

28.6.02

Internet – www.gloucestercitizen.co.uk

Down Your Way

We all bond so well here

WHITESHILL may not boast the picture postcard cottages found in some Cotswold villages.

But those who live on the plateau high over Stroud enjoy glorious views.

The Victorian writer Paul Hawkins Fisher went so far as to describe them as "such as can hardly be excelled for picturesque beauty and variety in any part of kingdom".

Whiteshill also has a keen sense of community.

It still has a post office, situated on the corner where the village meets Ruscombe, and a community shop on the edge of the playing field.

The shop, set up three years ago after residents bought £25 bonds to get it off the ground, is run by a committee of local people and staffed by volunteers in return for a peppercorn wage.

It sells groceries, newspapers and local crafts and has a coffee bar.

Committee member Mary Watkins said it was well supported.

"It pays for itself," said Mary, who has lived in Whiteshill for 12 years.

"When we took out the bonds we said we would try to pay them back within three years - we paid them back in two.

"It is great for the elderly and it is important for the children because they can learn about shopping here in ways that they can't at the supermarket.

"It is also a meeting place for people. Mums sit here and have a coffee and a chat while their children play on the swings on the playing field.

"I would say the hardest part is getting volunteers to man the place."

The vicar at St Paul's Church, the Rev Michael Jeffery, mans the coffee bar for two hours every Thursday morning.

He believes it makes him accessible to people who don't feel comfortable calling on him at his vicarage.

"The shop is a good contact point," he said.

Michael has been the vicar for Whiteshill and Ruscombe for 18 years.

Before receiving his calling he was a manager at the Benthalls department store in London for eight years.

"I think it is a healthy thing to have had a taste of real life," said Michael.

"I had a real zapper of a calling. It just happened. I had two children at the time and no money.

"I was offered the possibility of starting training and I had just two weeks to get up and go."

Michael shares the parish with a local ministry team of eight and curate Denise Cole who is ordained solely to serve in Whiteshill.

"Vicars come and go but Denise will be here forever," said Michael. "It is like the old idea of having a priest in every parish."

Pictures: Simon Pizzezy C223327-SP08 & C223327-SP4 (below)



■ **AT YOUR SERVICE:** Norman Cookson and Astrid Bingle, volunteers at the community shop in Whiteshill, which was set up three years ago by residents who bought £25 bonds to get it off the ground.

■ **HIGH ACHIEVERS:** Marian Smith chairman of Governors for Whiteshill Primary, which has been praised by the Government. Pupils pictured with their Jubilee medals are from left; Harriet Williams, six, Jessica Wren, seven, Ella Brown, six and Andrew Jones, five.

Whiteshill Church is used for concerts and other events as well as religious services.

A highlight is the annual children's Christingle service which attracts more than 200 people a year.

The church was built in 1841 and is credited with reforming the once unsavoury reputation of its residents.

In his Notes and Recollections of Stroud, Fisher wrote that the residents of Whiteshill and Ruscombe had for generations "exhibited a very low type and a very degraded state of social and moral life" and was reputed as supplying "all the beggars".

The writer put this down to the distance between the villages and the nearest parish church and Stroud itself, with their "civilising influences".

But with the arrival of a clergyman in Randwick, and the building of Whiteshill Church and school, "the character of the population has been greatly improved", Fisher wrote in 1871.

"The houses, with the habits of their occupants, now wear the usual appearances of comfort and respectability."

Rick Pellatt has been working to

maintain law and order in Whiteshill for 31 years.

Residents are so appreciative of the dedicated special constable's efforts that the parish council petitioned the Gloucestershire Police Authority to allow him to stay on when he reached the official retirement age.

Rick, 57, worked in the insurance industry for some years before being made redundant.

He later trained in television production but ended up working for the police as a neighbourhood watch field officer.

"I always wanted to be in the police force," he explained. "Years ago I was too short at 5ft 6ins. Later on when I applied again I was apparently too old.

"I joined the special constabulary because I want to put something back into the community.

"I love my village. I was born here. I felt I wanted to protect it."

28.6.02



In our weekly feature reporter Sue Painter visits villages and hamlets across the Stroud area meeting the personalities at the heart of their communities....

