

Down Your Way Weaving the of Chalford

14.6.02

CHALFORD has long been reputed as a centre for manufacturing. The large number of flint tools found around the area has even led some to claim that it was a Stone Age workshop.

The woollen cloth industry was Chalford's biggest employer for centuries from the Middle Ages, while Flemish refugees brought silk weaving to the area in the 1600s.

The first home weavers started building their cottages on the steep sides and bottom of the valley, or vale, from Medieval times, while settlements began springing up on the plateau at Chalford Hill after the area became a parish in 1894.

For present day residents the five-mile journey from Chalford into Stroud rarely takes more than 10 minutes. But just over 250 years ago it often took a carrier with horses and wagons a whole day to make the return journey using the undulating tracks on the north side of the valley.

Mike Mills' family has lived in the Chalford area for 200 years and his ancestors are entwined in the history of the village. Mike, who started his work-

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MUSICIAN OF NOTE: Cornet player Ken Wear outside his home in the village known as 'High C.'

...trumpet in an occasional ...
...Dorcas lived to celebrate her centenary.

Mike Mills' family has lived in the Chalford area for 200 years and his ancestors are entwined in the history of the village. Mike, who started his working life as a chemist and was in charge of developing new products at Critchley's when he retired, has long been fascinated by Chalford's past. His own family history has given him a personal insight into what life was like for ordinary people.

"Chalford was very poor after the cloth mills closed," said Mike. "The hand loom weavers were out of work and there was great poverty.

"There were riots - they sent the

■ **MUSICIAN OF NOTE:** Cornet player Ken Wear outside his home in the village known as 'High C.'

troops in on occasions."

Mike's great grandfather was working at New Mill when he died of typhoid at the early age of 28 in the 1880s. "He caught typhoid off the rags," Mike explained. "He left a wife and five children who were thrown out of their house and had to live off the parish. "They had to exist on five loaves and half a crown a week."

Despite living through such desperate times, Mike's grandmother Annie

Pearce lived to celebrate her centenary. Annie's working life started at 10 when she was sent to work for William Dangerfield at Bliss Mills for a half penny an hour.

Mr Dangerfield invented an improved bending process for walking stick handles and became one of the world's leading manufacturers in his field, employing as many as 1,000 people at one time. He was also a devout Baptist and one of the major benefactors of the Tabernacle built on Coppice Hill in 1873.

The chapel has enjoyed a revival in recent years and took on an ordained minister for the first time in living memory in 1995. Richard Burfoot, 35, worked as a sales and marketing director for a group of printing and media companies on the South Coast before giving it up to follow his calling.

"I had been a Christian since my teens and I felt that God wanted a lot more of my life than I was giving him," he said.

"We meet for worship on Sunday mornings and I find it incredibly fulfilling to see the way that the church and community are beginning to come together."

Over the years Chalford has been home to congregations of Methodists, Plymouth Brethren and Seventh Day Adventists. Christ Church, on the side of the A419, was built in 1725 as a chapel of ease and enlarged in the 19th Century.

Today it attracts visitors who come to look at its woodwork, much of which was produced by members of the internationally renowned Cotswold Arts and Crafts Movement.

Many of the fine pieces to be found there - including a carved font cover depicting a dove and an inlaid lectern - were handcarved by the craftsmen who worked at Peter van der Waals furniture factory in the old silk mills at the bottom of Cowcombe Hill during



