

Annual Parish Meeting held Thursday 3rd April 2008 at 7.00 p.m. in the Green Room of the Village Hall, Meldreth

Apologies for absence:

Mr D. McCraith (Councillor, Cambridgeshire County Council [C.C.C.])
Mr G V Borgonon (Parish Councillor)

Those present:

All Councillors with the exception of Mr Borgonon
The District Councillor
7 members of the public

Minutes of previous meeting:

Minutes of the previous meeting held Thursday 5th April 2007, were signed as a true record. Proposed Mr Chamberlain, seconded Mrs Fallon.

Reports from the following:

CHAIRMAN

(1) SPEEDING

This has been ongoing all year, with areas most affected being Whitecroft Road, North End and the new housing at Burtons along Whaddon Road, where street lighting clearly denotes that no one should be doing more than 30mph. Residents in areas most affected have expressed a clear interest in carrying out traffic monitoring for speeders. The county Councillor has made enquiries about the equipment purchased for villages to carry out speed checks. This it seems is languishing in a cupboard somewhere unused. However he is pursuing getting funding to restart the programme of training people to use this equipment stopped a few years ago, due to various reasons. The police are carrying speed checks whenever they are able.

(2) COUNCILLOR'S POST

The position on the council left by Mary's sudden departure was filled by electing on Mrs Joanne Montague-Fuller. Joanne is already proving her worth when it comes to flooding and matters relating to water and is part of the new sub committee dealing with drainage.

(3) P.P.I.T

This has now been wound up. With some items still outstanding, such as a new pavilion and other less glamorous wishes to be fore filled. The Parish Council is still following up on those that can over a period of time be fore filled. But some may well take a lot of funding, from wherever possible this can be gained, eg the pavilion.

(4) NEW HOUSING

The two new housing projects in the village, Elin Way and Burtons have now been completed and are mostly fully occupied. However, there has been the odd hiccup, one over wheelie bins and who pays for them.

(5) DRAINAGE

This has proven to be a problem still in parts of the village whenever there is heavy rain. There now exists a sub committee who are trying to establish where watercourses run and also where they should go. Work has already been carried out by Anglian Water to make sure blockages are cleared and find out where things are going working. The new committee has had some success with riparian owners of waterways.

(6) PRECEPT

Unfortunately this year the precept for the village has had to be raised. This is the first time in three years any increase has had to be made. The Parish is now paying out for items that it has not had to in the past e.g. street lighting, also things are costing more whenever work has had to be carried out e.g. whenever vandals cause damage and it is not worth claiming on the insurance.

(7) PARISH PATHS

Once again Mr Chamberlain and his band of volunteers continue to improve the state of paths around the village, and to improve the areas around them. As always there are vacancies for willing helpers who are looking for something to do around the village.

I would like to thank all the council for their efforts put in over the year to date.

Mr C. A. Land
Chairman to the Parish Council

FINANCIAL OFFICER

The following organisations received financial assistance: Royston and District Community Transport, The Royal British Legion, Meldreth & Melbourn Self Help Group, Meldreth Pre School, Melbourn Library, Mobile Warden and Meldreth Village Hall Trust.

Money in hand is £44,059.31(deposit account) and £247.18 (current account)

Judy Damant
Financial Officer, Meldreth Parish Council

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

It has been a good year for affordable housing in Meldreth, with two developments opening in Burtons and Elin Way. Both are populated by local people, many with young families.

Any new development will have teething problems, and various issues at both developments are still unresolved. Heating bills are too high at Burtons, and at Raglan communication for anyone interested in purchasing an equity share home has been problematic. Difficulties faced by new residents with the council's refuse collection policy have also been brought to attention, as

many are unable to afford the cost of bin delivery. We are grateful to Cambridge Housing Society and Ragland Housing Association for stepping in to pay these un-negotiable bin charges for tenants in rented accommodation, though the housing associations will not pay the cost for equity share tenants. That SCDC will have made a profit in delivering bins to Burtons and Elin Way goes against the ethos of affordable housing. Concerns about the bin delivery policy have been brought to the attention of the Environmental Health Portfolio Holder, but to no avail.

A great achievement in Meldreth has been the sustained, collective effort to take a proactive role in drainage issues, with a view to preventative work against flooding. Thank you very much to all residents and the parish council for their support in this endeavour, and for formalizing our efforts in the shape of a parish council flood avoidance subcommittee. We have a window of opportunity to gain practical help from SCDC, which is encouraging, though we must also look into the future and let the council know that detailed local expertise on the part of its drainage department is extremely valuable, and that any thoughts of privatising that area of council work would most likely hurt, rather than benefit, local residents. The County Council has also expressed enthusiasm for the group and an officer is coming out next week to walk and talk the ditches with us.

