailors and so on."

"This has dwindled to a newsagent, at least four antique shops, pharmacy, garage, post office, insurance broker, two computer businesses and the Eucomarket, Abbott's, department store," she added.

Joan said she can't help thinking how Debenham was, until the 1960s, a self-contained community.

"We did not have electricity until the late 1930s but we did have a gas works, my friend's grandfather looked after it, and we always called his house the Gas House and he was known as Gassy."

Each evening, Gassy did the rounds lighting up all the lamps in the village streets. Joan said she feels proud to know that her village actually had street lighting long before electricity was used for the purpose.

Debenham had its own brass band which played at all village functions and practiced in a room above the old bus shed near the Red Lion.

Each year a visiting fair would put up on the green near the Cherry Tree and that brought lots of excitement for everyone.

As well as being used for dances, the Foresters Hall doubled up as a picture house and Joan saw the cinema's transition from silent Charlie Chaplin films to the showing of magical talkies.

"Because there was no electricity to project the films I was told this was done by generating power from a jacked-up Model-T Ford car and the belt ran from the rear wheel."

"Fun was had on a wet night when the belt slipped," said Joan.

Debenham escaped bombing during the war but Joan recalled a day while she was still at school when the village was machine-gunned.

"We were walking home to dinner and got to the little footbridge near our school when a German fighter plane swooped down, firing as it flew over. We ran for shelter at Mr List's garage until the all-clear was sounded."



For Joyce, it all came out in the wash

WHAT a lot of changes have been made to Debenham since Joyce Hammond, pictured, was a young girl.

Fields where she once roamed freely have become housing areas. Roads, once little more than dirt tracks are solidly made up and pumping water from wells is a chore of the past.

But when you find out that water for drinking came from sources other than wells it makes you wonder how on earth Joyce has stayed so fit and healthy throughout her 84 years.

"Farmers laid hoses on their fields to drain away the water that otherwise lodged there," said Joyce. "And there was nothing that tasted better than being able to drink this water," said the lifelong Debenham resident.

"You wouldn't dare do it now, would you? Not with all the chemicals."

The aqua nectar she enjoyed was collected in a bucket by her farmworker father and taken home.

Her mother did all the cooking in an old bush oven which helped to heat the kitchen too. On bath nights the tin bath would be put in front of the oven giving a touch of luxury to the otherwise basic lifestyle.

It was a mile and a half-long walk to the Robert Hitcham school in all weathers but it did offer a smidgen of comfort to the wet and cold pupils. They were allowed to stand their bottles of tea on the hearth to help take the chill off by break time.

"But we had to go home dinner times," said Joyce. "We were only allowed to stay at school in really bad weather and then we had to take our own sandwiches."

The day after she left school, Christmas 1928, she began work. "I was a 15-year-old schoolgirl one day and the next I was looking after six people - three young children, their parents and myself."

Her employers, Jack and Edith Hammond ran The Handy Stores, opposite The Woolpack pub, and while they were in the shop, Joyce looked after their children.

Living in, she was up at 6.30am to see to the children. There was no electricity, running water or any modern appliance but the teenager loved her work and soon became a treasured member of the family - in more ways than one.

"After working for the family for eight years I married Ernest Hammond, Jack's brother. Not only had I always been made to feel part of the family but I married into it," said Joyce, who was widowed in 1983.

In 1937, floods forced she and Ernest from their home in High Street into a council house in Low Road where they stayed for 32 years and brought up their son.

Now living in a community within a community in the Mid Suffolk-built bungalows at Cross Green, Joyce, a life-long member of the United Reformed Church, as were her parents, is still a regular attendee of services and meetings.

Never car-oriented Joyce and her late husband walked or cycled. Not long ago she sold her bike. "Roads are too dangerous now," she said.

Busier roads is just one change which Joyce says has taken away some of Debenham's charm.

"Many country folk were unhappy about new housing developments, but I love my home, which is newish."

After coming through the hard times before electricity and water on tap Joyce says she is living in the lap of luxury these days.

"But I got rid of my washing machine. Old habits die hard and again I'm doing washing by hand. But we have good washing powders these days which takes the hard work out of it."



