

## Chapter 6      *Making It Happen*

*Religion generates amazing power;  
Saxon Villagers put up St Mary's tower,  
And Bunyan, fired with religious zest  
Inspired dissenting Baptists to protest  
Against Church law and build their Meeting here  
In Stevington. Our Parish Council too  
Shrewdly applies its slender revenue;  
And in the early pages if you look  
You'll see it wisely underwrote this book.*

A significant number of Villagers give up many hours of their time to making organisations function and flourish.

### Governance

Stevington's first local councillors were returned under the Local Government Act 1888. Until 1974 Stevington was part of Bedford Rural District Council. The first councillor of note of whom we have a photograph is Percy Keech [353]. He was a wheelwright, carpenter and undertaker who restored the Windmill after the First World War. He was responsible for bringing foul water drainage to the Village in 1936.

The last Stevington councillor to represent the Village on the RDC before it was abolished on 31 March 1974 was Paul Hodgkinson [357]. He did much useful work for the Village while on the Council and afterwards, as he was a keen supporter of the football and cricket clubs and also choirmaster at St Mary's. He was an accomplished pianist and often played the organ in church. When the Church was heated by solid fuel Paul stoked the boiler and the crunch of coke underfoot at Evensong was a sure indication that he had been there. His untimely death in 1995 robbed the Village of an undoubted character.

Jim Brandon of Carlton has represented Stevington as an Independent on the Bedford Borough Council since 1983 (see 363). At County level, the first councillor elected after reorganisation in 1974 was Dr Mike Kelly. He was succeeded by Phyllis Gershon of Harrold who still represents the Village (see 363).

The Parish Council as a civil parish council first

met in 1894. Two former parish councillors of long-standing who served the Council post-war are pictured in Chapter 7: Marion Field (see Chapter 7 470) and Ken Prentice, seen here with his family (see Chapter 7 480) and in **Plate 354** on parade. Ken's cousin, John Prentice, who farmed at Manor Farm, was also active on the Parish Council. Another long-serving councillor was Alan Cox (see *Village History* page 111). He has been an elder of the Baptist Meeting for over fifty years and was Secretary of the Football Club from 1934 until Dennis King took over some thirty years ago.

David Stanbridge [361] connects their era with the present day. A farmer, born in Stevington at Duck End Farm, he has served on the Parish Council since 1970 and was chairman from 1970 to 1981. He is also chairman of the Stevington Historical Trust and a trustee of the Barringer Trust.

The present Parish Council is chaired by Doreen Pendlington [358]. A former teacher, she has been Chairman since 1998. She is seen here with the 2004 Parish Council [363]. The other occupants of the chair since David Stanbridge stood down were Paul Middleton (1981-85) [359], Ken Davies (1985-91) [360], and John Ward (1991-98) [362].

### Religion

There were three churches in Stevington until comparatively recent times: St Mary's, the Baptist Chapel and the Primitive Methodist Chapel. The "Prims" closed in 1957 but took on a new lease of life as the workshop of Robert Shaftoe, organ builder [386]. The buildings are illustrated in Chapter 3.

## *St Mary's*

The earliest picture we have of any Stevington clergyman is that of the then vicar, Rev J R H Duke, officiating at the laying of the foundation stone of the Church Rooms in 1897 (see *Village History* page 99). He was vicar when a dispute arose over the use of the Church Rooms which led to a certain coolness between Anglicans and Non-Conformists which fortunately has been healed in recent times. **Plate 365** shows Canon Arthur Sproule officiating in 1927 at the dedication of the War Memorial.

Of the post-War incumbents, Rev Donald Macrory [**366**], a learned Ulsterman, is still remembered with affection by many. He was a mild-mannered, even shy, man whose pastoral care was outstanding. He was vicar from 1968 until 1976 and was the last incumbent to live in the Vicarage. Father Lawrence MacDonald was priest in charge from 1999 to 2003 (see Chapter 5 **227 and 320**). His successor, Rev David Hunter [**368**], is from New Zealand.

St Mary's has been well-served over the years by some exceptional church wardens. The late Eddie Clayton, pictured here with his fellow churchwarden at the time, Ken Ward, and Rev Geoffrey Cowley [**367**], is reputed to have regularly rung three of the Church bells unaided.

Marina and Albert Markham have long been active in church affairs and have held churchwarden posts at different times (see Chapter 7 **468**). The current churchwarden is Jean Lockwood (see **364**).