Sheltered housing: The policy of not allowing wardens to live on site means that we are now without a warden and are waiting for a new one to be appointed and trained. This seems to me a shame. The Sheltered housing communal room has been well used by groups from outside the sheltered housing umbrella, including the parish council, the Meldreth Local History Group, CAP, the drainage group, and so on. Unfortunately there have been difficulties with SCDC in setting up a dependable billing system for rental of parish council office space, and also for rental of the main room. We hope that SCDC will improve this arrangement very soon.

Elin Way garage block: A new roof is now being put on the garage block. This has been an exercise of practical importance to nearby residents who were not properly consulted when the first roof went in without a proper planning application, but also a symbolic exercise highlighting the fact that the District Council, which is the local planning authority, must keep its own house in order, going through the same required planning application channels as anybody else.

Cycle wheeling channel: It was so pleasing that this equipment was installed at the station bridge, after a concerted local appeal to the County Council, but then equally disheartening that health and safety requirements have meant that the channel is in fact very awkward for many types of bicycles. Promises by FCC to revisit the issue have not been fulfilled. I am happy to continue chasing FCC and CCC, but there are other issues requiring time and attention so it is a matter of ordering priorities.

South Cambs District Council has recently been re-inspected by the Audit Commission, with some positive feedback on progress so far, enough so that no further inspections are scheduled, but also with serious areas requiring substantial improvement. Some of the key areas are: communication with parish councils, greater transparency in decision making, improved scrutiny function, adjustment to the political reality of control and opposition, and improved communication between the District Council and the Gypsy and Traveller community – this area is perceived to have worsened in the past year. Development Control is highlighted as a principle service area in which public confidence is at risk, due to the growth agenda and the very real involvement of parish councils in planning matters, on a day-to-day basis. Meldreth has seen practical manifestations of this issue in the lack of accountability on planning applications going to the 'Chairman's Delegation' meetings, which are closed to the public, for which there are no officer reports, and where officer recommendations are difficult to turn. From the perspective of a district councillor, I can say that most of the jobs I do for residents or the parish council require dedicated, persistent chasing, often running into brick walls. This is a sad indictment of the democratic system. The real test as to whether the council has improved is in its services to residents.

EERA Gypsy and Traveller site identification: this exercise has been greatly delayed, and still pending. There is no SCDC committee overseeing the work and this means that member knowledge of the matter is second hand at best. In-house staff working of Traveller issues, including Kirsty Simmons, Simon McIntosh and Matt Siggery, have either left the council or are working in other departments. This is a hugely important area of work, and it is worrying to witness it falling off the radar.

'Housing Futures' is the current name for housing stock transfer: The official position of the council, as of January, is that tenants will be asked to decide whether they wish to be transferred to housing association ownership, or to remain with the Council. The Council faces the inherent problem of 50% of Council house rents going to the government, creating an illogical situation from the point of view of the Council as landlord needing to maintain its stock. Looking into the future, who knows what different arrangements a new central government might impose. Tenants are rightly concerned about a whole range of issues, including what will happen to their democratic representation in the event of a transfer. The critical exercise at the moment is one of communication with tenants.

Disability: Disabled adaptations to take up to nine months to process, which is very difficult for anyone in need. Access to platform 2 at the station has been highlighted again by Scope, and it seems unbelievable that exclusion from platform 2 should be possible in this day and age. I have made an appointment to visit Direction Plus in the near future to find out more about how to lobby on this issue.

The reward for any councillor is working with one's community; thank you.

Susan van de Ven

COUNTY COUNCILLOR

This year the County Council have once more received a funding settlement from Central Government that does not reflect the rate of inflation or the amount of extra people that are being encouraged to live and work here to share in the huge amount of economic growth being generated.

The average rise in the amount Government gives shire counties such as ours is 5.6%. We are the fastest growing county in the country. The Government has given us a rise of just 2.1%, which, in effect, forces the County Council to do more with less money, and to increase Council Tax by the legal maximum of 5%.