THE WAY WE WERE: Gracechurch Street, Debenham in 1920

THE PEOPLE

A place with a difference

BOB Webster loves the uniqueness of Debenham. There's no other place in the world with the same name and he says you could almost guarantee anyone sharing their surname with the village is bound to have ancestors who lived here.

"I have people coming in the shop from all over the world who are on a visit to the village with their name. It makes me feel kind of special to know this place is unique and that I actually live in it."

By "shop", Bob is referring to the newsagent's in High Street which he has been running with his wife Grace since 1958.

"I have agriculture in my blood, I was born at Tower Mill then moved to a farm and later went to agricultural college to learn all about the land and I love horses," said the 77 year old.

"But Grace said she would like to run a little shop and that's why we're here."

They had some land behind the shop and for a long time they kept chickens and turkeys so at least for a while his training was put to good use.

Running the newsagent's means he and Grace have a long day which begins at 4am to sort the papers before their delivery youngsters arrive.

He also delivers papers himself to the outlying villages which come within their catchment area.

The business is now a partnership with their daughter Ruth Boulton and they have casual staff they can call on when necessary.

Grace and Bob who married in 1954 also have a son, Edward although he lives in Milton Keynes.

They were both born in Debenham and apart from a time when Bob was in the army they have stayed put throughout their lives.

Bob has fond memories of Brett's Repertory Theatre Company which toured around the villages during the 1930s.

"I loved going to the Foresters Hall when Brett's came, the place was always packed so it seems everyone else enjoyed going too. They put on a good show."

In 1947 Bob started the first football team in the village and had a say in the new village hall and sports field by getting himself onto the executive committee.

He says he is not really "a joiner of things" these days, but there is not much going on in the vicinity which gets past him.

The newsagent's shop serves as another meeting place for residents and so Bob feels he, Grace and Ruth are providing more than a place for people to buy their daily papers and sweets. It is somewhere for folk to gather and have a chat.

So, does he have plans to retire, have a lie in of a morning, keep a few hens for his breakfast eggs and buy a horse?

Bob's reply: "We've got a house to retire in but I haven't really got the time to hand over yet. I don't think I want to anyway, not yet."

Shopkeeping for 40 years, but no retirement plans



LASTING PARTNERSHIP: Bob and Grace Webster. Picture: JERRY TURNER

HELLO FROM VILLAGE



Copies of this photograph can be ordered

The idyllic life-style of village 'dream chaser' is doing what he wants, doing something different every day



ALADDIN'S CAVE: Dave Martin, surrounded by some of the ceramics in his co

Club is still bowling along after almost a cen



GREEN KEEN: Some of the present members of the longstanding Debenham Bowls' Club. Picture: JOHN KERR

FOR almost a century Debenham has had a bowls club although it has had a change of name, venue - and membership.

Mind you some of today's line-up on the fairly unique green - it's one of only two in Suffolk to be a synthetic, all-weather surface - have been with the club for a fair while.

John List, for example, 81 years old - 48 of those with the club - and Percy Rowe, a member for 40 years.

Of course the 56-strong membership - including 20 ladies (this year's captain is Peggy Barber) - are not all long-serving Debenham bowlers. President this year, Bernard Ryan has been with them nine years; secretary, Geoffrey Swinyard, two years and vice president Geoff Castell for seven.

Ernie Turner, nine years a player but before that he was green keeper at the club's former ground at Cherry Tree.

And although the green is synthetic and shares the one-of-two honours with Felixstowe, it does need keeping. The honours at the club's new HQ, opened

in August 1995, goes to Peter Camp.

It may seem a simple task but it involves a lot of feeding, weeding or need vacuuming.

"The blessing of a green is that we can play any day of the year."

They play mixed tripartite league on Wednesday evenings and English Bowls on Thursday's.

Founded in 1903, Cherry Tree Bowls Club allowed to join in 1911 when it moved from the green to the new pavilion built in 1990 to replace the old one.

The pavilion built in 1990 to replace the old one is now at the Sports Centre in Gracechurch Street.