The bells fell silent from 1978 because the cradle was dangerous. With some crucial assistance from Tony Hollins, a metallurgist and foundryman of Farley Way (see Chapter 5 **278**), the bells rang out again in 1991. **Plates 387 and 388** show the strengthening of the Anglo-Saxon tower in progress, while **Plates 389 and 390** show the operation of re-hanging the bells. Meanwhile, the old tower team had melted away and the task of training a new team fell to Patrick Albon, formerly of Park Road.

The first tower captain of the new team was David Gorham of Burridge's Close [**391**]. The

current tower captain is Rosemary Maclaine seen below with current members of the team [**392**].

St Mary's has had number of regular organists in recent times. Ann Warburton is pictured in **Plate 395**. Until recently she coached and conducted the choir which is convened on an *ad hoc* basis, principally for the Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols [**393**] and the Village Hall concert. She has passed the baton to Philip Bond. **Plate 397** is of Josie Hunter who was an organist for many years. Philip Bond also plays the organ in Church from time to time (see Chapter 5 **324**).

Ralph Jeffries of Silver Street built the Church pulpit and also made the Church gates [**394 and 396**]. He learnt his joinery at J P White's in Bedford and then worked for many years at the Royal Aeronautical Establishment at Thurleigh.

The Parochial Church Council was established in its current form in 1894 when the civil Parish Council separated from the Vestry. The current PCC is pictured below [**364**].

A goodly number of weddings, baptisms and funerals are held at St Mary's each year, as they are at the Baptist Meeting. A few of the happier occasions are illustrated below [**369, 370, 373 and 374**] and one of the recent sad occasions [**371 and 372**]. One popular event in the Church calendar is the Christingle service for children held during Advent [**375 and 376**].

### *The Baptist Meeting*

The Baptist Meeting continues to play a full part in Village life. However, photographs of former pastors are rare and we are fortunate to have one of Rev James H Brooksbank (1928-30) seen here with his wife [**377**]. Trevor Ogden, who came to Stevington from Bromham, is the current pastor. **Plates 378-9** show him taking the service with a congregation while **Plate 380** reveals the font ready for baptismal immersion. In the early years of the Meeting baptism was carried out in a baptismal pool at the river bank. This "special place", probably Woodcraft [**384**], was still being used after the construction of the baptistery in the Church Yard around 1835.

## The School

The School, which opened in 1864 (see Chapter 3 **119**), was first attended by 62 children from the age of three. Sixty years later the roll included some 129 names. One outstanding headmaster, Harry "Daddy" Read (1894 - 1918), ruled with a rod of iron for 24 years, but he had a great affection for his former pupils and wrote innumerable letters to those serving abroad in the First World War. He is seen in **Plate 401** with his wife, Helen (nee Smith), of Duck End [**400**].

Over the years the School achieved notable successes and raised educational standards. Sadly, in 1983, as part of a re-organization of educational policy in Bedfordshire, the School was closed and is now converted into two houses. The last teacher to live in the School House (see Chapter 3 **120**) was Mrs Marion Watkins (nee Tysoe) [**408**]. Some earlier School photographs are reproduced at **Plates 402-4**.

## Trusts

The oldest Village trust is the Barringer Trust established in 1631. It manages its five Almshouses and also owns valuable land in Pavenham (see Chapter 3 **129**). The current chairman is Albert Markham and the other trustees are Aileen English, Reg Bishop, David Stanbridge, Rev Lawrence McDonald and Rev David Hunter.

A more recent Village trust is the Stevington Historical Trust which produced this book and the preceding volume *Stevington: The Village History*. It grew out of an informal group which started to meet, irregularly, in the 1970s and organised exhibitions from time to time. The Trust was formed initially to produce the *Village History*. The current trustees are seen in **Plate 410**. The object of the Trust is to research and popularise the history of Stevington. Its sister group, the Friends, was formed to further this aim. The chairman of the Friends is Peter Conquest, seen here in his 16<sup>th</sup> Century bishop's robes in which he officiates with the Sealed Knot [**411**]. He was Lord-General of the Sealed Knot Royalist Armie from 1986 to 1994. **Plate**

**412** shows him lecturing on Stevington's role in the Civil War, appropriately attired, with a Sealed Knot colleague, musketeer Simon Rockwood. **Plate 413** depicts Stuart Antrobus lecturing to the Friends on the Windmill in 2003.

