

A Social History of the Parish of Albury over the past 40 years

Albury is a rural parish, extending northwards of Newlands Corner and southwards into Winterfold Forest, and including Albury Heath and Farley Heath as prominent open spaces. Housing is mainly along the A248 through the village in the Tillingbourne Valley and then uphill to Brook and Farley Green. As this is not only Green Belt, but also an Area of Natural Beauty and Outstanding Scenic Value, development is strictly controlled, though recent changes in permitted development rules have allowed more extensions without the need for planning permission.

Employment opportunities

Without local employment opportunities, Albury could easily be a mere dormitory serving London, Guildford and other towns, so changes in the patterns of employment are interesting for life in the village. Albury Estate has always been an important employer, and the change has been mainly in moving from direct employment (now about half that in the 70s) to the use of contractors/self-employed workers. For example, the Estate sawmill is now contracted out, and mechanisation generally means many fewer workers: previously tenant farmers had employees, now there is only one at Water Farm. This has also meant a change in the population: previously most of the workers had been here all their lives.

It can, however, be seen that the loss of some opportunities, such as Weston Farm (formerly an intensive chicken farm), has made possible the setting up of a considerable number of small businesses, increasing from the 1980s to about twenty-four at the moment along the A248 in Weston Farm, Weston Yard, Home Farm and Albury Park, plus three in Water Lane and cafes and restaurants on Newlands Corner.

Albury Mansion used to employ a number of people. Up to 1969 we were able to visit it as a stately home; the Estate then sold it for use as retirement apartments, but it closed in 2010.

When the Woodhill sandpit closed in the 1980s, it was used for several years by a car mechanic. Since this use has no longer been permitted, the site remains barricaded off and inaccessible.

Rural occupations have changed over the years. Agriculture and forestry used to account for 60-70% of the Estate's activities, but they now barely constitute 10%. There were five milking herds in the 1970s, with two farms delivering direct to houses in Brook and Farley Green. Milk production on this scale ceased to be financially viable in the 1980s, some farms ceasing to operate altogether, others changing to beef cattle. We no longer see pigs on Albury Heath nor on Farley Hall land. Nor do we see our shepherdess on her motorbike.

There has been an increase in small holdings however, and although there are considerably fewer farm animals (Farley Hall sold its beef cattle in the late 1990s), there is an increase in the number of horses – hacking and liveries are important aspects. Other leisure pursuits such as fishing are reflected in the fisheries set up by Albury Estate along the main road in 1984. Similarly the erstwhile watercress beds were abandoned and trout ponds built there instead. Fishing tackle is sold where there used to be a garage and petrol station.

New ventures have appeared in the last ten years. Opportunities for the sale and purchase of paintings, sculpture and other crafts are possible at regular exhibitions, and three new vineyards have been created. Scotland Farm (*is this in the parish?*), having produced local specialist cheeses in the 1980s, now houses a microbrewery supplying pubs in the area.

Shops and Services

At the beginning of the 1970s, there were shops in Albury and Brook, two farms delivering milk, a baker in Albury who also delivered to Farley Green, an itinerant tinker, a butcher's van, a garage and petrol station, a doctor's surgery and a school. First to disappear was Albury Primary School, which closed in 1974.

Children in Albury had been able to walk to the school on Albury Heath and now have to catch a bus to Chilworth, attending Chilworth First School and then Tillingbourne Middle School. The latter was for some years in the catchment area for Broadwater School in Godalming, and the children thus lost all local connection and became dependent on school transport. Children attending state schools now travel to schools in Guildford or Cranleigh

The other services disappeared in the 1980s, but the Post Office was saved by Albury Estate, which bought the shop in 2001. There was a fish and chip van in Farley Green for about five years in the late 80s and early 90s.

The bus to Farley Green had its timetable gradually cut from a regular daily bus to Guildford, which served workers, shoppers and school children, to one which ran in term time only for the use of school children, and then a twice-weekly service for shoppers, finally ceasing altogether in the 1990s. Those people without their own transport are dependent on taxis, and for car drivers, the consequence of there being no bus service is that the road up to Farley Green is no longer gritted in bad winter weather.

Albury Village Hall continues to play an important part in the life of the village, providing a venue for various activities, societies and parish meetings. 40 years ago it had no heating, but the Estate refurbished it, thereby also providing space for offices. However, running the Hall costs the Parish about £10,000 over receipts for use of the building.