Things could not be better if they were to be

VILLAGE OF DEBENHAM



BOYS are catered for with the 1st Debenham Scout Group which meets at the high school.

Beaver Colony and Cub Scout Pack and the Scout Troop began two years later.

Group Scout Leader, Ron Walters said: "We are like other voluntary organisations and need funds and some willing hands to take on leader roles and assist in the management.

Andy Wilson started as Akala and is now leader of the Cubs pack. The Cubs were started by Ron and Andy.

"We are continuing to grow in numbers and it is a successful unit but we still do not have enough funds to provide our own headquarters," he said. It all began 10 years ago with a

In charge of the Beaver Colony is leader Coral Morton and Scout leader is Dave Swinyard. The Scout troop is a mixed unit, girls having started to join in the last year which has helped make the group of around 80 members, one of the largest in the district.

DEBENHAM Brownies has been meeting at the primary school on Monday nights since 1966.



It is a thriving group with 32 members under the leadership of Brown Owl, Pam Rutherford and Tawney Owl, Sue Jaynes.

They go on pack holidays each Easter, take part in the District swimming gala and Brownie Rebels in summer as well as working towards badges. Brownie helpers are Glynis Read, Sue White, Adele Whayman and Julie Anderson.

h can be ordered through any office of The Evening Star



YOU could walk past the unimposing cottage and never give it another thought.

But behind these four walls in Gracechurch Street you will find a world full of the stuff that dreams are made of.

Dave Martin, "dream chaser" of this parish lives here. As he opens the door his burly frame blocks any first sight of the treasures which lie within but all becomes obvious the minute he steps aside. Here is an Aladdin's cave of Dave's realised dreams.

Self-portrait sketches, paintings and sculptures line the walls and table surfaces and there's ceramics galore depicting animal, vegetable and mineral-based creations.

You can't beat the natural world for giving inspiration to an artist. Dave really goes big on earthy colours too.

Throughout the deceptively large cottage are more examples of Dave's artistic flair and there's a reason why he is surrounded by his handiwork.

"Everything I make is done because I want to do it. I don't make to sell but because I want to create it."

But when the spirit moves him, he will exhibit his work, he's taken part in several shows in this country and on the continent. In March this year he was one of seven British artists in a Russian/English exhibition in St Petersburg.

On occasion he does sell some of his work but he never makes a conscious effort to do so, it causes too much paperwork.

"I can't be bothered with bureaucracy and form-filling and any money I do get is used to buy more materials."

His two daughters have left home and his living expenses are minimal these days - he just needs to feed Winston, who he is dog-sitting for his youngest daughter while she's away at university.

Apart from his appearance - baggy leggings, a much lived-in jumper and a "Compo-style" woolly hat worn at a jaunty angle - he seems far removed from the typical artist category.

He has a hearty, good natured laugh, an easy-going manner and a lively sense of humour.

Dave, now 60, moved to Debenham as a "young man", half his life ago to take up an art teaching post at the now demolished Tower Ramparts School in Ipswich.

He then moved to Stoke High School, its

replacement, becoming head of art. He didn't really dislike teaching but it sapped his enthusiasm for his own work.

"Every day there was a continuing round of more and more of the same and after 35 years teaching the subject it gradually wore me down. So, I got out to do my own thing.

"I'm now in the wonderful position of doing what I want, how I want to do it and every day is different."

Dave has never been one to stand on ceremony and would always find his own way to opt out of anything that could be remotely boring.

"More than one occasion his glasses, which hang round his neck when not in use, became a good front for an ingenious (and artistic) foil for when he lacked concentration.

He'd pop his specs on his nose, and with cardboard cut-outs showing a picture of wide open eyes tucked behind the lenses and looking outwards, he could quietly drift off on a far more interesting plain undisturbed.

"But I did make a small hole in each one so I could peep."

He trained as a painter and printmaker and paid for himself to go through college by playing banjo in a jazz band.

Looking at anything which needs doing, he often says: "I could do that", this has resulted in him being a chef for a while and a builder, all the extensions, his workshop and kiln at his home are his own work.

