

# Village Voice —

## From Rocklands

When Wally Webb, of Radio Norfolk, and I went to Rocklands we were shown around by local Women's Institute treasurer, Mrs. Joan Woodruff.

At her home, Allison Farm, we learned that we were to go and see the vice-chairman of the parish council, the schoolmaster, the man who dreamed of a playing field, the verger, a retired baker and a retired shop assistant with memories of the old days.

by Basil Abbott

Mrs. Babs Southgate is vice-chairman of Rocklands parish council and also Breckland District Councillor for Rocklands. She explained that there were originally three villages — Rockland All Saints, St. Peter's and St. Andrew's — but they are now known as Rocklands.

The village is five miles from Attleborough and Watton, and farming is the main industry. There are two large and several small farms and an iron works which makes things like pig hoppers. There are also two builders and a small garage.

When Mrs. Southgate first came here, 35 years ago, there were two bakers, a fish and chip shop and a grocer's. Now there is only one shop and one pub, where there used to be three. She described Rocklands as "a very active village" with football and cricket clubs and an Evergreen Club for senior citizens. The W.I. meet in the village hall, which is also the venue for the play group, yoga, the flower club and

*Mrs. Babs Southgate, vice-chairman of the parish council*



dances.

"Newcomers get on well with the village people," said Mrs. Southgate. "It's a very friendly village. Most people know one another and take part in all the activities. It's a very nice village to live in. Everybody seems to be very happy."

Mr. Alan Potter is headmaster of Rocklands county primary school. It



*Some of the children of Rocklands county primary school.*

was probably built in 1875 to serve the three parishes, became a county school in 1903 and a primary school in the 1960's. It used to have just one classroom, whereas now it has been divided into three.

Mr. Potter said that the school was one of the last in the country to stop being a through-age school which children left at 14. Unlike many village schools, this one has no worries about closure. It takes fifty to sixty children and more are always moving into the village. As Mr. Potter showed us around it was gratifying to see that Foxy Loxy, Chicken Licken and Henny Penny were still as much in evidence today as they were thirty years ago.

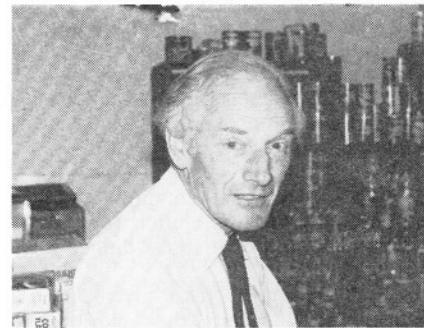
The headmaster said that in a small school it is difficult to cover all areas of the curriculum adequately but this made the children very adaptable. Most will go to Attleborough High



School when they leave Rocklands.

Sitting in the doorway of the pavilion, Mr. Stan Fisher told Wally Webb about his lifelong ambition to get a playing field for the village. In 1937 the parish council gave him permission to start a fund-raising committee for the scheme. A beetle-drive and dance

raised £8. When they had raised a few hundred pounds Mr. Fisher approached some of the farmers to see if they had any suitable land. Most, however, were not keen to sell.



*Mr. Francis Dove.*

"But I was not too despondent," he said. "I kept looking around." When he first saw the site which eventually became the playing field it had a pit, fifty yards wide and six feet deep,

which was full of water. Otherwise the measurements of the land were suitable. Expert advice was sought, the committee agreed and Mr. Frank Reynolds, a keen cricketer and the owner of the land, was approached.

"Come back in a week, Stan," he said. After that time Mr. Fisher went back and was overjoyed to be told that he could have the four-and-a-half acres for £500.

A grant of £900 was received from the Ministry of Education, and the site was levelled and seeded. There was still the problem of the pit, however. At that time the Territorial Army were demolishing a railway siding and needed somewhere to dump the rubble. Mr. Fisher told them that he knew the very place and it was only about five miles away. (He now admits it was more like nine-and-a-half!). His wife provided hot soup and food for the soldiers as they worked. Now the village has its playing field, with a new pavilion being built.

There are three churches in Rocklands. St. Andrew's has been a ruin since the 18th century but St. Peter's and All Saints' are still thriving. Verger of All Saints' is Miss Joyce Fisher, cousin of Stan. In the churchyard stands the tiny National School room which is still used as a Sunday School. Miss Fisher told us that the early part of the church dated from the 11th century, the thickness of the walls showing that the structure is Anglo-Saxon. Notable features inside the church include a hand-pumped organ, an unusual Victorian centre panel in the east window and an Anglo-Saxon coffin slab.

Mr. Francis Dove was born in a house which was then a bakery and is now a grocer's shop and post office. The Doves have been here for over a century. About 10 years ago Francis



Mr. Harold Webster.



Local W.I. treasurer Mrs. Joan Woodruff.

Dove became fed up with rising at 4 a.m. every day to bake bread. "I had done half a day's work when other people were just starting out," he said. "I did one-and-a-half days work each day." So he gave up baking and devoted his time to groceries and running the post office.

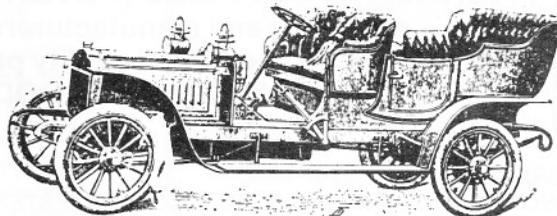
Mr. Harold Webster has lived in the village for eighty years, forty of which were spent working in an ironmonger's shop. During the war he was in the fire

service in London. Some of his experiences were recounted in Norman Longmate's book *The Doodlebugs* (Hutchinson, 1981).

Mr. Webster has many memories of old Rocklands: the cavalcade of trailers and caravans at the annual fair; the travelling puppet theatre; going to Watton Show in farm waggons; village dances, with behaviour strictly supervised, in the 1920s; and being soaked to the skin coming home from an outing to Cromer in open lorries.

Mr. Webster also recalled the village characters, like the poachers for whom he used to load cartridges in the shop; and the dismissed farm worker whose parting malediction was, "I hope it rains on everybody's fields except yours!."

*The ruined St. Andrew's Church. All Saints' can be seen in the background.*



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