

26.7.02

Welcome to

SHEEPSCOMBE remains a "peaceful valley" more than 175 years after the phrase was first used to describe it. Nowadays almost everybody pronounces the name of the village as it sounds, although in the past some have referred to it as Shepscombe and in one 13th Century document it was recorded as Sebbescombe.

The village, with its stone cottages dotted along steep and narrow lanes, is fringed with acres of woods and common land. At the beginning of the 19th Century Sheepscombe had three mills employing a majority of the men from the village, along with eight unlicensed ale houses.

In her book *Old Cotswold*, Edith Brill wrote that the clothiers' records from the time showed that, "the conduct of the men was so riotous, even at work, that the owner was sometimes obliged to close down and turn them all out for part of the day to quell the tumult".

Sheepscombe's reputation is said to have improved with the arrival of the curate the Rev Charles Neville and his wife Agnes in 1817.

Mrs Neville revived the village Sunday school, originally set up in 1780, and walked the two miles between Painswick and Sheepscombe in all weathers to teach there.

Her work inspired her husband to raise money to build a church for the village and the idea caught the imagination of the mill workers, a delegation of whom went to the curate offering their labour.

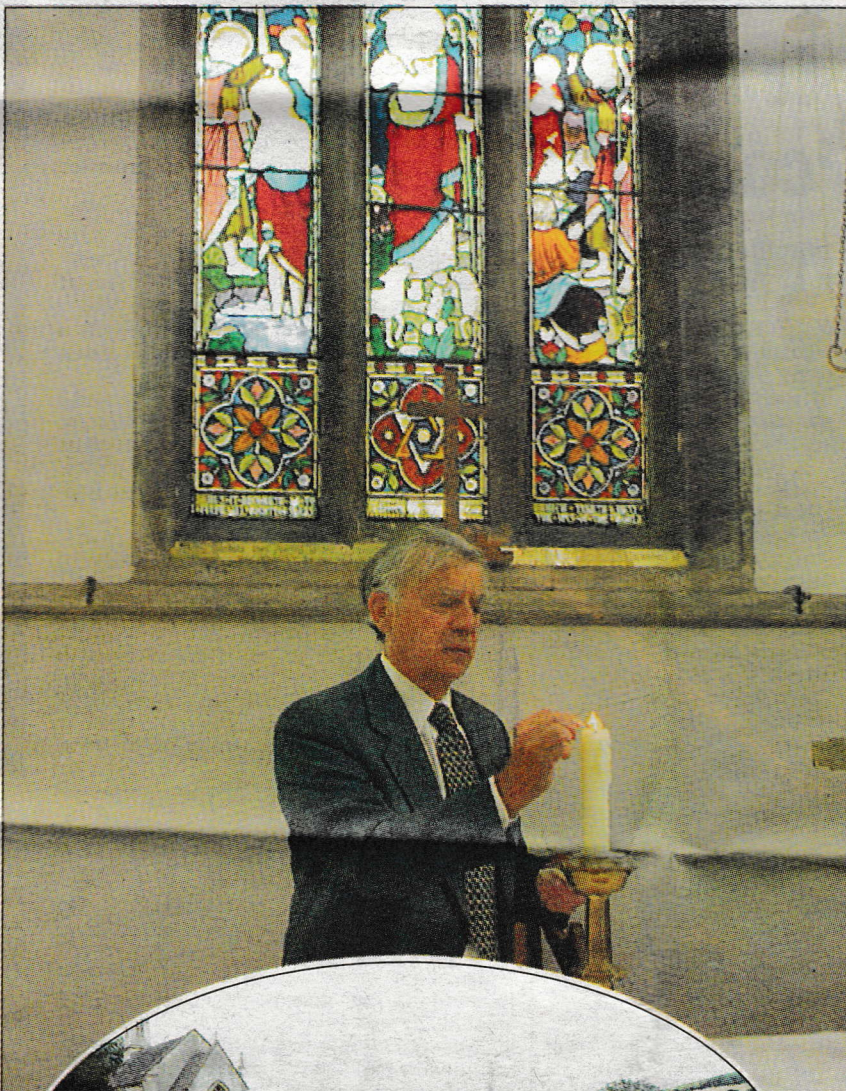
The church was completed by 1820 and Mr Neville became Sheepscombe's first vicar. In 1825 the "transformation" of Sheepscombe was recorded in a tract written by the Rev Hugh Stowell, called *The Peaceful Valley*, which sited the village's Sunday school as an example to the rest of the country. But some believe his claims that the people of Sheepscombe were wild and unruly before the church was built to be unfair.

They include Elisabeth Skinner from the Sheepscombe History Society.

She said: "The story of Sheepscombe being a wild place was largely based on *The Peaceful Valley*, which had the sub title *The Influence of Religion*.

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Pictures: Richard Besent C222413-DB01 & C222413-DB03 (bottom)



■ **A SHINING EXAMPLE:** John Bousfield, one of the church wardens at St John's The Apostle Church in Sheepscombe, lighting a candle ready for Sunday service.

"While I would not want to underplay the work of the Nevilles in any way, Stowell was trying to say how bad the village was before the church came and how good it became afterwards."

"Parts of what he said were probably true I don't see how, looking at all of the evidence, that Sheepscombe should have been any worse than other cloth making communities in the Stroud Valleys."

Elisabeth, who teaches local government at the University of the West of England, moved to Sheepscombe in 1949 and became interested in its past after starting her Open University degree in history in 1975. She has noticed many changes to the village over the years.

"Farming has all but disappeared from the Sheepscombe valley," she said.

"The countryside is not managed in the way it was when I was a child and it is now a lot wilder. What stands out is the number of trees that have grown on the common. It used to be completely bare."

Sheepscombe Church attracts many visitors who comment on the peace and quiet they find there.