He had another dream, this time to own a seaworthy boat after he came across the broken down 36ft Jack Heron.

"It had been built about 1900 and was in a very sorry state. I think it had been sunk when I bought it for a few pounds."

After completely restoring it himself Dave takes off on voyages all over - if he's not home the chances are he is in full sail to Finland, Holland or somewhere.

Dave developed an interest in pottery but wanted more out of it than merely "throwing clay on a wheel" so in 1991 he took an MA in ceramics and got himself a distinction.

He gets up when he's ready, throws on his shabbiest of clothes, there is, he says: "no point wearing anything decent."

And with Radio 4 playing all day, whiles away the hours in pure contentment fulfilling his latest dream.

Looking at the size of his hands its hard to imagine them crafting such delicate ceramics, but as soon as these deft hands receive the signal prompted from an: "I could do that" thought, they oblige.

Many more dreams are already developing, but one forming in his head right now is to sail to Finland, one more time.

"In my mind I'm still a young man but my body feels old, bits are beginning to drop off, so I want to get in this one last trip before it becomes totally derelict."

"Yes, I should do that next year."

a century

in August 1995, goes to this year's captain, Peter Camp.

It may seem a simple task to carry out in a green which needs no watering, seeding, weeding or cutting but it does need vacuuming.

"The blessing of an artificial green is that we can play way out of the normal playing season. We even play on Boxing Day," said Geoffrey Swinyard.

They play mixed triples on Monday's; mens league on Wednesdays and the BF (English Bowls Federation) Thursday's.

Founded in 1903 it was known as Cherry Tree Bowls Club even though it layed at Priory Lane. Ladies were allowed to join in 1946 and in 1958 it moved from the green owned by butcher Mr Neave to the Cherry Tree.

The pavilion bought for the Cherry Tree in 1990 to replace their former pavilion is now at their present home next to the Sports and Community Centre in Gracechurch Street.

Things could not be better, in fact you could say they are bowled over!



THE 1st Debenham Guide Company has 24 members but, said Guider in Charge, Ruth Boulton: "Like all youth groups, Brownies, Cubs and Scouts, we are short of volunteer help and leaders.

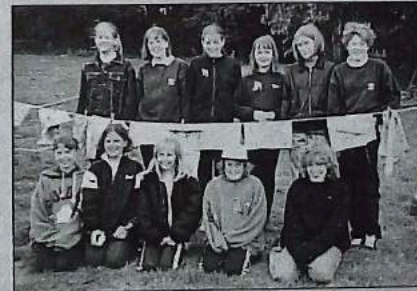
"If we had more helpers we could possibly take more Guides, it's a great pity but it's happening all over," said Ruth, who was a Guide and returned to the movement again 16 years ago as a leader.

The 10 to 14-year-olds take part in all District events and go to camp for

the Spring Bank Holiday and on ice skating trips to Chelmsford.

"We also took part in the 125-strong Youth Review in the village. It was a marvellous turn-out with all youth groups being represented including the primary school."

Ruth has two Unit helpers - Maureen Cracknell and Mary Pawsey - and she is hoping that if other helpers come forward it will be a move in the right direction for recruiting more Guides.



TOP: 1st Debenham Scout Group celebrate Suffolk Cub Scouts 80th Birthday.

MIDDLE: What's Happen Brownies show off their favourite headgear.

ABOVE LEFT: Ruth Boulton, Guider in charge at 1st Debenham Guide Company and left, some of the Guide company line up at camp.



★ In 1707 Henry Abbott opened up a store in the centre of the village and it is still here today and being run by the family. Over the years it has expanded to become what is probably the only independently-run supermarket chain in the country.

Today the Debenham store and those in Framlingham and Eye are run under the leadership of Barry Turner, pictured, but don't be deceived by the name, his mother Eileen was an Abbott before she married. Selling everything from groceries to garden goods, bread from their own bakery and clothing, in fact

everything except a kitchen sink.

This is a buy-anything store, but there is one difference which sets this apart from any other of its size.

"We still give the personal touch by delivering orders," said Barry.

