

Chapter 5 *The Village in Action*

*In all the various disciplines of Sport
Inter-village battles have been fought
At football, cricket, tennis even darts.
Villagers accomplished in the Social Arts,
Revel, feast, combine and sing in choirs
And variously fulfil their hearts' desires.
To know about the goings-on there've been
You only have to read the Village Magazine.*

Stevington has always been the sort of village where folk seize every opportunity to come together to enjoy themselves. The pubs and sports clubs have always provided the ideal rendezvous.

Pubs

In the good old days Stevington boasted at least four pubs, but today it is left to the *Royal George* and *Red Lion* to welcome us and keep us supplied. The *Royal George* retains its original cosy, low oak beam charm. The current landlord is Gary Harber [185] who has a reputation for traditional cooking, and a Tuesday dining club meets to enjoy it regularly [189]. The pub attracts many visitors and a recent visit by the French Resistance *Michelles* can be seen in **Plate 203**, while some of the regulars tend to get into the habit [204]. Festivals are observed here and a photograph taken from the front door shows Richard Galley standing in Silver Street piping in the New Year [197]. The pub hosts many competitive sporting activities including pool, darts and even golf, and for many a year has fielded successful quiz teams.

The *Red Lion*, overlooking the Cross, is the oldest watering hole in the Village (though rebuilt in the 1880s on the site of the earlier alehouse), and with its larger gardens attracts the outdoor type, in summer at least [194]. Geoff and Karen Gallimore [186], as landlord and landlady until May 2004, continued the tradition of having live music about the place. **Plate 188** is of the new landlords, Jim Wannerton and Jodie Hague, seen here with Jeanette Wannerton **Plate 200** shows the outside of the *Red Lion* some 50 years or so ago with an interesting trio who look as though they are set to enthral, while **Plate 199** shows Pete Bonas with his

brother Paul Bonas (formerly of Silver Street), serenading their audience in more recent times [201]. Also, being close to the Cross, the *Lion* has long been a favoured venue of the Bedford Morris who regularly dance outside and drink within [195 and 196].

Plates 184 and 187 are rare shots of Thomas Burrige who married Martha Field (nee Ruffhead), the first licensee of the rebuilt *Red Lion*. She also owned the brickworks next to the house now called *Tankards* on the Pavenham Road. Burrige kept the *Lion* from 1903-46. His wife had held the licence from 1891-1903.

The *Red Lion* has its fair share of regulars, and the three with the prettiest legs can be seen enjoying a pint in the bar [190] though they cannot compete in pulchritude with the friendly staff [202]. The pub supports a good number of pub games and **Plate 191** shows the local Women's Institute darts team who seem to be 3:1 up against their opponents.

Some former publicans got on so well with their customers that they settled in the Village. Jennifer and Graham Benthams kept the *George* from 1988 to 1992 [183]; Pam Luck (see 189) followed the Benthams. Peter and Sue Bishop kept the *Lion* from 1977-86 [182]; and Anne and Brian Westbrook followed them from 1992-4 [181].

Sport

Until fairly recent years Stevington's sporting life centred on outdoor pursuits, especially football and cricket. Both have had a following in the Village for so long that just which one came first is lost in the mists of time. However, it is known that both have been played for well over a century, and certainly by 1901 both had estab-

lished clubs and were competing with teams from neighbouring villages. Like all clubs their fortunes waxed and waned with some notable successes and defeats.

Plate 209 is the oldest photograph of the *Stevington Football Team* taken early in the 20th Century. The two players we have identified are Alan Cox's uncle, Phil Cox, and Billy Field.

Plates 210, 211 and 212 are of the Stevington football teams of the 1950s and portray some dedicated club members. Most tasted victory when the teams won the divisional championships in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Village currently has two football teams playing respectively in the Bedford and District League (Premier Division) and in Associate Division One. **Plates 213 and 214** show the first XI in action, including long-established players such as Gareth and Darren King. They are coached by Roger Easingwood [216] and encouraged and supported by Dennis King [215] who has tended the playing field with loving care for many years. There is also a band of keen youngsters who pursue the sport and use the five-a-side facilities at the playing field [217].

