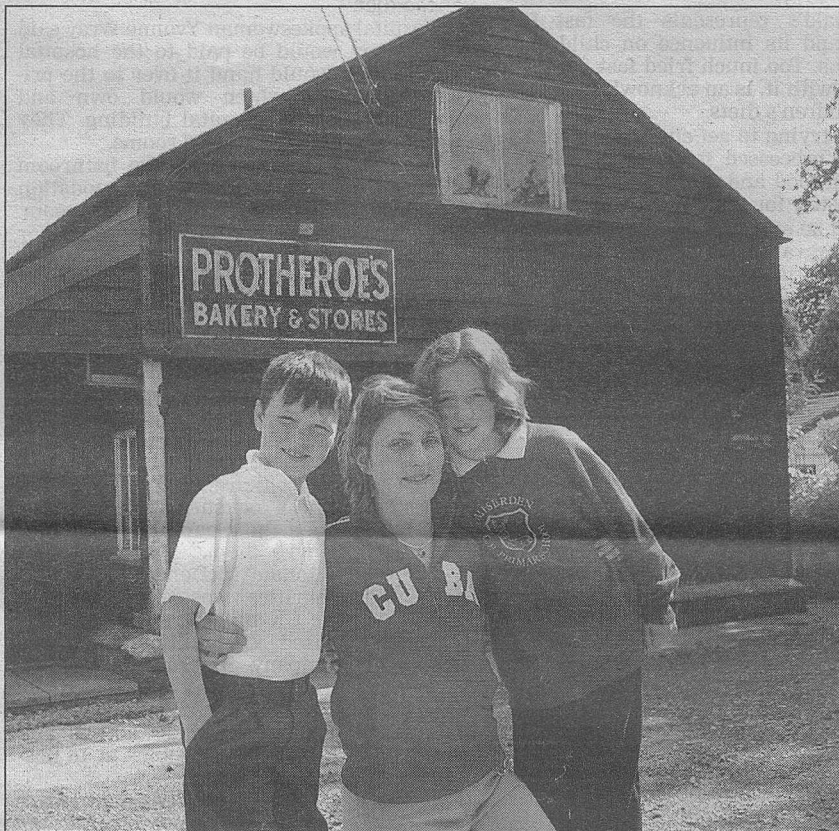


17.5.02

Internet – www.gloucestercitizen.co.uk

Down Your Way

Colony spirit still survives 100 years on



■ **BAKERY:** Colonists Mel Hill and children Harley (8), left, and Corrie (10), in front of the former Protheroe's Bakery.

C222810-SP212



■ **HOUSE:** Fiona Holder and daughter Sarah who live in the original Whiteway Colony house.

JUST over 100 years ago, ten people purchased a shepherd's cottage and 42 acres of farmland and set up a community based on their ideals of living and working together and sharing the rewards.

Some things have changed since the Whiteway Colony was founded but the original spirit of equality and tolerance remains. Those who live there own their houses, whether they are small wooden buildings or more substantial family homes, but the land on which they are situated belongs to nobody.

Anybody wishing to live in Whiteway today still has to be approved by the colony meeting before a plot can be allocated. Joy Thacker, the meeting's chairman and the author of a book on Whiteway, said the founders burned the deeds for the colony land believing it would make everyone equal.

"The first colonists moved to Whiteway in 1898," she said. "They wanted to live out the ideals they had been talking about in a society called the Croydon Brotherhood Church. They wanted to alter the structure of the political system. They thought by forming land schemes like the one at Whiteway they would influence the surrounding area and eventually change the social system of the country.

"They had many visitors in the early days - Ghandi came once."

Just a few years after the colony was founded, however, its original members changed the system after finding some of their ideals had been abused by "hangers on". Afterwards each colonist was responsible for a piece of land on which they could live and work. "We still have a system where people own their homes but they give back their land when they move," said Joy.

"You are allocated a piece of land and you look after it, but you also think about the care of the other 42 acres. We still have work parties, usually on Sunday mornings, to do things like mending the roads.

"Years ago moving to Whiteway was like a dream for many poor people who had no prospects but we cannot do that today. Everybody has to buy his or her home outright - you cannot get a mortgage because of the land situation. But despite this there is a good balance.

"Everybody is equal here and everybody's opinion is respected. We still use just Christian names."