Housing

Housing development has occurred mainly as a result of a change of use or demolition of existing buildings. The 1980s saw Weston Farm shut and cottages converted from the farm buildings. Bakery Mews was created after the baker shut in the 1980s. The 1980s also saw the policy of selling council houses into private ownership, both in Kingsfield, Farley Green and most of Westonfields. In the 1990s, the milk delivery premises next to the village shop ceased to operate and the land was developed for housing. Likewise in the 1990s, Tupperts Court, a home for older people, was demolished, and there is now no such facility in the village. The site has been developed for housing. At the end of the century the Millennium Cottages were built on disused allotments and the Old Mill converted to housing.

Edgeley Holiday Park in Farley Green has developed from a camping and caravanning site to permanently sited caravans to luxury lodges, with the result that the residents are now a much more stable population. With the very high prices for property, the importance of housing rented out by the Estate can be seen, as the rents charged are not fully economic.

External pressures

When the sandpit at Woodhill closed, the proposed landfill use was prevented, but the sandpit on the A25 started to be used for landfill in the 1990s, with the permanent destruction of Weston Wood and archaeological evidence of a prehistoric site. There have since been constant problems of odours, as well as the disfigurement of the hillside. However, the tip is now nearly full and restoration of the landscape can then be planned.

Also in the 1990s a well was drilled in Albury Park, and gas was found. After initial problems with noise, the present gas well is discreetly hidden in Albury Park. Proposals for drilling with a view to storing gas in geological strata beneath Albury and Blackheath were strongly resisted by residents, and at present have been reduced to a planning application to utilise the gas which already exists.

Generally it can be said that Albury Estate is now being managed much more as a business, with conservation rather than preservation being the philosophy of the trustees. A telephone mast can now be seen in Albury Park.

Forestry Commission land in Farley Green, part of the Hurtwood, was sold into private ownership twenty years ago. Locals used to walk and ride freely in the forest and now have to keep to the public paths.

Churches

There are 4 churches in the parish: the Parish Church in Albury, the Barn Church in Farley Green, which are both used regularly for religious services, the Old Church in Albury Park, which has a midsummer service and a carol service, and the Catholic Apostolic Church which has not been used for religious services for many years – previously it was open to visitors, but that possibility no longer exists.

The Rectors, now Vicars, of Albury have played an important role in the social life of the village. In his time as Rector, the Reverend Dudley Gummer started the Parish Magazine, which increasingly carries articles of a non-religious nature of interest to inhabitants. The Gummers left in 1995, and in 1998 Albury became part of the United Benefice of Albury, Chilworth and Shere, losing its stipendiary Rector. The Rector of the Benefice, based in Shere, realising that no leisure facilities existed for young people aged 12 and over was

the inspiration for the foundation of the Lychgate Youth Trust in 2000. In 2002 a youth worker was recruited and funded to work with young people in the Benefice. Funding a full-time youth worker was no longer possible after 2008, and the Trust now seeks to support financially other organisations in their youth work within the Benefice.

The Reverend Ken Hobbs was the (non-stipendiary) Vicar of Albury for 10 years, leaving in September 2011. During his time, the congregation, which was small and ageing, greatly increased with the average age going down by several decades. The church is now a more welcoming place for families and services are more accessible to those with no previous church background. As there were no clubs specifically for Albury children, Ken started 'six²⁵' for younger children and 'Friday Night Live' for older ones (in practice, 14 seems to be the age at which there is no further interest in a youth club). On a wider front, his involvement with community events led to an increase in social activities led by the church.

The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, in the heart of the village, has been refurbished, with a new stained glass window and an extension planned. The Friends of St Michael's was founded in 1985 to support the upkeep of the Barn Church in Farley Green. The Old Church, also known as the Saxon Church, as parts of the building date back to pre-1066, was initially left to decay after St Peter and St Paul was built in 1841. It was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1974 which rebuilt the chancel at the east end, and is responsible for the fabric of the building. The Old Church Committee keeps the church clean and attractive with flowers. With the Trust's permission, it puts on flower festivals, exhibitions and concerts which raise money for items not funded by the Trust, such as the wire bird doors and the publications available inside the church. The Old Church is now open every day and draws a great number of visitors including from other parts of the world.

GASP

Originally set up under the Lychgate Youth Trust in 2002, GASP (Gomshall-Albury-Shere-Peaslake) is a club for boys and girls over 14 to give them hands-on experience of basic motor engineering, with courses taking place in a custom-built workshop, the building of which was completed in 2005. In 2009 GASP, which was not part of church activities and was financed and managed separately from the Lychgate Trust, was set up as a charity in its own right and a company limited by guarantee. Its work has grown well beyond the initial concept, its evening sessions now extended to mornings, catering for children sent by the Surrey Youth Justice Service and working with schools for children with learning difficulties such as St. Joseph's. The original workshop is no longer available to them, and, working with Albury Estate, planning permission has been granted for a site on the Albury landfill when vacated by SITA – the Estate would finance the building, GASP its fitting-out and the employment of a CEO and manager.

