

STOKE BY NAYLAND

VILLAGE RECORDER'S REPORT 2019

It feels as if 2019 in Stoke was rather uneventful, with one exception. The 20 mph speed limit is, as sadly predicted, honoured more in the breach than in the observance, though the Speedwatch team is consulting the police about using our camera to enforce it, and the police have not immediately knocked the idea on the head. The Neighbourhood Development Plan progresses, and the Parish Council has commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment, which has to be done by professionals in the art: one would have thought that being in an AONB was sufficient evidence of specialness without further investigation. The Primary School, which gained a new Headteacher in September, has had some notable successes, being awarded Linguamarque Gold status for its teaching of foreign languages, while no fewer than 11 of its pupils graduated from the Suffolk Children's University in its pilot year, the largest number from any school.

The exception to the calm of our existence has been that the Recreation Ground Management Committee resigned *en masse* on 7th November following its AGM in October, having given the Parish Council a mere 48 hours to digest the news of this bombshell: nobody outside the Committee's membership is quite sure what precipitated their resignation. They are all volunteers, and like all such voluntary organisations it has had its difficulties, but hitherto has kept going. Stoke's Rec. is exceptionally large – 9 acres which allow two football pitches, a hard tennis court, a children's playground, and a hard car-park, plus sites for a bowling green (which has never been established) and two cricket nets, with plenty of room beside. It was bought from the Tendring Hall Estate in 1950, and the conveyance lays down in detail how it should be run as a Recreation Ground: the Parish Council is Custodian Trustee, and therefore is by law precluded from the day-to-day running of this most important amenity. The Charity Commission has appointed a temporary committee of three new trustees to maintain the running, and the Parish Council has been taking legal advice on how to reconstitute the committee, which it can itself not do, but it is all a very sorry affair which is as yet not resolved.

One of the village's most important businesses changed hands in July. The Crown Inn had been going under its previous management for 16 years, and had been built up from a pretty scruffy pub (though one with a history going back to 1536) to one of the best-known restaurants in the area, with consistent annual entries in the "Good Food Guide": its popularity is plain to see, especially at weekends, when the car-park regularly overflows onto the village streets (not popular, but Babergh DC has refused planning permission to expand the car-park). It is now owned by the Chestnut Group of East Anglian pubs and restaurants, but fortunately its character and its popularity appear unchanged. For the time being! Also in July another prominent Stoke undertaking, the Stoke by Nayland Hotel, Spa, and Golf Club, won recognition as the Hotel and Leisure Business Family Business of the Year 2019, and, nothing if not versatile and forward-looking, its management also won the Best Biogas Plant Award

As of this year, June 21st is designated Suffolk Day, and Stoke supported this inaugural occasion by flying the Suffolk county flag from the church tower for the first time. It shows the Saxon crown and crossed arrows emblem of St. Edmund on a blue ground. It is for consideration that we should also fly it on the Saint's Day, 20th November – after all, St. Edmund was considered the Patron Saint of England until Richard I went to Genoa on his way to Palestine for the Third Crusade and "borrowed" that city's patron saint, St. George.

On 18th June the church was the scene of the funeral of Roger Clarke, who of course needs no introduction as horseman *extraordinaire*; breeder, trainer, and expert user of Suffolk Punches; renowned raconteur, and much else. The building was packed with over 700 people present, a record, and Roger himself was borne to the doors on one of his own carriages adapted as a hearse, while his widow arrived on horseback riding side-saddle. Carrying on with activities in St.Mary's, in September Peter Crompton, the organist and choirmaster at the Royal Hospital School and frequent performer on the Albert Hall organ, gave an organ recital on our newly refurbished instrument, a tiddler by comparison with those majestic two, but he used it to fill the church with splendid music interspersed with amusing stories.

This account would not be complete without recording that Mrs.Margaret Fowler, wife of the Rev.John Fowler, and an indefatigable contributor to the life of the village in manifold ways, in June received from the hands of HRH the Princess Royal the President's Award of the Riding for the Disabled Association for "exceptional dedication to the Association over many years" (30 in fact). Margaret tends to be very modest about what she does, and it gave everyone enormous pleasure to see her quiet dedication thus recognised.

The Local History Society plans to offer a "Focus-On" day in the village, but seems to find itself frustrated at every turn, with suggested dates ruled out by more urgent events. On the day it hopes to tell the story of a distinguished dweller in the parish for every century since 1000AD. However, anticipating this idea, at its AGM in November a lecture was given on the three naval Simpsons, grandfather, father, and son, who all lived in the village in 20th century and did interesting things. The grandfather, Vice Admiral Simpson, when Captain of H.M.S.BLANCHE gave his name and that of his ship to Rabaul, the capital of New Britain (near New Guinea), where the harbour is Simpson Harbour in Blanche Bay. The son, Jim Simpson, became a noted mountaineer who led a tri-Service expedition to north Greenland in the early 1950s, and the LHS actually found newsreel of its members returning to this country to illustrate the talk. Those attending Stoke's putative Focus-On have something to look forward to!

2019 may have been uneventful: 2020 will never be considered anything but fraught, with, at the time of writing, the village in lockdown to prevent the coronavirus (Covid-19) killing a great many people. Is the predicted appearance in April of the brightest comet for a generation an omen?