Joy and her husband Keith moved to Whiteway in 1968 and brought up their three children on the colony. "My father told us that we would never own the land, he saw that as a very important thing, but since moving here it hasn't had any effect at all," she said.

Whiteway does not have the usual community hubs such as a school, post office, church or pub. Instead the residents continue the tradition of holding regular colony meetings and social events at a former building from the old Cranham

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Sanatorium now known as Colony Hall. There is also a swimming pool built in 1968 and funded by the colonists.

Joy Evans has lived in Whiteway all her life. Her parents, Basil and Mary Robert, were leather workers and Joy and her husband Peter continued the family craft tradition by working with wood. Peter became a furniture maker and Joy turned her hand to carving.

Their son Alan is a blacksmith who works from a forge behind his parents' home. His commissions have included the treasury gates at St Paul's Cathedral and the gates and railings for the Public Records Office at Kew.

Joy met her husband when he moved to Whiteway in his teens and they live in a wooden building that was previously her parents' workshop.

"In the days when we met everybody did things together, young and old," she said. "We had regular folk dancing, ball room dancing and whist drives. A play reading group would occasionally get round to putting on a play.

"I think mixing with the older people gave us a broader outlook on life. The people here then were so diverse - you didn't just get one opinion, you got lots."

At 93, Hilda Gustin is Whiteway's oldest resident. She moved to the colony in the 1950s. "I needed accommodation and Whiteway was my only chance of getting a place of my own," she said.

"I lived in a caravan for three years and then a builder put up the asbestos placed where I live now."

Hilda said there was still a feeling in Whiteway that it did not have to conform. "There is not so much philosophising as there used to be although that was dying out when I moved here," she said.

Former sea captain Ian Hardie swapped life on the ocean wave for the green rolling pastures around Whiteway in the 1990s. He now lives with his partner Yoli Creed and two children in the Captain's Cabin, a wooden house he designed and built himself.

"I served my apprenticeship in the Merchant Navy and worked my way to being a skipper for 12 years before I retired," he said.

"I miss it a bit - the sea horizons and the wide open spaces - but I don't miss



■ **HALL:** Local historian Joy Thacker in front of the colony meeting hall.

the commercial pressures."

The previous building on the site of the Captain's Cabin was an asbestos-clad wooden shack built in the 1920s. "Cold wasn't the word for it when I first moved here," he said. "One year the bath water froze. The people who lived here must have been as hard as nails."

Ian took over the running of the colony's swimming pool around three years ago and was involved in helping to raise the £30,000 needed to renovate it.

Yoli is the great granddaughter of one of the first members of the colony, Sudbury Protheroe.

"Our children are Sud Protheroe's great great grandchildren," she said. "It gives us quite a strong feel for the place. The Protheroe Bakery was set up to provide bread for the colonists but later expanded to supply the Stroud area and beyond.

"Protheroe's cakes were especially highly regarded and were sold all over the country.

Ray Hill, formerly of Bristol, now owns the bakery and associated buildings in what is the latest in a set of co-incidences. Around 15 years ago he took over the Sunshine Health Food Shop in Stroud which was set up 75 years ago by colonist Lilian Wolfe.

And when a fire closed Protheroe's Bakery around 10 years ago, Ray set up a bakery in the former British School to fill the gap in the market. Now he hopes to restore the old bakery on the Whiteway and to bring it back into use.

Ray's son Andrew, who also lives on the colony, said the rebuilding work was a slow and expensive process but that his father was determined to see it back in use. "When we moved to the colony we realised what an integral part the bakery had been," he said.

"We should like to start baking the old Protheroe cakes again. They were sold all over the country and went out as far as India." Really the whole thing has come full circle - it was colonists who set up the health food shop and now colonists are now running the health food shop again."

Although the Whiteway Colony itself covers 42 acres, a number of properties have been built on the outskirts over the years. They include what is now The Keyhole Nursery which takes in 75 babies and toddlers from within a four or five mile radius of Whiteway.

Gill and John Bullough, the parents of five children and grandparents of six, set up the nursery in 1999.

"There were no nurseries around this particular area," said Gill. The nursery employs 14 people, some part time, including the couple's daughter, Charlotte, and two daughters-in-law Becky and Corina.

And with their sons helping to build the nursery extensions, Gill said the business was a real family concern. "Whiteway is a great place for a nursery because it is such a lovely spot and there is no pollution and no traffic. I spent most of my life bringing up my family and now I'm looking after other people's children."