## Committees

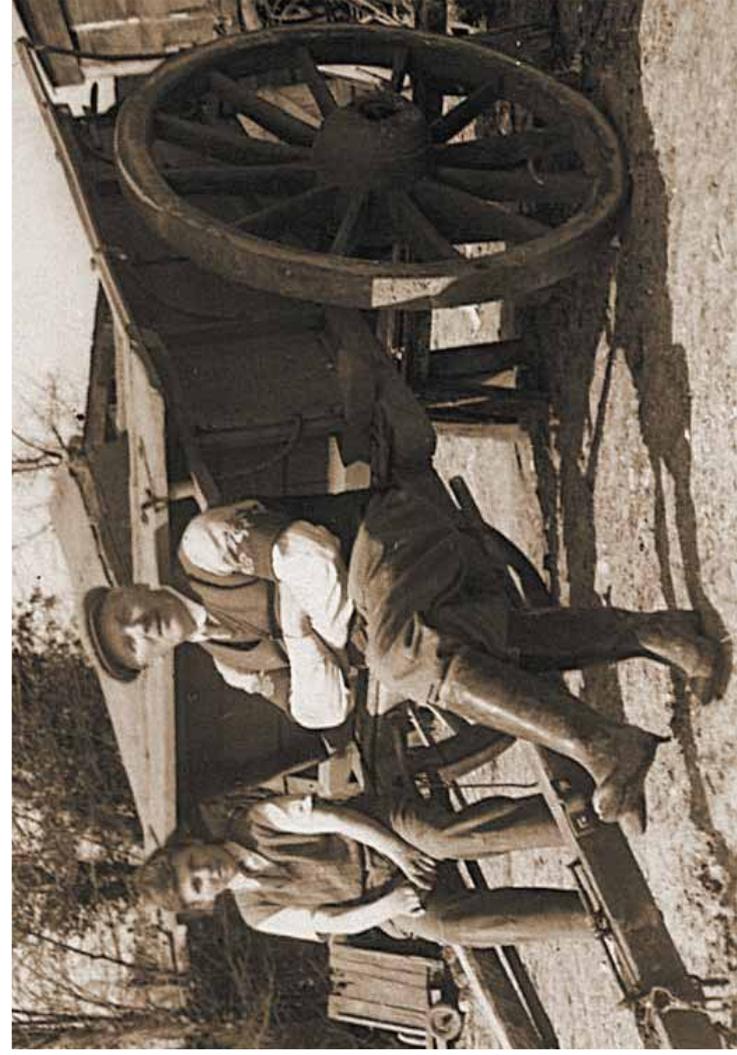
The Social Centre and Village Hall Committee was first established soon after the Second World War and aims to be representative of all leisure interests in the Village. The late Arthur Bowman was Chairman when the present Village Hall was completed, and Bill Wills-Moren, the then Keeper of the House and Grounds, was responsible for receiving it from the contractors in 1974.

Gary Thomas is the current chairman, and the Committee [**415**] is engaged in a concerted effort to raise funds for a sizeable extension to the Village Hall. Recent chairwomen of the Committee include Ged Puckett (see Chapter 7

**463**) and Anne Westbrook (see Chapter 5 **181**).

The Women's Institute is another association of long standing in the Village. It was founded in 1943 by Dorothy "Cherry" Robinson [**356**], the first chairwoman and wife of George Robinson [**355**] of Hart Farm. She occupied the chair until 1972 and also served as a Justice of the Peace. The branch [**414**] currently has a membership of 24 and the chairwoman is Pam Rolls. They also have a much-feared darts team (see Chapter 5 **191**).