■ **A SHINING EXAMPLE:** John Bousfield, one of the church wardens at St John's The Apostle Church in Sheepscombe, lighting a candle ready for Sunday service.

John Bousfield has been a church warden for four years, sharing his duties with Gordon Horner.

Previously John wound the church clock for 20 years before the process became automated.

The retired dentist moved to the village 40 years ago after joining a surgery in Gloucester. He is a former chairman of the Sheepscombe Society, which organises a varied programme of events every year. And during the 1970s, he was one of a number of parents who fought education bosses seeking to close the village primary school.

"There was a move to close it because it had so few children, we petitioned and cajoled and in the end they didn't."

With its 53 pupils, Sheepscombe Primary is still one of the smallest schools in the county.

The majority of its pupils live in the village but a number are also drawn in from the surrounding area.

Headteacher Stan Giles is proud of the

school and everybody in it.

"There is very much a family ethos," he said. "We try to bring out the best in every individual. The whole ethos is to promote the confidence of each child to give them the security to attempt challenges they might not be able to attempt in a larger school."

The Butcher's Arms, built in the 1600s, was previously two cottages. One of its ceilings is higher than the rest and it is assumed this was where deer used to be hung to mature.

The pub's carved wooden sign, showing a butcher with a pint of beer and a pig strapped to his leg, is one of the most photographed in the country.

The Butcher's Arms is owned by Johnny and Hilary Johnston, who also run five other pubs in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

The couple used to live near London and went into the licensed trade after their children had grown up.

Previously Hilary was a secretary and Johnny a civil engineer.

Laurie Lee knew Sheepscombe well as



In our weekly feature reporter Sue Hamlets across the Stroud area in the heart of their communities....

the peaceful

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■ **LANDMARK:** A walker looks at her map by the village war memorial.
C222413-DB05



■ **PICTURESQUE:** The road to the Far End past Cotswold cottages.



■ **PAST TIMES:** Elisabeth Skinner and dad Ken French.
C222413-DB97

10 years ago in the woods, which

■ **PICTURESQUE:** The road to the Far End past Cotswold cottages.

■ **PAST TIMES:** Elisabeth Skinner and dad Ken French.
C222413-DB97

generations of his mother's family came from the village. Several years ago the author bought the village's hill top cricket pitch and rented it to the local team.

Laurie, who enjoyed watching the cricket at Sheepscombe, also gave money towards the pavilion.

The club will soon be celebrating its centenary, although no one is really sure if it should be this year or next.

Player Joe Skinner said games were definitely played on the field in 1904.

"In 1904 we know that Sheepscombe played Cranham. We reckon Sheepscombe was formed two years before that," he said. "Sheepscombe has the prettiest cricket ground in the area. It looks down the Painswick valley towards Frocester. You can see the Severn Bridge on a clear day."

Joe, who is currently studying for a sports degree, has been playing cricket since he was 14 and is a qualified coach for Gloucestershire.

This year he started a youth cricket club in the village.

Joe's grandfather Ken French is a former president of the cricket club.

Ken's sporting interests also include

the village's table tennis club where he is only the second president in almost 70 years. He replaced Alex Rogers who once owned a vegetarian guest house in the village. There are now 12 players who practise in the village hall and play in the Stroud, Cheltenham and Cirencester leagues.

Ken, who has lived in Sheepscombe since 1949, has been the treasurer of the church for 25 years and was previously a church warden.

"Sheepscombe is a great village," he said.

"It is always a job to know where to go on holiday when you live in a place as beautiful as this."

The woods around Sheepscombe were long part of the ancient Ebworth Estate and are thought to have been used as a deer park by the lords of Painswick Manor for more than 500 years.

They were purchased by the Woodchester timber merchant Henry Workman in 1901 and recognised as a nature reserve in 1976.

In the same year, the land was named Workman's Wood in honour of the family.

John Workman OBE has spent a

lifetime managing the woods, which cover 120 hectares (296.4 acres) and cross the boundaries of Painswick, Cranham and Miserden.

John, who moved to Sheepscombe in 1949, was honoured for his role as the National Trust's Forestry Adviser for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In 1989 he gave Workman's Wood to the charity and in 1993 it was named a centre of excellence by the Forestry Authority of England.

The award recognised John's style of woodland management which seeks to balance landscape, the timber trade, conservation and access for leisure pursuits.

"I have been able to demonstrate that you can have multiple objectives for woodlands," he said. "There is a balance."

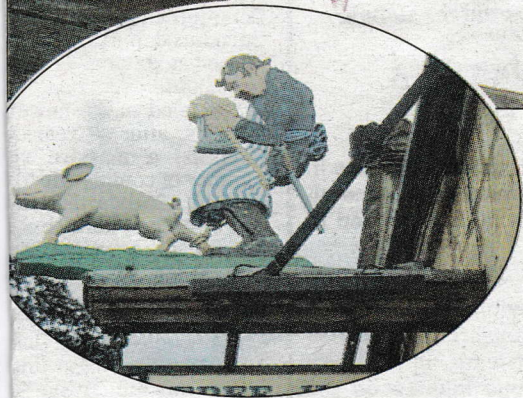
There are four rights of way through Workman's Wood and John believes they, and Sheepscombe itself, are best explored as part of a longer walk starting further along the valley."

All of Sheepscombe's approaches are steep and narrow and there is virtually nowhere to park when you arrive," he said.

Painter visits villages and
meeting the personalities at the

valley

C222413-DB05 & C222413-DB10 (bottom)



■ **TAKE A BUTCHERS..** Hilary Johnston, who runs the Butcher's Arms with husband Johnny, above, and one of the most photographed signs in the country, left, of a butcher with a pint of beer and a pig strapped to his leg.