The *Stevington Cricket XI* plays in the Bedford and District Leagues and **Plates 223 and 224** show them in action. **Plate 225** is of the supporters' club; Lucy King keeps a spare ball in case of the odd "over the hedge" sixer. Earlier teams are shown in **Plates 218 and 219** and these include some of the Village's celebrated sportsmen. One of the more unusual matches to take place on the playing field occurred in 1977 during the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. The ladies of the Village challenged the men, the twist being that the men, playing left-handed, had to dress as women and *vice versa*. All rose to the occasion with a spectacular catch being made by the late Brian Hopkinson (former landlord of the *Royal George*) in his handbag. **Plates 221 and 222** show the teams, but just who played for whom and what the final score was remains a mystery to all concerned, not least the spectators.

The cricket and football teams have traditionally drawn on the same pool of enthusiasts. George Curtis, holding the ball in **Plate 212**, was one of those who excelled at both the sum-

mer and the winter game.

The *Social Centre* acts as the hub for many Village activities and one of the "new" sports that has gained in popularity and takes place there is carpet bowls. The Club was formed by a group of enthusiasts in 1990 spearheaded by Mick Haggerwood. Within a few years of its formation, the Club won the Knock-Out Championship in Luton and continues to compete in the local leagues [226-228]. Stan Walker's son and grandson have both followed in his bowling footsteps, and **Plate 236** shows the three of them in their club strip.

During the 1920s and 1930s a Tennis Club thrived in the Village [233], playing on the court at Marion Field's house. Nowadays it is table tennis that is proving more popular, with five teams currently enjoying success in the Bedford and District League. **Plates 229 and 230** show the action and the concentration. **Plate 231** shows Clive Rudd, Norman Beesley, and Malcolm Nightingale, founder members of the Stevington Club, while **Plate 232** shows Roger Day and Richard Blayney celebrating their victory in the Milton Keynes Summer League in 2002.

A regular event at the Village fete used to be a tug of war match and **Plate 240** shows a winning combination that included Charlie Finch and Chris Boniface.

Bedford Sailing Club, founded in 1954, is also an integral part of the Village sporting scene, having attracted many dinghy sailors and families over the years to its beautiful location by the river. **Plate 268** shows young beginners enjoying their first sailing experience. Some of those who learnt the ropes at the Sailing Club have gone on to ocean sailing. The Club's compound is a sought-after venue for barbecues [275], birthday celebrations and even wedding receptions. In **Plate 274** two Club stalwarts guard the beer at the Summer Barbecue while things happen on the water [270-72]. Chris Boniface [479] ensures that this beautiful spot always looks good. The present Commodore is Lynn Christison (see 325). Other recent Commodores include Peter Francis [239], Peter Hart (see 410) and Fiona Frossell.

In 1983 Charlie Homer [261] instigated the first Stevington 7.5 mile road race. It is held each May and continues to attract many runners, young and old, from all over the country. **Plate 247** shows George Strong starting one of the first runs, while **Plate 248**, taken just a few years ago, shows the start from outside the Village Hall. **Plate 249** shows the new "fast start" technique currently being used by the Stevington youngsters. Getting to the finish line is a real achievement and **Plates 250-257** show just how hard it gets. The reception and medal awarded by our Brownie troop [258] is very welcome indeed.

Bill Harris of Court Lane was a talented runner in his time. He competed in cross-country for the County and for British Rail and was Bedford Athletic Club champion in the late 1950s at cross country, road and track over distances of two to 15 miles [259 and 260]. Cycling to work at Bedford Station kept him fit. David Stanbridge was also quick out of the blocks in his day [245].