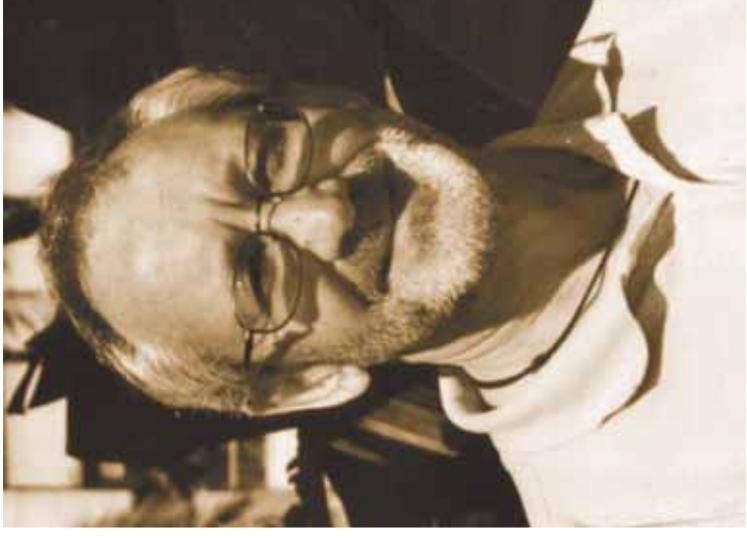
353 Percy Keech with his Son, Jim



354 Ken Prentice as Jorrocks with his Admirers



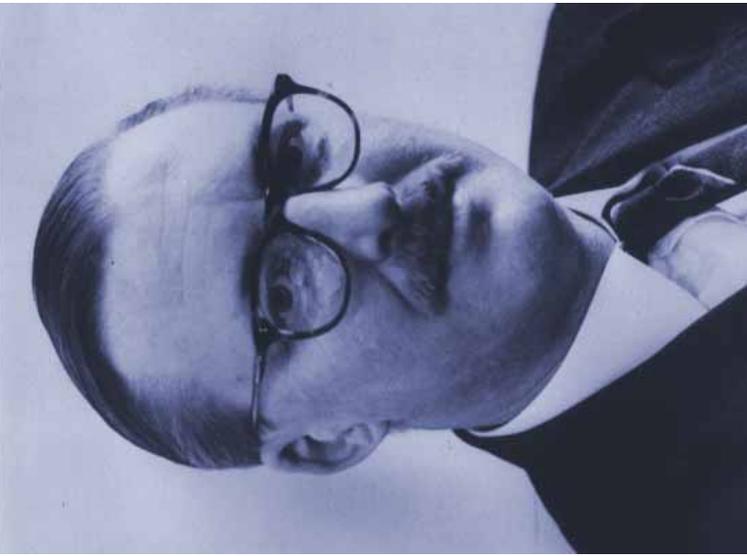
359  
Paul  
Middleton



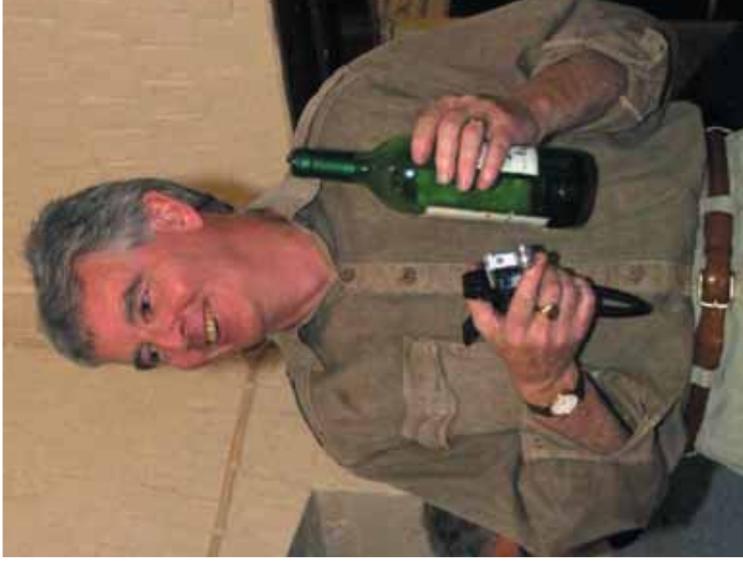
358  
Doreen  
Pendlington



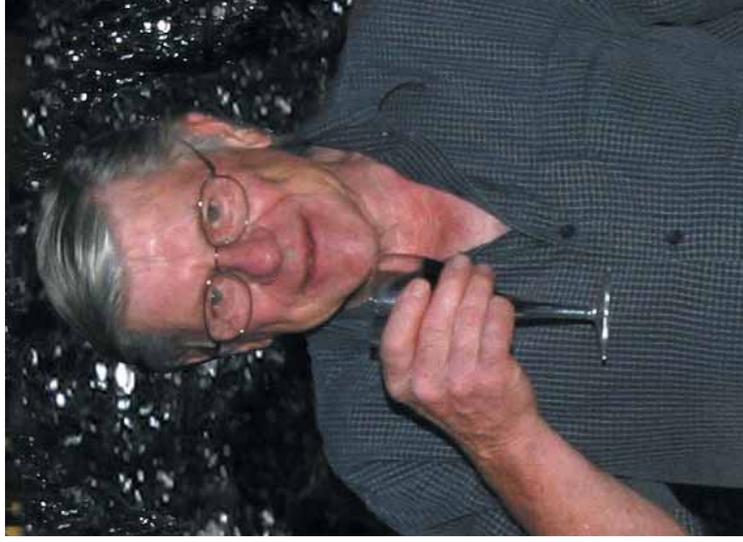
357  
Paul  
Hodgkinson



362  
John  
Ward



361  
David  
Stanbridge



360  
Ken  
Davies





363 The Parish Council

*From left to right:* Doreen Pendlington (Chairman), Barbara Davies (Clerk), Sandra Proud, Brian