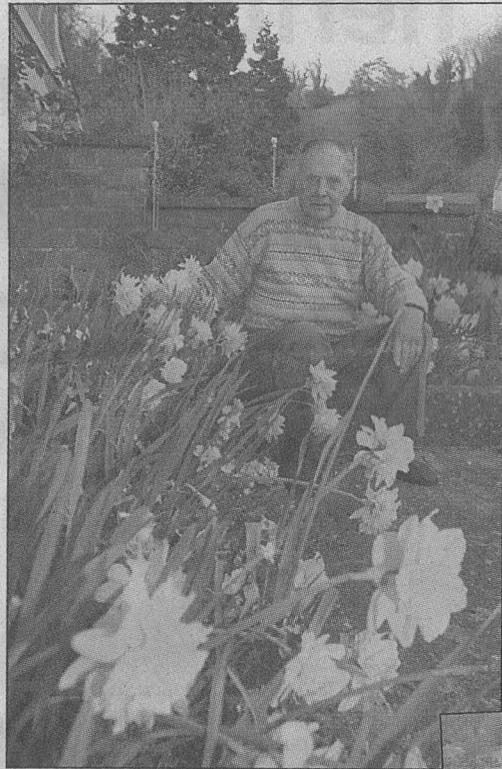




In our weekly feature reporter Sue Painter visits villages and hamlets across the Stroud area meeting the personalities at the heart of their communities...

Picture: Martin Perry C221198MP88



■ **GREEN FINGERS:** Jack Birmingham, 82, of Ruscombe, far left, who still likes to maintain his garden.

Whiteshill in the days when it was a boys-only establishment. He is now 82 but still works five mornings a week at a printing firm in Ebley.

"I live on my own so I might as well go to work. I enjoy it," he said.

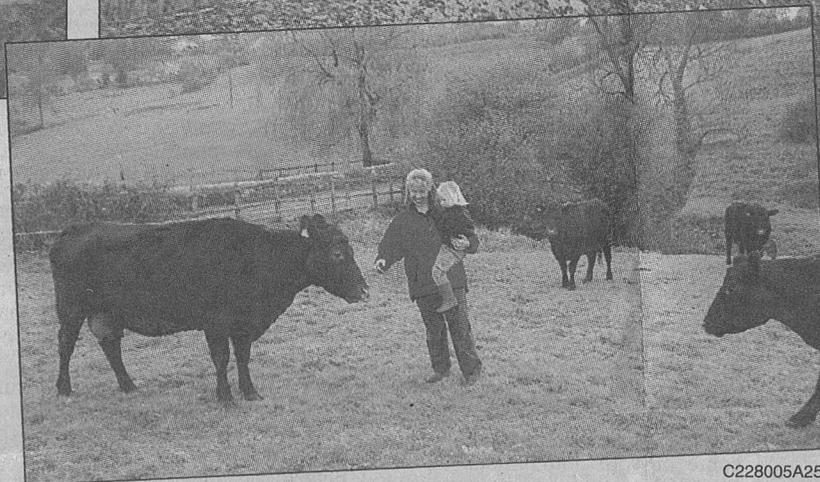
Jack said Ruscombe had changed little since his youth. "We've only had about half a dozen new houses built here," he said.

Bill Gulwell, 86, was born in Honest Corner – a name which local people attribute to the Congregational chapel there.

His mother Martha raised him



Pictures: Richard Besent C228005A36



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■ **ON THE FARM:** Rebecca Charley and daughter Matilde, two, above, view the mill pond at Ruscombe Farm where a Wellington bomber crashed in the Second World War and, inset, left, with their herd of Red Poll cattle, a rare breed prized for its meat. Once a scene of tragedy, the pond is now a haven for wildlife including frogs and kingfishers. Rebecca and her husband Richard Snowee

Co-op building in 1970 after giving up the Stroud and District Caged Birds

work at Strachans and to volunteer for the fighting force known as the RAF

'Spot the criminal in your child'

MEASURES must be taken to identify problem children from the age of three to stop them becoming the criminals of tomorrow, Home Secretary David Blunkett.

Mr Blunkett told a parenting conference that the behaviour of children at nursery school should be monitored to spot those who could eventually join gangs and cause misery in their neighbourhoods.

The earlier that unruly youngsters can be spotted, the earlier they could intervene, said Mr Blunkett.

"We have got to provide support at the point where it can be most effective," he said.

"We have got to be able to pick up on the behavioural reactions of children very quickly, from the moment the child enters nursery education.

"Universal nursery provokes that possible more quickly.

"We need not to pass the buck to the schools to do it, but together in the strength of the community to be able to provide that backing and that intervention early."

In his first major speech on the family since becoming the Home Secretary, Mr Blunkett told the ParentChild 2002 conference in Islington, north London, that while governments wanted to avoid "hectoring" parents on how to bring up their children it was crucial to intervene with dysfunctional families.