The Police have reorganised the way they are fighting crime this year. Neighbourhood Panels have been established, and Meldreth is part of the Melbourn panel, which meets monthly to decide what the priorities are for their area. Parish Councillors are invited to these meetings, and I would urge you to go, as it provides an opportunity to monitor how the police are doing and bring any local problems to their attention so that you can make sure they take the effective action needed to deal with them. Currently the three top priorities here are 1. anti-social behaviour, 2. house burglaries, and 3. speeding.

The County Council has appointed a new chief executive, Mark Lloyd, who is starting at the end of this month. He is coming from Durham City Council and will, I am sure, be a great help to the County in the future.

The area around Cambridge is going to have nearly 50,000 new homes built in the next few years, and the County Council has teamed up with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council, to form two joint planning committees-one for Northstowe (SCDC and County only), and the other for the Cambridge 'fringes'.

I have been elected Joint Chairman of the fringes committee and we have already approved our first application in Trumpington. This will be a long process, but at the end we will have a bigger and better Cambridge with more services and better transport links.

With Transport the County Council has been consulting parish councils regarding what sort of improvements people prefer. The County Council has bid for over £500m worth of improvements from the Governments Transport Innovation fund(Tif) including better rural bus services and more imaginative use of services such as bus services to railway stations. The Government has not replied yet, but has indicated that they require some form of congestion charging.

But the County Council recognise that the improvements need to be substantial, and carried out before any Congestion Charge takes effect. And, of course, if the Government do not make a good enough offer, the County Council are ready to turn the money and congestion charging down completely.

The Guided bus scheme is making progress and is on target to open in spring next year. There will be a station at Trumpington park and ride and a branch going into the Addenbokes campus, and this, with the Addenbokes Access Road currently being built, should help enormously to make it easier and quicker to get to Cambridge.

The County Council is responsible for many different areas, and I am determined to make sure that Meldreth gets a good service. I look forward to another year working with your parish council so that together we can give Meldreth the best service possible.

David McCraith, County Councillor

MELDRETH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Another good year at school with pupil numbers maintained, good standards of attainment in national tests and continuing improvements to the school premises.

Pupils

I am very pleased to report that pupil numbers have been maintained at about 160 and so we continue to run six classes, with Infants taught as Reception and Years 1 and 2 and Juniors as Y6, Y4/5 and Y3/4.

Curriculum

Some years ago we had a major revision of the curriculum topics and how the teaching would be organised. This has been very successful and our children benefit from carefully planned teaching and as many and visitors as we can integrate into the timetable.

This year every class has benefited from extra-curricular activities. Y6 spent a week in Derbyshire in July, made a film with a professional film-maker, met the author Eoin Colfer at Duxford and launched rockets at the University Engineering Department. Years 4 and 5 have recently returned from a three-day residential at Grafham Outdoor Centre and also spent a day in London on the Golden Hinde, whilst Year 3/4 have studied the Second World War, visiting Duxford Museum and are preparing to work with musicians at Meldreth Manor School for a production in the summer. The younger children spend more time in and around the village, getting to know their local area but they have had trips to Hunstanton, the Waitrose Store at Trumpington and the pantomime at the Cambridge Arts Theatre. It all goes towards making a rich and engaging curriculum.

We look carefully at how Juniors are progressing in Maths and the more able in each year group are taught with the year above, thus extending their already good skills. Science continues to be taught in separate year groups and we are delighted that our science results in national tests have attained a consistently high standard.

Mrs Lucy Barlow, our specialist music teacher leads a school choir and we were very proud of them when they performed with other local children's choirs at the Cambridge Corn Exchange for a concert in the series 'Cambridgeshire: a singing county'. The standard of work produced for Home Challenges continues to amaze us with the creativity and skill of our children as they work supported by their parents. We welcome parents and family members to class assemblies and school productions, and again this year held a Christmas Carol Service at Holy Trinity Church.

The school organises a very wide range of clubs and activities, before, during and after the school day and we have been cited as an exemplar to schools in the South Cambs locality. This programme is only possible through the commitment of the school staff and others who give unstintingly of their time. We are also grateful to the adults who run activities for which a small fee is payable. The children are encouraged to be outward-looking and generous towards others. This year, most of our fund-raising has gone towards supporting 'Children of Chernobyl', some of whom are hosted by Meldreth families. In addition, dried and canned goods from our Harvest giving were sent to the Cambridge Foodbank and flowers taken to Maycroft nursing home.