Mike Grafton, who played football and cricket for Stevington, as well as football in the Isthmian League and cricket at county league level, instigated and organized the Stevington Ski Trips in the 1980s and 1990s [242]. The first, at Serre Chevalier, included over 50 Villagers aged six to 60. Mike is pictured here with his wife, Angie [241], who played squash at County level. Anne Seaton [235] played tennis for the County and still plays at that level as a veteran. In 1984 the Village ladies were champions in the Inter Village Sports [234]. Rosemary Stanbridge [237] played netball for Northants and hockey for Bedfordshire. Natalie Ward played rounders at a national level [265] and her sister, Stephanie, competed in gymnastics at the same level.

Village sporting achievements cover a wide range of activities and there have been many successful individuals including the late Brian "Bumble" Stapleton and Peter Jackson [238], both of whom played for Bedford RUFC ("The Blues"). Peter also represented the East Midlands. "Titch" Haynes, who lived in Farley Way in the 1970s, was a celebrated Blues player and regularly represented the East Midlands; he was later President of the Club.

Indeed, Stevington abounds in sporting talent. For example, Jane Poulter [243] was an international oarswoman. Some Village residents of the past have been international celebrities such as Diane Leather, the former women's one mile world record holder, and more recently the Olympic oarsman, Graham Smith, lately of Duck End House. Paula Radcliffe was a frequent if fleeting visitor as she pounded through the North Bedfordshire lanes in training.

Riding has a keen following in the Village and some youngsters have excelled at an international level: Harriet Cole represented Great Britain as a junior [262]. Nick Finch [263] and Charlotte Finch [264] represented Oakley Hunt West in tetrathlon competitions at a national level. Swimming and deep sea diving have also enjoyed popularity, but one of the rarest pursuits must be kite bugging, practised by Mike Bush and his sons [266].

An exponent of something entirely different is Stuart Robinson who held the world model powerboat record and was president of the sport's governing body for some years [267]. James Petre's pursuit is also somewhat out of the ordinary [244]. He climbs the "Munros", the significant Scottish peaks, and has conquered over half of the 284 odd total.

However, fishing attracts the greatest numbers and can be fiercely competitive. Even so, it has its more relaxing moments. The lads are tying flies in the *Red Lion* in anticipation of the next catch and in mellow mood reminiscing over the size of the last (see 207). John Duffield (far right) has captained an England team against Scotland in a fly-fishing competition. On the other hand Rob Puckett does not have to dream; he has actually caught something (see Chapter 7 475).

Cycling has been an active pastime for some time with the Ouse Valley offering many challenges. **Plates 276 and 277** show some cyclists enjoying a ride through the Village, while in **Plate 279** Roger Seaton's battery seems to have run out. Not so Marion Field's [287]. Most, it appears, prefer not to be self-propelled [281-286], although Gill King seems to be less nervous about travelling solo [280]. For others, who enjoy Stevington's network of footpaths,

Shanks' pony is good enough [330]. And there's always the scooter [299].

Leisure

It should not be imagined for one moment that all Village activity is concentrated in the pubs or even on the playing field. Until the late 19th Century most social activity revolved around the three churches. The advent of the bicycle and the internal combustion engine radically affected mobility and the motorised charabanc, previously horse-drawn [289], brought the "outing" into being [294]. **Plates 292 and 293** show the "Bluebird" with and without its hood. Sunday afternoon trips to Turvey for tea were a regular occurrence. The modern version of the charabanc is seen here in the form of David Litchfield's coach [295].

Other modes of transport were used to get to work. The chain ferry in Boat Meadow ferried labourers to the Oakley side to work at Westfield Farm [291], though in this picture not much work is being done.

The harvest supper has always been popular and is traditionally held in the Church Rooms [318-319] and **Plate 320** depicts the auction of harvest vegetables. The Christmas Concert in the Village Hall has also been a well-attended and amusing event for several decades [321-6].