C223327-SP983



C223327-SP983



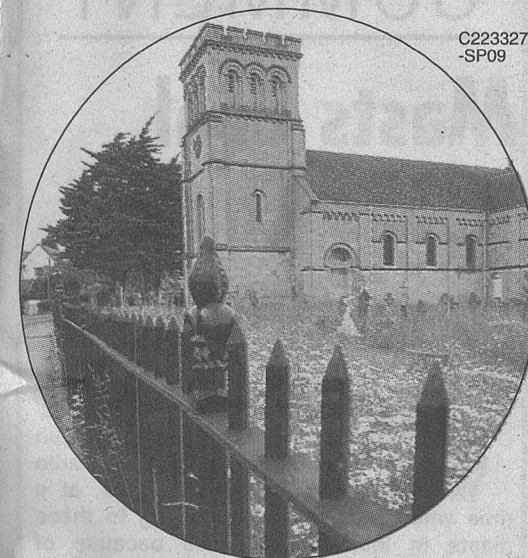
■ FAMILIAR FACE: Roger McAdam, landlord of The Star.

C223327-SP999



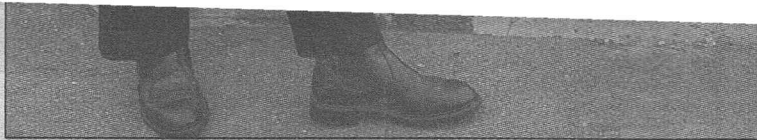
■ SO SPECIAL: Popular community bobby Rick Pellatt on the beat, left.

■ CREATIVE: Edgar Corkhill former parish council chairman, above, who renovates doll's houses and has made a scale model of a caravan.



C223327-SP09

■ GATHERINGS: St Paul's Church, Whiteshill.



■ **SO SPECIAL:** Popular community bobby Rick Pellatt on the

■ **CREATIVE:** Edgar Corkhill former parish council chairman renovates doll's houses and has made a scale model of a

Rick effectively became the local bobby when the last full-time police officer to live in Whiteshill moved away.

"Over the years I have done everything that the old village bobby would do," he said. "I visit the old people and the children at the school.

"In the past people have used my house as they used to use the old fashioned police stations. I have taken in found property and lost dogs. People phone me if there are problems in the village.

"We're very lucky. Up until now it's a quiet village. We have our problems, obviously, but they are minor compared with other villages."

Staff and pupils at Whiteshill Primary School are in a celebratory mood after winning an achievement award from the Government for rising standards.

The school, which has 105 pupils, has also been recognised for its work in the arts.

"We have had dancers, actors and artists working with the children," said headteacher Alison Finch who has been at the school for a year.

"We feel it is important to work with the arts, otherwise it is a very narrow curriculum. Children have to learn many skills in life and it is not necessarily in literacy, numeracy and in science that a child shines."

The school frequently reaches into the wider community. One of its traditions is to visit the elderly with flowers around Mothering Sunday.

Several mums and dads run out of school clubs and the parent teachers'

association holds a number of fundraising events every year.

"Because we are small we need to be part of the community," said Alison. "People always comment on how happy it is here which is the biggest compliment we can have."

Whiteshill has two pubs, the Woodcutters Arms and The Star. Rog and Mu McAdam have been at The Star for 10 years.

The couple, who moved to the Stroud area from the Midlands, and previously had The Prince in Cashes Green.

The Star, which dates back to the 1700s, has a darts and dominoes team.

"I play in the away games and Mu plays at home," said Rog. "The secret of playing dominoes is common sense really. You have to remember what has already been played."

Beryl Browning has been a familiar face in Whiteshill for many years.

She was born in the village, went to school there and later ran the Rockery Store for several years until the 1980s.

"There used to be several shops here," said Beryl, 74. "There was a butchers, a paper shop, another grocers and a fish and chip shop, as well as the post office.

"We could shop in Whiteshill without having to go to Stroud."

In the 1960s Beryl and her husband had to give up their 100-year-old cottage so that the narrow road through Whiteshill could be widened. They later moved into a bungalow

built on what was once the garden of their old home.

"We were quite sad to leave our cottage," said Beryl. "Other people lost some of their gardens but we were the only ones in the village who had to lose our home."

Former parish council chairman Edgar Corkhill's garden has been widely admired for many years and he has won several awards from Stroud in Bloom.

Ill health now prevents him from taking an active role outside, apart from planting up hanging baskets, but his garden still looks a picture thanks to the efforts of his family.

Edgar's other abiding hobby has been creating and renovating doll's houses. He has even made a scale model of a caravan.

"When our kids were young we couldn't afford to buy them a dolls' house so I made them one," he explained.

"Over the years I have made them for other people as well.

"I make all the furnishings too."

Edgar, 80, moved to Whiteshill after getting a job as the manager of the Britannic Assurance office in Stroud where he worked for 30 years.

"When I bought our house, Whiteshill did not have one of the best names in the area - it had a long history of problems going back many years," he said.

"But now it has picked up and is one of the most desirable villages in the area. Houses very rarely come up for sale."