"The reality is that in many of our housing estates in many of our disadvantaged communities, a handful of those whose lifestyles and behaviour so disrupt the well-being of others are creating havoc."

Tips help

a printing firm in Ebley.

"I live on my own so I might as well go to work. I enjoy it," he said.

Jack said Ruscombe had changed little since his youth. "We've only had about half a dozen new houses built here," he said.

Bill Gulwell, 86, was born in Honest Corner - a name which local people attribute to the Congregational chapel there.

His mother Martha raised him single-handed after his father was killed during the First World War. Bill's working career started at Holloways clothing factory in Stroud and finished at Hill Paul. He served in the Army during the Second World War, ending up in Burma.

Bill now lives with his wife Geraldine on Zion Hill, from where he enjoys views across the valley. There used to be a Sunday school at the top of the hill and some villagers still recall the local saying: "Come ye hither to Zion and be purified."

Bill can still remember when gas was installed in Ruscombe in the 1920s, and mains water was fitted in 1948.

"We used to get fresh water from the spring," he said. "The water was beautiful. People used to collect it in metal buckets and some had yokes across their shoulders.

"Before we had sewers we had vault toilets. When they were full people used to put the contents on their gardens. Brussels sprouts have never been the same since!"

Bill was a member of the Congregational chapel for many years and has fond memories of Whitsuntide Treats when villagers processed through Ruscombe with banners led by the Whiteshill band. Tea and cake followed the parade and afterwards everyone would go to Shortwood to hold children's races and put up swings in the trees.

Eric Papps, 80, has been the driving force behind Whiteshill and Ruscombe Youth Club for more than 30 years, acting as its secretary and treasurer.

The club was held in the former Co-op which was built in 1895 in such a way as to make it easy to convert into two houses should the enterprise fail. The business finally closed in 1966. Now the building is about to enter a new phase following the closure of the youth club.

Eric helped raise the money to buy the



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Co-op building in 1970 after giving up the Stroud and District Caged Birds Society after 39 years during which time he and his wife were secretary and treasurer.

"The Co-op gave us 14 days in which to raise the money to buy the shop," he said. "We found 15 guarantors who pledged £100 each. We used to get 60 a night coming in. That was when they made their own fun and respected property.

"Between the time we started and 1998 the total cost of repairs for things that had been damaged came to about £300 but we spent more than that in the last three years. Some of the people running the club joined when it started. It was the same people doing all the work all the time."

Eric began his working life with the Gloster Aircraft Company on a wage of nine shillings and seven pence a week. He travelled to work by bicycle and had to leave home by 6.15am to make the journey around Edge, Cranham and Upton St Leonards to get to the factory.

"If you weren't there by 7.30am they shut the gates and you had to come back," he said. "I used to leave for home at 5pm and get back at a quarter past seven - it was harder coming back."

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Eric left the aircraft factory to

"We used to get fresh water from the spring. People used to collect it in buckets. Before we had sewers we had vault toilets. When they were full people used to put the contents on their gardens."

work at Strachans and to volunteer for the fighting force known as the RAF Regiment. He would have been unable to join the forces had he stayed at GAC as making planes was classed as a reserved occupation. Every year a Battle of Britain Service is still held for the RAF Regiment at Ruscombe Chapel.

And it is also there that the crew of an ill-fated Canadian bomber is remembered. The plane crashed into the village's mill pond after completing no fewer than 24 missions. The Gloucestershire branch of the RAF Comrades Association put a plaque in the chapel to remember them.

"I wasn't here when it happened," said Eric. "The crew had completed 24 missions and was due to go on leave. They had been on a leaflet drop but could not make it back. We felt we should put up a plaque because people would forget."

Once a scene of tragedy, the pond is now a haven for wildlife including frogs and kingfishers. It is on land at Ruscombe Farm which Rebecca Charley and her husband Richard Spyvee run alongside her father Mike. The couple is building up a herd of Red Poll cattle, a rare breed prized for its meat. But like so many in their position today, they also have jobs outside the farm.

"The Red Polls are dark red/brown in colour and are naturally without horns," Rebecca said. "They are also good on slopes."

Rebecca's family moved to the farm 30 years ago when she was 11.

"You could not ask for a better place to grow up because of the space and the peace and quiet," she said. "At the moment the farming side would not make enough to maintain itself but it is a way of life.

"We have been trying to promote environmentally sensitive management of the land. We have one of the best sites for frogspawn and toad spawn in the county."

two, above, view the mill pond at Ruscombe Farm where a Wellington bomber crashed in the Second World War and, inset, left, with their herd of Red Poll cattle, a rare breed prized for its meat. Once a scene of tragedy, the pond is now a haven for wildlife including frogs and kingfishers. Rebecca and her husband Richard Spyvee run the farm with her father Mike.

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