Albury Trust

This was founded in 1979 as a registered charity to help preserve or improve buildings and amenities of special interest or beauty in the district of Albury. Projects of a permanent nature completed over the years have included the restoration of the Pigeon House in Weston Yard, the provision of wrought iron village signs at each end of Albury and the construction of the Montgomery Memorial and seats on Albury Heath. The Trust's publication 'The Albury Signpost' is designed to provide information on the Parish for new residents. A programme of cultural and social events also enhances the quality of life in the village.

Albury History Society

Founded in 1971 with the objectives of recording and promoting interest in the history of Albury, the Society mounts regular illustrated talks and visits to places of historical interest. It built up over the years an extensive archive of historical material. In 2008 the difficult but sensible decision was taken to place its records in the safe keeping of the Surrey History Centre in Woking. They have now been catalogued and are available for visitors, whether for research or general interest, many of whom come from other parts of the world. For over twenty-five years the History Society mounted Old Church Evenings recounting the history of Albury, the last one being in 2006.

Other areas of research:

Archaeological: As access to the prehistoric site in Weston Wood has been lost under the landfill, the other area of interest is the Romano-British Temple on Farley Heath, a Scheduled Monument. This had not been

excavated since before World War II, and was re-excavated in 1994 by English Heritage in the hope that modern methods would uncover more information. Nothing new was found, but the perimeter wall of the Temple was reconstructed (there was no trace of the temenos wall) and a board erected close by with a drawing of what the Temple would most probably have looked like.

Geological: About ten years ago, the Newlands Corner-Albury Geology Trail was created by Surrey group of RIGS (Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites). Backed by a booklet, there are 9 'stops' marked on the trail to draw attention to geological, natural and historical aspects of the five mile walk.

Albury WI

40 years ago there was an afternoon WI with a membership which was gradually becoming older, and in 1976 a younger group set up the Albury Evening WI which is more outward-looking and more vocal on political matters (and the singing of 'Jerusalem' no longer starts their meetings). The aims remain educational and companionship. However, now its membership is similarly growing older, and it is interesting that a new group calling itself 'Jam Free WI' has been set up in Shalford to cater for younger women in the area.

Albury Produce Association

2011 saw the 65th Produce Show. Taking place in a large marquee by Albury cricket pitch, this shows off the efforts made by the many keen gardeners in Albury, as well as cookery, flower-arranging and other crafts. It is combined with a fair with various stalls and such perennial favourites as terrier racing. This is an important social event with a Barn Dance taking place in the marquee in the evening, one of the few occasions attended by all generations. Not only has the Show itself grown in size over the years, but the marquee is also used for a church service on the Sunday morning, and for the last 3 years, an Albury Free Festival has taken place during the afternoon and evening with rock, jazz and folk music.

Friends of the Hurtwood

The open countryside between Albury, Blackheath, Shere, Peaslake, Ewhurst and Holmbury is a landscape much loved by walkers and horse riders, and maintaining access has been the work of the Friends of the Hurtwood (previously known as the Hurtwood Control Trust) for over ten years. During that time car parks have been maintained, paths cleared, views kept open, fires and fly tipping dealt with and the mountain biking phenomenon managed.

Albury Bowling Club

This has grown in size, building a new pavilion, including car park and surrounds. Its green now attracts many top competitions.

Cricket and Football

Both clubs have expanded during this time with an increasing participation of young people: there are over 100 juniors involved in cricket, and Albury Eagles Junior Football Club has grown since its formation in 2002 to about 130 members ranging from under 6s to under 13s. The pavilion on Albury Heath was rebuilt in brick some thirty years ago and is now well-equipped.

Contributions to leisure activities by Albury Estate

The Green at Farley Green and the Recreation Ground in Albury village were given by the Estate to the Parish Council. Fishermen welcomed the establishment of the Estate fisheries. Land for the Burger Bar on Newlands Corner is rented out by the Estate, which is also concerned by the increased pressure of public access, causing wear and tear and erosion. The local authorities have been involved in the necessary maintenance, but this source of money has been cut off during the last year by reductions in spending.

Parish Council

The running of the Council has been reorganised so that Councillors take particular responsibility for: planning, facilities, open spaces, community development and the environment. Visual aspects of the village have been enhanced, and there is now more forward planning to deal with eventualities such as bad weather. The increasing flow of traffic through the village continues to be a matter of concern.