Norman Ruffles started a three year apprenticeship at Henry Abbott's stores in 1929. At 16 years-old he was paid five shillings and it rose to 15 shillings in his final year.

"I learnt to drive and was promoted to delivery roundsman and was paid 25-shillings, I thought I was a millionaire," said Norman of Ipswich.

Get-togethers are always good for Happy over 60s

IN THIS context the Happy Hour has nothing whatsoever to do with licensed premises.

But the 30 or so members of Debenham's Happy Hour Over 60s Club can be assured of having a good time at their monthly meetings.

In addition to these occasions when they have invited guest speakers along, they have demonstrations, competitions, lunches, parties – their next one is at Christmas when Santa puts in a guest appearance – and go off on outings.

"We have a lovely time and it is such good company," said secretary Ethel Bestford.

The club was restarted three years ago after an earlier one folded. Its new beginnings are thanks to president Janet Stanley who, with Ethel and treasurer Doris Ready heading the committee, provide lots of interest for the membership.

They meet at Coopersfield, a sheltered housing complex opened in 1979, but membership is not restricted to its residents. They come from across the whole village.



ALL JOINING IN: Some members of Debenham's Happy Hour Over 60s Club at Coopersfield, where their meetings are held. Picture: JOHN KERR

Pubs 'R' us

A RESIDENT population of less than 2,000 with four pubs to choose from, so how do they all vie for trade?

They either offer something that little bit different to their competitors or, in the case of one landlord, take on two of the pubs to even things out.



ANN and Alan Dixon have been tenants at the WOOLPACK for four years and as it is a one-bar pub, they manage to run it by themselves.

"We are a real ale pub but one which does traditional English food," said Alan, adding: "but only six days a week, Sunday is our day of rest from the cooker."

"Never on a Sunday is a bit of a joke in here."

The Woolpack has two quiz teams and a mixed darts team but Alan said their customers are among the older generation: "All four pubs compete well because we all offer something a bit different, and older ones seem to like us."



KEN and Maureen Walker are the longest-serving publicans in Debenham and have been at the ANGEL for just over five years. They have no teams, the pool table and darts board are: "purely for fun," said Ken, adding: "most times it is more than fun, we have a jolly good laugh."

Maureen is the cook providing meals each mid-day seven days a week and Ken said most of their customers are locals who have been coming here for at least as long as he and his wife have been in residence. "We aim at the middle-of-the-road range and by having discos and stuff we attract a wide selection of people."



STEVEN Gill is the tenant of the CHERRY TREE and the RED LION and while he is busy running the former with Josephine Presley, manager Charles Spears is in charge of the latter.

"The Cherry Tree is a family pub with restaurant and children's play area in the garden," said Steven, who took on the tenancy here one year ago.

It is currently undergoing alterations which will improve the entrance way and by January he hopes to have the new conservatory and better toilet facilities completed.

It's also a real ale pub with entertainment – karaoke, small groups and singers – at weekends.

He and Josephine have extra staff in the kitchens and "wonderful cook Linda" to take care of the food.

Further into the village is the Red Lion which Steven took over the tenancy of six months ago.

"This is aimed at younger people and although we're not doing food there at the moment, it is planned for next year," added Steven.



★ THE United Reformed Church building has stood in Chancery Lane in its present form since 1820 but the church itself has been a feature of the village since 1746.

This building was originally known as the Congregational Chapel.

It was built after the original on the site was demolished and rebuilt 20-feet larger in 1820.

The church became United Reformed when Presbyterian and Congregational Churches merged in 1972.

This remains a well-attended place of worship in the village.



THE Domesday Survey recorded two churches in Debenham, St Mary's and St Andrew's. There is no record of where St Andrew's was sited. It had disappeared without trace by 1291 but St Mary Magdalene is still very much in evidence, and still bearing a pre-Conquest lower tower, one of the finest in Suffolk.

The church bells also make this church a little more special. In 1761 the four old bells were replaced by eight.

Priest in Charge of St Mary's with Kenton and Aspal, the Rev Graham Noble said it is quite a lively church too, both among the congregation and within its walls.