Staff

The staff team has experienced some changes with Mrs Michelle Swallow beginning maternity leave in June and becoming the mother of Benjamin a few weeks later. Mrs Swallow intends to return to the school this summer. We were fortunate to appoint Miss Pauline Thompson from South Africa to teach Mrs Swallow's class. In the autumn we were joined by Mr Ben Westley as class teacher for Y3/4 and the teaching assistant team welcomed Mr Peter Hinton and Mrs Sharon Ellis. Ms Kelly McCorley was appointed as School Caterer. The governors are now in the process of appointing a new head teacher, as I will be leaving Meldreth in the summer, after four very happy years.

Governors

The Chair is Mrs Rosamund Rhodes- Kemp and Vice Chair, Mrs Dee Williams. The full Governing Body meets at least once a term, with the two sub-committees meeting more frequently. This year we have said goodbye to Mr Rob Searles and welcomed Ms Jane Pearson as a Parent Governor and Mrs Rosemary Childerley as an Associate Governor.

Parent Teacher Association

The PTA continues to be very active in raising money to support school projects and arranging social events for the school community. The focus for this year is the development of the school grounds and digital cameras have been bought for every class.

The Christmas Fair and Summer Fun Day were both very well organised and extremely successful events. We have also enjoyed discos, a family barbeque, a Mother's Day tea and family bingo.

OfSTED Inspection

In November, the school was inspected by two OfSTED inspectors. The inspection was driven from the outset by the Contextual Value Added figure, the 'value' the school had added to pupil scores in English, Maths and Science between Y2 and Y6. As this was deemed 'satisfactory', with children making the progress they should have achieved, the overall judgement was that the school was also 'satisfactory'. Many aspects of the school's work were judged as 'good'.

Premises

We have greatly benefited from the extension to the school that has given us a spacious library, new toilets and staff room and freed up an additional classroom for other groups and activities. Unfortunately, the design of the new roof has led to problems with drainage and water penetration into the school, issues that are gradually being resolved. In April, the school assumes responsibility for managing its own bank account, so a new office for the Finance Administrator, Mrs Karen Plumb, is currently being developed and redundant toilets converted into storage.

From September, it will be a statutory requirement for all Reception children to have access to an 'outdoor classroom' and this year we have extended the existing area and have exciting plans for its potential as a learning space.

The school remains a busy and vibrant learning community of children and adults, well-supported by our parents and the local community.

Mrs Janet Rayment
Head teacher

MELBOURN VILLAGE COLLEGE

New Warden at the College

September saw the arrival of Mrs. Elaine Stephenson as the new Warden of Melbourn Village College.

Mrs. Stephenson is a local girl; born in Cambridge, she attended Impington Village College before going on to study Geography at the University of Nottingham. She is also an ex-international diver! Having qualified to teach secondary Geography, she worked in a number of schools in Hampshire and Cambridgeshire (Hinchingsbrooke and Netherhall) before being appointed as Deputy Head at the John Warner School in Hertfordshire, where she worked for six years before being tempted to return to Cambridgeshire. Elaine Stephenson says that she feels as if she has 'come home'.

She lives with husband Michael and their three daughters in Saffron Walden; together, they have just finished building their own house, the topic, she claims, of her 'best ever assembly!' Elaine loves travelling, particularly in colder climes, and cites as her greatest wish an opportunity to see, 'properly', the Northern Lights.

Elaine is very excited by the prospect of building on the excellent legacy left by Ron Berry in developing the College still further as we move towards our 50th anniversary in 2009. She is particularly looking forward to meeting the parents, and prospective parents, of students at the College.

Record-breaking GCSE results at the College

Records tumbled in August when students arrived to collect their GCSE examination results. The percentage of students entered for the exams who gained five or more higher grades rose to 72%, breaking the college's previous best performance (1999) by 5%, with an improvement of 9% on last year's figures.

There were many outstanding results across the range of abilities. We derived great pleasure from the success of some students who worked incredibly hard to achieve a string of C grades, results which guaranteed their place at college or on Modern Apprenticeship courses. Some of the most able students also performed outstandingly well. For the first time in the college's history, two students (Andrew Szopa-Comley and Fiona Llewellyn-Beard) each achieved 11 A* grades, a perfect set of results! Others, including Will Mycroft, Sophie Reeves and Gareth Johnson, gained a clutch of A*/As.

We were delighted, too, to receive letters from the examination boards telling us of particularly impressive performances by individual students. In English Literature, three students (Lizzy Quinlan, Andrew Szopa-Comley and Gareth Johnson) scored three

of the five highest marks in the whole of England and Wales, in an examination sat by over 364,000 other students. AQA's Director General, Michael Cresswell, referred to this as an 'exceptional result' and an 'outstanding achievement'. In GCSE Textiles, Elin Karner gained one of the top ten marks in the country, a remarkable result.