Westbrook, Jacqui Ward, Jim Brandon, Phyllis Gershon, Alison Campion, Bob Poulter, David Stanbridge



364 The Parochial Church Council

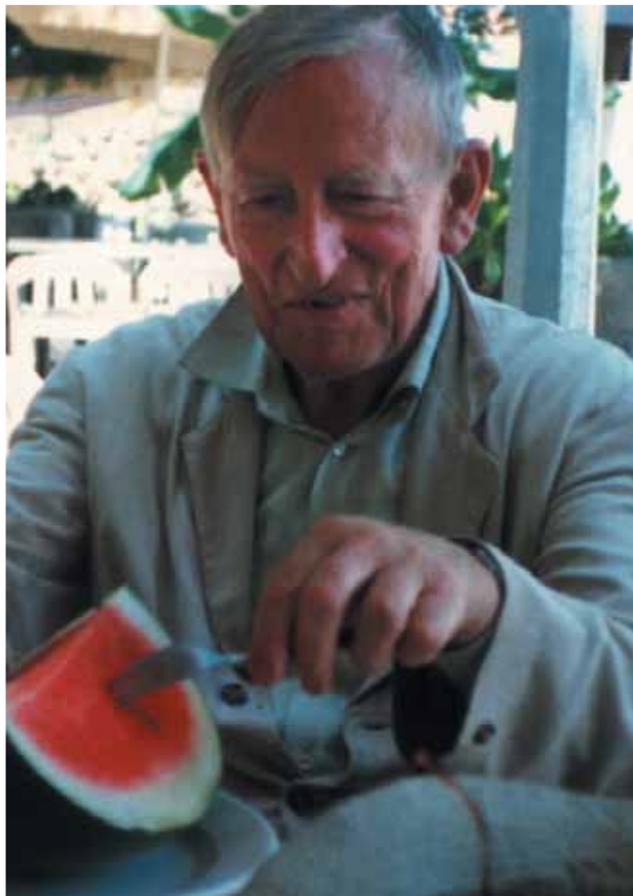
*Back Row:* Tom Benson, Margaret Benson, Bob Hart, Jean Lockwood  
*Middle Row:* Tricia Lennie, Avis Clayton, Marina Markham, Margaret Jackson, Clare Stapleton  
*Front Row:* Frances Hirst, Roy Pryn, Rev David Hunter, Sally Macdonald, Patricia Gillam



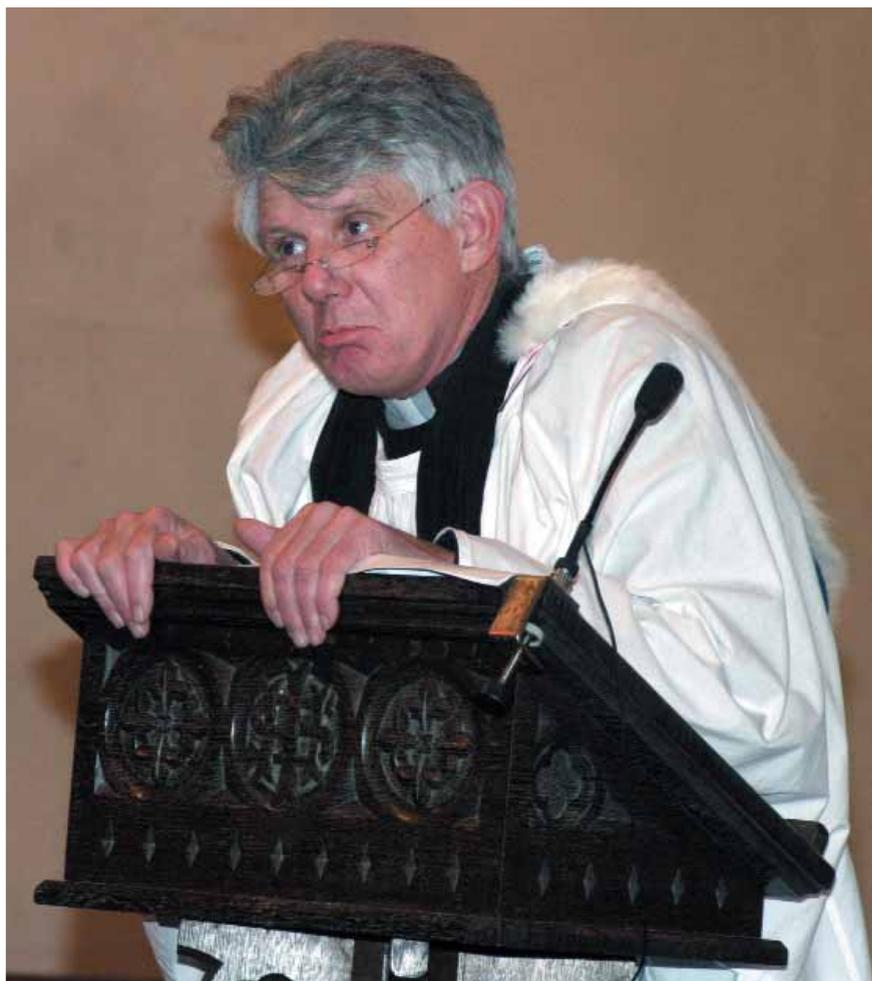
365 Canon Sproule: War Memorial Dedication 1927