"For a population of under 2,000 we have a very sizeable congregation and among our members there are a great number of people who do lots for the community without the church banner," he said.



Church-based groups include Mother's Union, coffee mornings (held at Dove Cottage) with Sunday School or Crusaders (for under 14s) meeting at the community education centre near the school.

Mr Noble, who is just getting back into the swing of things after major heart surgery, says Debenham is a fine place to live and work in.

The father of three grown-up children, he moved to the village with his wife Joanna two and a half years ago and he is enjoying it.

"I was born in London and spent most of my life in Birmingham so a village like Debenham is lovely."

Long-lived love

LOVE for Thelma and Charles Mayes blossomed after a series of brief encounters over the invoices at Abbott's store.

The couple had known each other in their schooldays.

Thelma had been a pupil at the Sir Robert Hitcham School from the beginning but Charles did not arrive in the village until a month before he was eligible to hang up his satchel.

"I was 14 years old when I moved from Norfolk with my father who took up a position with Mr Gill at Crows Hall," said Charles.

After completing his schooling, they went their separate ways, although Thelma said she'd noticed him on his first day.

It was only when Thelma worked at Abbott's and Charles was a bus driver - in those days buses transported goods as well as passengers - that their paths crossed again.

"I had to have the cake delivery invoices signed and I always used to try and get Thelma to do the honours."

She was only too happy to oblige and their lives have stayed sweet through 38 years of marriage.

This has given them two sons, Melvin and Colin, and twin grand-daughters.

Thelma, a twin herself, was one of 10 children and although not identical to her sister Audrey, they did end up retiring from jobs as home-help, three years ago.

"I did 25 years and Audrey 15 when we retired in October 1994," said Thelma, who received a long-service award for her duties.

Charles and their son, 34-year-old Colin, are both avid football fans. The only problem is that they support rival sides.

"I am a Canary man," said Charles, a habit he finds hard to break even after all these years away from Norfolk.

"And Colin is an ardent Ipswich supporter, but I love him all the same," added Charles.

He can't fathom out exactly why it is that the sporting side of his personality won't move across the county border.

"But I would support Debenham through and through.

"It's a wonderful place to live," he added as Thelma nodded in full agreement.



FROM BRIEF ENCOUNTERS TO MARRIAGE: Charles, Thelma, and Colin. Picture: Jerry Turner

DEBENHAM BRIEF

A mix of ancient and of modern

WANDERING through the main street of Debenham you are as likely to see cars sharing road space with buses, delivery vans and agricultural vehicles - such is the variety of life here.

Situated 13 miles from Ipswich and seven from Eye, this picturesque village has well-preserved timber houses dating back to the 14th century mixed in with modern houses that aren't immediately obvious but they are there behind the predominantly historic main thoroughfare. There is also a ford.

Its good looks was the reason Debenham was chosen to represent East Anglia in the 1975 Architectural Heritage Year.

Obviously on to a winner

DEBENHAM Leisure Centre is more than a complex providing a full-sized sports hall, fitness suite, squash courts, sauna, snooker, weights room, 10-acre playing field, etc. etc.

It has an award-winning social side, namely The Deben Club.

Last month it received two national Club Mirror awards - Top Family Club of the Year and Leisure and Fitness Club of the Year.

The proud moments didn't begin here however and considering this is a complex in a small rural community it won Sports Council Service to Sport awards in 1992 and 1994; a British Arts Council Award and the Club Mirror, Most Improved Club in the UK, both in 1996.

A variety of organisations are provided in the village including Mothers Union, Women's Institute, a fuchsia club, Roundabout playgroup, in existence for more than 20 years, history society and Young Farmers club.

Disco is new year treat

On June 1, 1975, the octagonal, pine-roofed and glass-domed community centre was gutted by fire. It was three years old. A replacement, in a similar design, was built on the same site near to the high school.

One of the centre's forthcoming attractions is a New Year's Eve disco with Chase Stereo, beginning at 9pm and ending in 1998!

Tickets can be booked (£5 each) by phoning 01728 861101. On the door, the price is £7.50. The same number can be used to find out more about a future event with The Fat Band.