The Silver Jubilee in 1977 saw the Village *en fete* and **Plate 302** shows George Strong opening the Jubilee fete at the playing field when every child received a Jubilee mug. The youngest, Isobel Hart, was six weeks old.

For a number of years the Stevington Guy Fawkes' night was a very popular event [312-317]. Regretfully, stringent health and safety regulations and crippling insurance costs mean that it was last held in 2002.

The Village Hall has witnessed many thespian occasions. There was a theatre group between the Wars, and after the last War there was a new impetus with the production by the Social Centre of *Cinderella* in 1988 [327]. Since then there have been innumerable shows, conducted under the auspices of the Social Centre, the



Sailing Club and others. **Plate 331** shows the girls on form and the impresario himself, Rob Puckett, directing in **Plate 328** and performing in **Plate 335**. **Plate 332** portrays a monstrous regiment of Stevington evacuees in the production *Careless Talk* as well as Charlie Finch on song [333]. The most recent production was of Willie Rushton's *Our Day Out* [329 and 330]. The Village Hall is also a popular venue for parties, wedding receptions, and many other social events [301, 303, 304 and 336-346].

But when all is said and done, many of us simply like to sit and see the world go by [297], and this is not an activity confined to the more mature Villagers [306 and 308].





181 Anne and Brian Westbrook



182 Sue and Peter Bishop



183 Jennifer and Graham Bentham



184 Thomas Burrige outside the *Lion*



190 Anything but Legless: Seaton, Hart and Garrett



194 The Red Lion Garden



195 Morris Men Performing at the Cross



196 Morris Accordion and Squeeze Box



197 The Phantom Piper; Richard Galley



198 The Snarling Beasties



199 Pete and Paul Bonas



200 Wandering Minstrels Outside the Red Lion



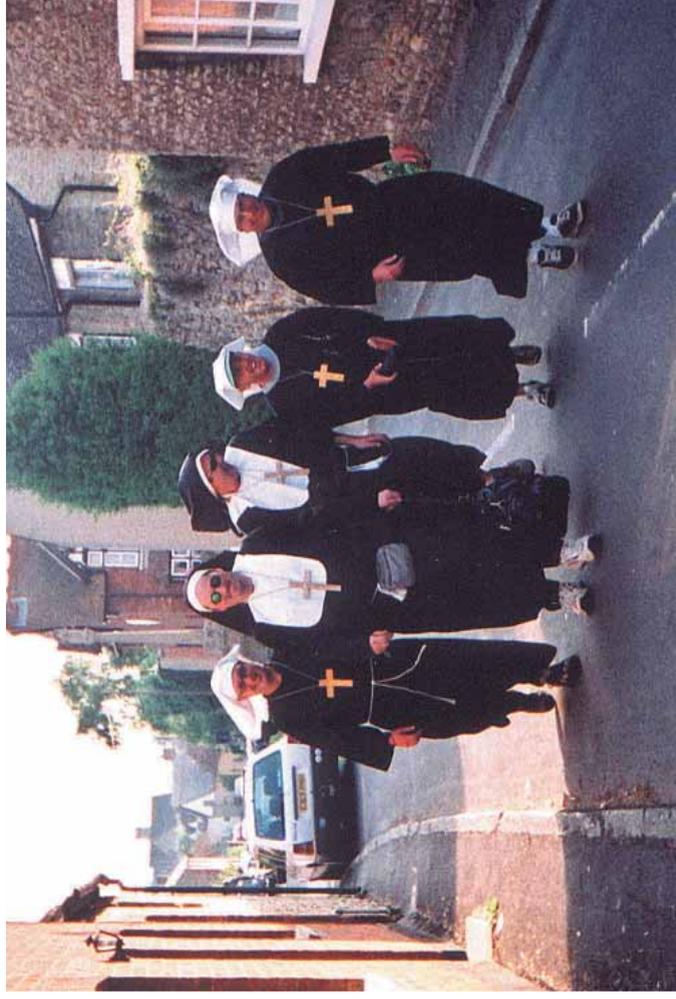
201 A Red Lion Audience



202 Service with a Smile



203 French Resistance Michelles
Christie Fitch, Jane Thomas, Linda Penney, Anne Westbrook, Jackie Ward and Sue Smith



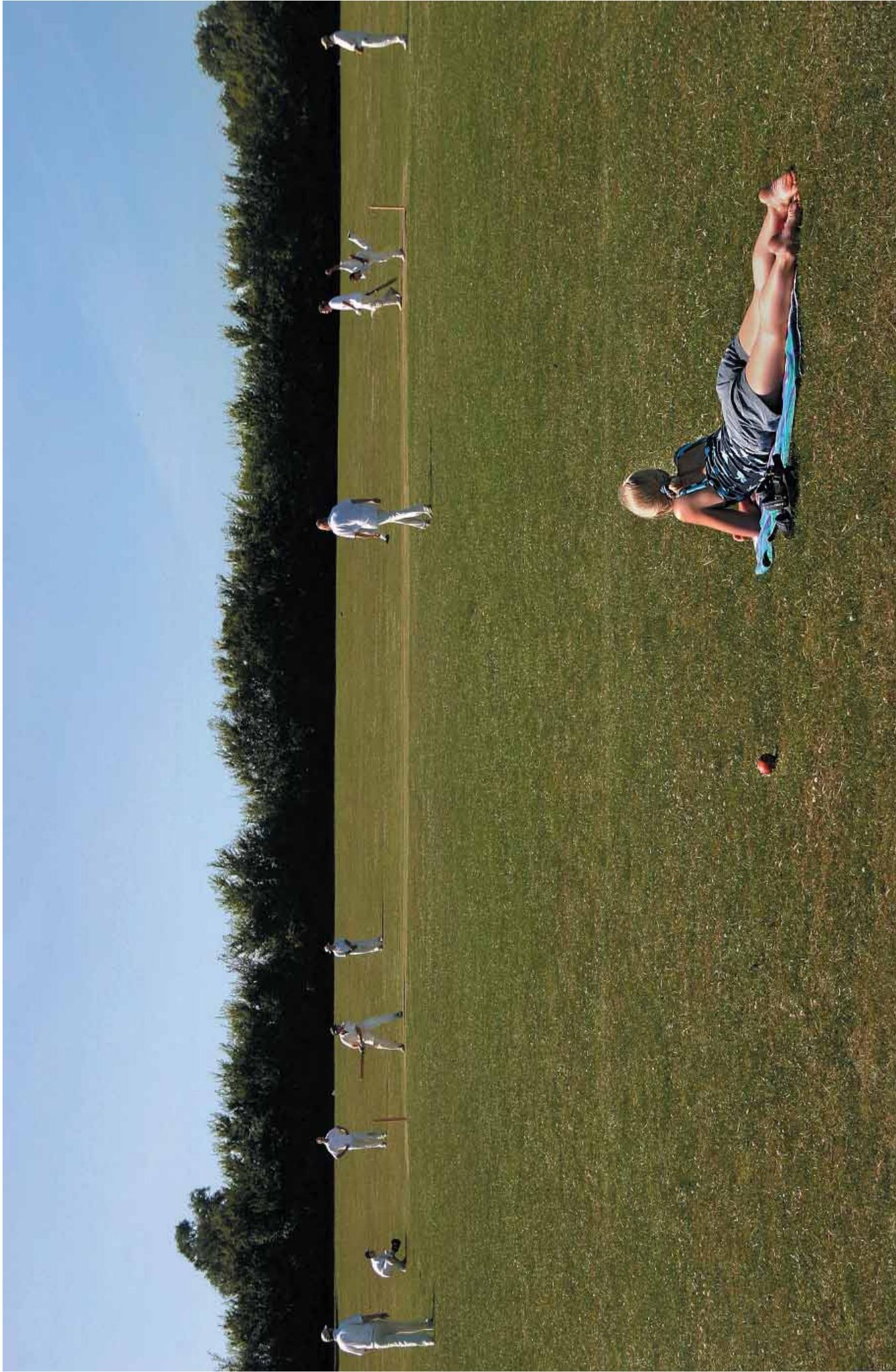
204 Getting into the Habit; en route to the Royal George