367 Eddie Clayton, Rev Geoff Cowley and Ken Ward



366 Reverend Donald Macrory



368 Rev David Hunter



369 Nuptials of Ron and Denise Randall



410 The Historical Trust

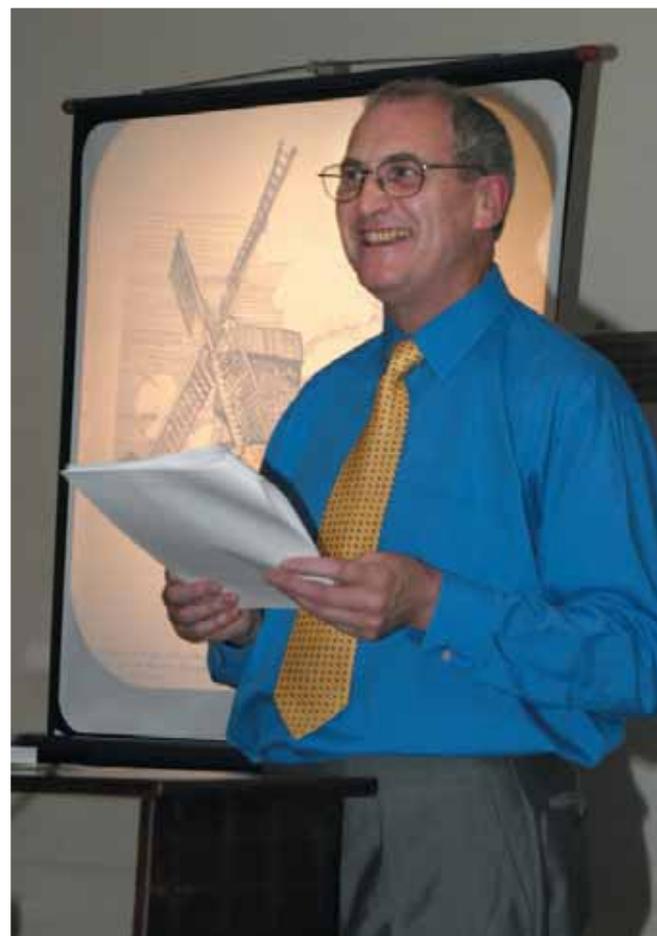
*Back Row: Paul Middleton, Alan Edwards, Peter Hart  
Front Row: Peter Stileman, David Stanbridge (Chairman), John Ward*



411 Peter Conquest as Cranmer



412 Simon Rockwood and Peter Conquest



413 Stuart Antrobus Lecturing on the Windmill



414  
 Jerusalem: The WI on Song  
 with Chairwoman Pam Rol  
 (Front Row Second from Right)



415 The Social Centre Committee  
*Top:* Richard Blayney.  
*Second Row:* Iain Morrison (Hon  
 Secretary), Gary Thomas (Chairman)  
*Front Row:* Ged Puckett, Sandra Proud,  
 Alison Campion, Brian Westbrook,  
 Barbara Collins, Keith Lee