Crafts and computers

DEBENHAM, once the home of the Deben Rush Weavers, retains a craft-like atmosphere through individuals making goods such as handbags, shoes and jewellery. There is also a pottery.

The village has also attracted many antique dealers which in turn have brought VIP visitors to the village including HRH Princess Margaret. There are shops selling computers, flowers, fish and chips, a cafe, bank, post office, estate agency, furnishings, hairdresser, pharmacy, butcher's shop, telephone exchange and heavy industry including motor and agricultural engineering firms which help make up the bustling side of this rural community which also has its own police and fire stations.

And just outside the village is the long-established Aspal Cyder company.

Debenham's started here

THE chain of Debenham's department stores was founded by William Debenham, believed to be a descendant of Lucas de Debenham.

In 1913, William Debenham bought a London haberdashery and drapery business for £1,000 and changed its name to his own, putting the village name on the shopping map through hundreds of stores.

In 1820, a labourer found a large ear of barley on his shoe and planted its seed in his garden.

He showed its crop to his landlord, Dr Chevallier, who arranged for the strain to be marketed and it was "exported" to America and Canada. Chevallier Barley of Debenham has been replaced by modern varieties.

Give us shops, cafe and a pool say kids

WHAT do the young people of Debenham want from their village?

If the nine teenagers who put forward their ideas are representative of the others living in the community the answer to this question is - a wider variety of shops, a cafe for their age group and a swimming pool.

Helping with the low-down on Debenham were High School pupils: 14-year-olds

Shawn Wakeling and Helen Boulton, and 15-year-olds Chloe Munn; Rebecca Read; Claire Rose; Peter Woods; Natalie Newton; Matthew Borley and Jordan Giddins.

They have numerous school-based clubs, a youth club, the leisure centre facilities, drama group, Guides, Scouts and dance clubs.

"More shops and a swimming pool," said Helen.

"These provisions would brighten up the

lives of six of her fellow pupils too.

"A teenage cafe and fewer antique shops would also improve Debenham," said Shawn.

Peter agreed with the antique shop observations, but gave a plus point to the transport system by adding: "Although we're very rural we have lots of services."

Jordan did not agree with Peter's assessment and thought the village could do with more transport.

But he added: "I would like to stay here because it is a quiet and safe environment."



GIVING THE LOWDOWN FOR A BETTER VILLAGE LIFE: From left, Shawn, Natalie, Claire, Matthew, Rebecca, Jordan, Peter, Helen, and Chloe. Picture: Jerry Turner

Claire has only lived in the village for five months and at the moment feels she would not like to stay when she leaves the family home.

She says this is because "I would like to live in a little Victorian house."

The problem of an insufficient variety of shops cropped up again when Rebecca chipped in.

She said: "They're all very much the same and there is no choice unless you want to buy an antique."

Natalie says she would like to travel but is not against being based in Debenham.

She said: "I like the closed community feel about it here."

"I like living here," said Chloe. "But I feel more should be provided for the younger generation."

And Matthew, with full agreement from others present, said it was a shame that lottery money was spent on a bowling green when that provides an interest for a limited number of people.

"I think the council should apply for more money from the lottery to help provide facilities to suit a wider range of tastes, like a swimming pool."

■ Debenham Secondary Modern School opened on September 9, 1964 and Arthur Holifield was headmaster. Although it was an Anglican voluntary controlled school from the beginning this was not part of its name until it became Debenham C of E High School in 1978. Today the school has 400 pupils aged 11-16 and the headteacher is Mike Crawshaw.



School's size and number of pupils is still growing

THERE has been a Sir Robert Hitcham School in Debenham since 1668, when the upper storey of the building in Market Cross, pictured on the front cover, was used to teach 12 boys. The original part of today's Sir Robert

Hitcham Voluntary Aided Primary School was opened in 1876.

However, it has been added to on several occasions since, the last time three years ago, said Chris Blshop, head-teacher for the last 11 years.

Today the school has 202, four to 11-year-olds, including 18 in the mornings-only reception class. There are seven full-time and one part-time teaching staff plus three ancillary helpers.

Picture: JERRY TURNER