223 Stevington Cricket XI in Action

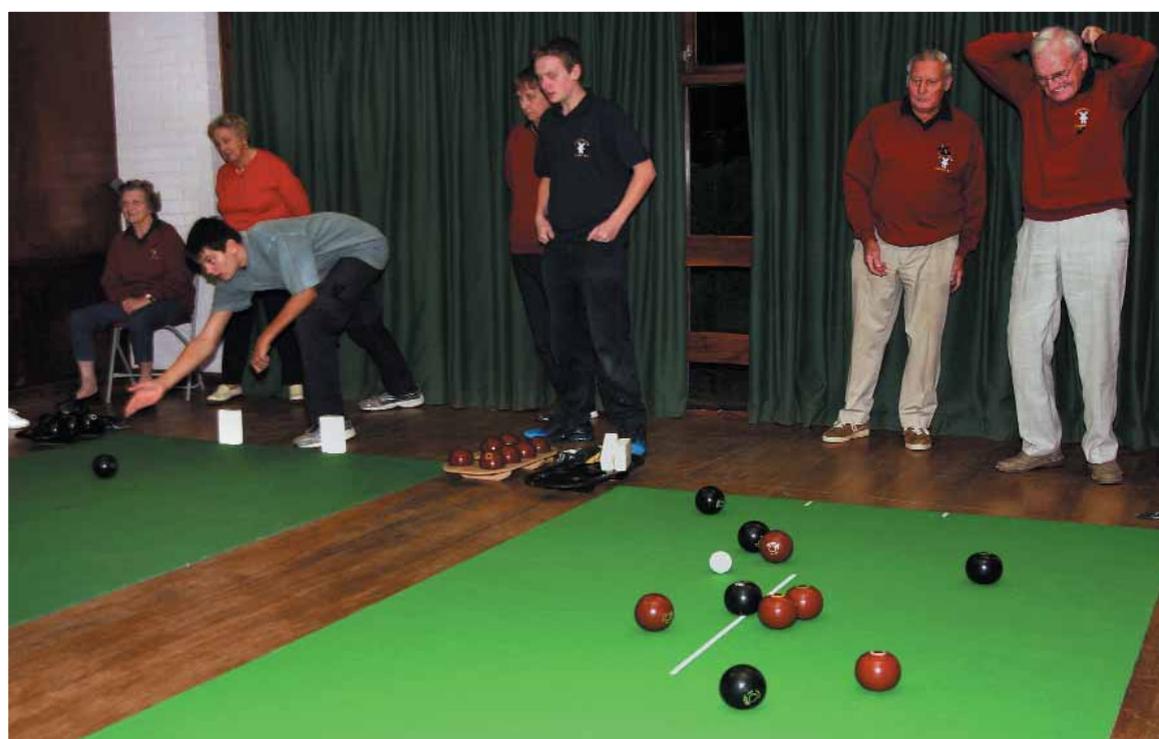


224 Stevington Cricket XI in the Field





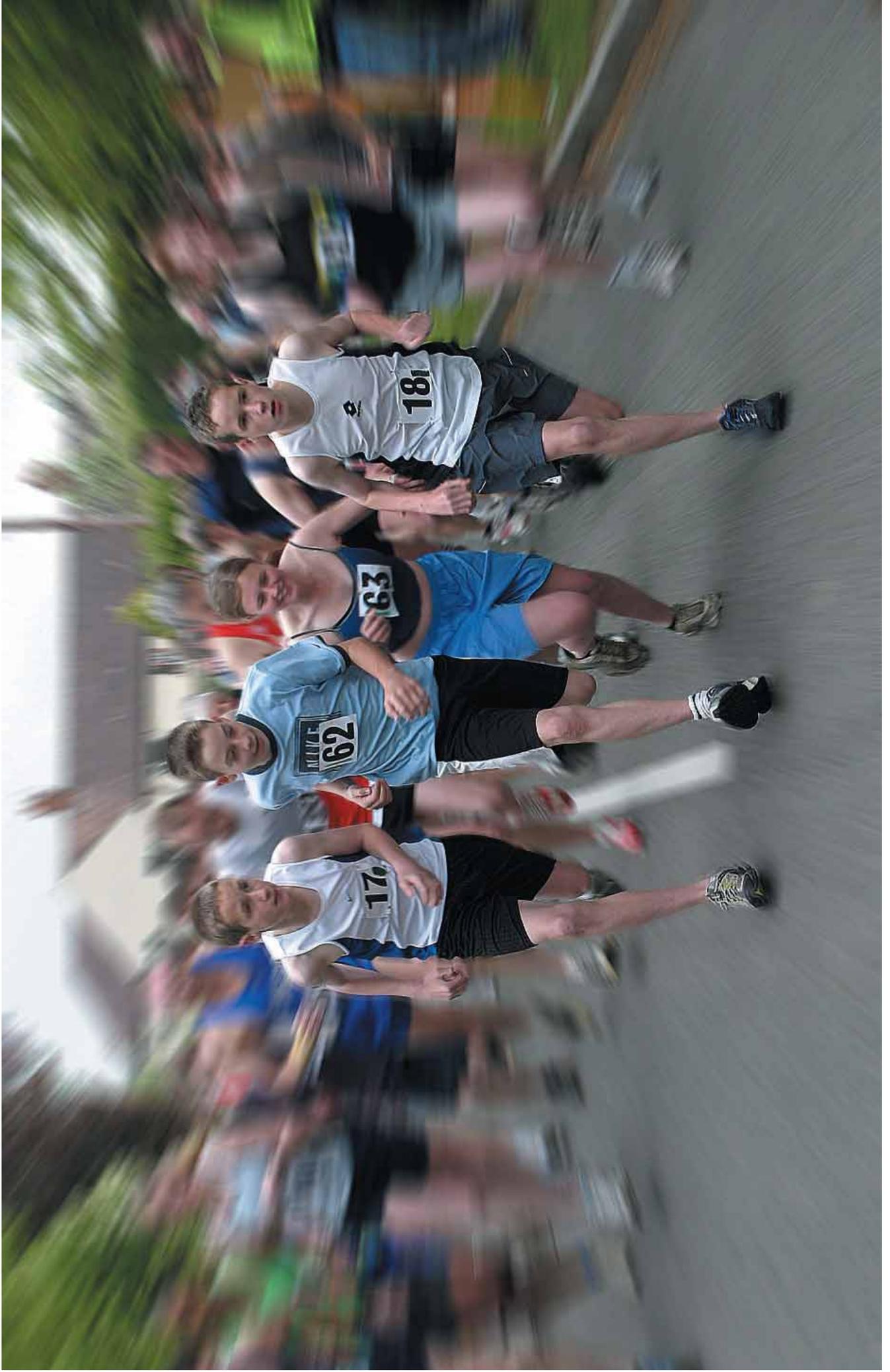
226 Carpet Bowls in Action



227 The Vicar Appeals to the Almighty

228 Just Bowling Along





249 Fast Start Technique: Tom Strutt, Greg Stephenson, Sarah Rock and Joe Strutt

270 Come in No 1
Your Time Is Up



271 Down by the Riverside



272 Warburton Triplets
Coming into Port



280 Uphill Struggle: Gill King



281 Black Leather Convoy



282 Rex Cox on his BSA





285 Stevington's Hell's Angels





336 The Bonas Brothers in Consort



337 The Snarling Beasties in Shadow