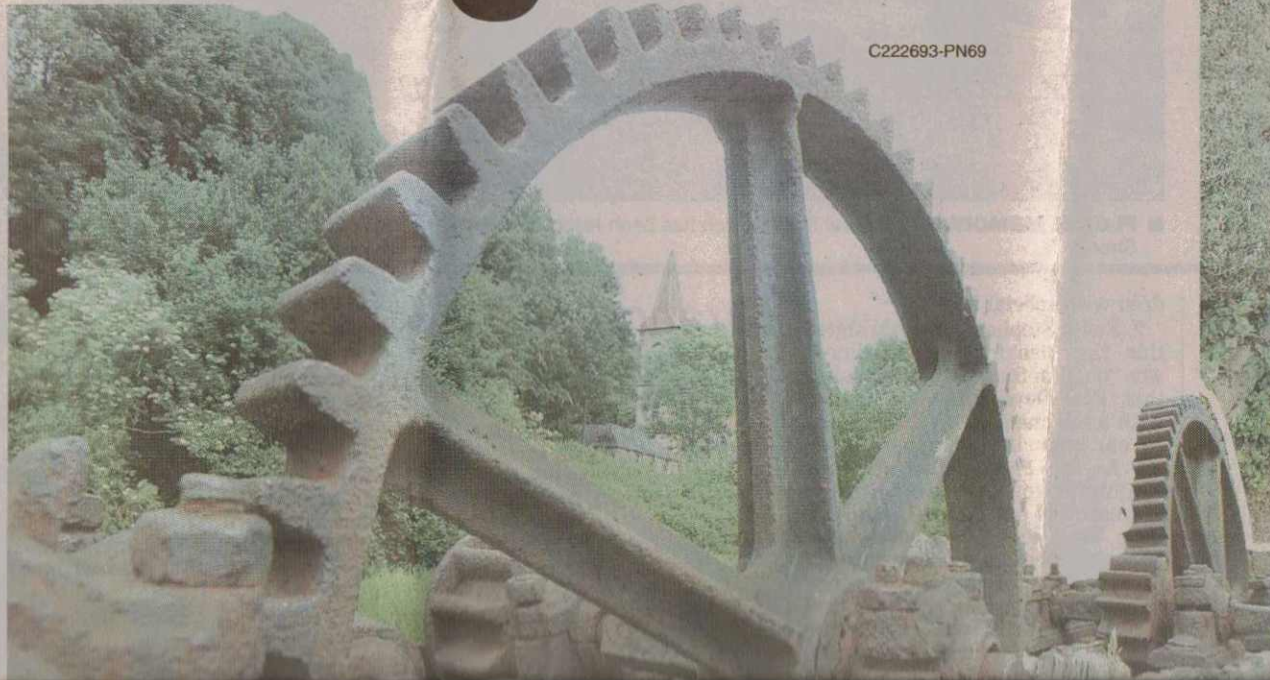
■ **SNAPSHOT OF THE AREA:** Historian Mike Mills looks through his many slides of the area, in the background is the Roundhouse at Chalford. C222693-PN75



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

curious tale 14.6.02 village life

Pictures: Robert Davis and Paul Nicholls C222693-PN79



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the first half of the 20th Century.

Another Chalford company to make its mark on home furnishings throughout the UK was Arnold Designs Limited, set up by a couple of former art teachers, who made decorative pieces such as trays, umbrella stands and magazine racks.

Bill Rickinson and his partner Susanna Birley live in one of three households of artists along Anchor Terrace. He splits his time between painting, making pots and teaching. He has taught at Stroud and Cirencester Colleges and currently runs evening classes at the art school building at Lansdown and therapy sessions for Horsfall House, a home for elderly people in Minchinhampton, and for the Gloucestershire Association for Mental Health.

"Using art as therapy keeps people focussed on a specific area. Also it's a co-operative process with a lot of exchange and discussion," he said. "Art is important in any kind of home or institution."

Bill, who was born in Stoke-on-Trent, started making pots when he was five.

Bill and Susanna's workshops are open to the public this month as part of Stroud Valleys Open Studios.

Chalford is firmly on the musical map thanks to the brass band based in the village.

The Chalford Band was set up in 1885 and currently has 80 players, split into three sections. The senior band, led by musical director Steve Tubb, practise twice a week at their band room on Chalford Hill. They play at several venues and enter a number of competitions every year.

Cornet player Ken Wear, 64, whose home in Chalford Hill is appropriately



called 'High C,' joined the band when he was nine and went on to be the band master for 26 years. Over the years he has seen the band's competition status rise from the fourth section to the championships. It is currently a second section band but is hoping for promotion after recent successes.

"I think Chalford Band has endured due to the personal commitment from some people that has made it an attractive place to play," he said.

Geoff and Rosie Franklin's house in the Chalford Valley has been home to some 50 children over the past 33 years. The couple started fostering soon after they were married. Geoff and Rosie took in foster children, some for short periods and others for several years, while bringing up their own family.

■ WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS:

Above: A scenic shot of the cogwheels at Chalford.

Inset: Richard Burfoot, minister of Chalford Baptist Church, and Jean Holloway, church secretary.