Congratulations all round, then, to a group of students who did us (and, more importantly, themselves) proud.

Performing Arts

MVC is now in its fifth year as a Performing Arts College. Many events have been planned for the year ahead. In July, for example, College musicians will have an opportunity to participate in a musical tour of Holland.

Andrew Allsworth
Deputy Warden

MELDRETH TENNIS CLUB

Membership

Membership is about the same as last year. The public use of the courts has increased again this year, and it is good to see the courts are being used. Fees are £37.50 per year for adults; student/juniors £17.50; family membership £80 and associate/non playing members £5 per year. Fees for non-club members are £1.00 and hour and 50p and hour for under 18, which is still very reasonable.

Social/Fund Raising

Over the year we have had some very successful fund raising events and tournaments. The weather was good for the outdoor events, which included croquet, a pool party and a barbeque. All events were well attended by members and their guests.

Maintenance

Money raised at our Tournaments and social events is put to good use, i.e. cutting of the conifer hedging, replacing tennis nets etc. This year we have not had so much vandalism. The police have been informed of all cases of serious vandalism and they have been keeping an eye on this in the village. The Club has a rota of volunteers to cut the grass surrounding the courts, and the conifer hedging is due to be cut over the next month.

Tennis Coaching

Over the winter period we have been pleased to offer tennis coaching with Mr Matt Fellingham, Royston Club Tennis Coach. This has been on a Friday morning and has been well attended. We hope this will continue during the coming year. Notices regarding this coaching are displayed at the tennis courts.

Sue Davies
Secretary

MELDRETH FOOTBALL CLUB

At the end of last season we were promoted to 3B by coming fourth in the league. This season we are holding our own in the middle of the table, with three more games left to play, we should stay up. We did not have a good cup run so we had one or two games a month of playing. One of our players got picked to play in the rep game, which was played at Soham (so we put Meldreth on the map).

Fundraising

We had a golf day at Malton last May, and we are repeating this again this year. On Good Friday we had a football match against Melbourn, this was in memory of a young lad who had played with both teams with Melbourn winning the cup.

Pavilion

We are looking at grants and quotes to have the roof redone. In the summer we may repaint the inside. The football club would like to thank the Parish Council for letting us use the pitch and pavilion.

Joan Fallon
Secretary

MELDRETH CROQUET CLUB

Meldreth Croquet Club has existed for about 16 years, initially in various locations, we now have a single lawn at the rear of the British Queen pub in Meldreth High Street, by kind permission of the landlord Jon Smith. In the past year we have been successful in preventing rabbits getting onto the lawn and digging holes. In the autumn we top dressed the lawn to improve the playing surface which had been damaged by earlier rabbit activity.

The activities of the club are based around weekly sessions on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings and Club competitions. For the past seven years we have played in the Beds and Herts League against 6 other croquet clubs. 2007 was one of our better years as we won 2 of our 5 games (against Colworth and Wrest Park). Our members range in playing ability from novice to expert. Coaching is provided for members with little or no experience or who wish to improve.

'MCC' is both a sociable and informal club. We hold an annual Club picnic and Club Picnic in members' gardens. The final of our internal knock-out competition, the Nickisson Cup is held at the end of August at the same time as the Club picnic. A club newsletter is produced four times a year which provides information and contact with our members.

Our 2008 seasons started at the end of April and continues until the beginning of October. We welcome new members and anyone who would like to give croquet a go is invited to contact me or our Chairman, Alec Osborne (01223 833278).

Janet Pope
Publicity Officer

MELDRETH MOBILE WARDEN SCHEME

Since the last report at the Annual Parish Meeting the Scheme has proved to be of value to 10 people in the village. The Mobile Warden, Mrs Eve Chamberlain, does an invaluable job. Her work is much appreciated by all the clients and by the Scheme's committee.

Thanks are due to the Parish Council for their generous contribution towards the costs of running the scheme.

Joan Gipson
Chairman

MELBOURN & MELDRETH SELF HELP GROUP

The Melbourn & Meldreth Self Help group has been in operation now for more than twenty-five years. In that time we have seen many changes but the basic format remains the same. However the past year we have had to make fairly major changes. Firstly three of our longest serving helpers served notice of retiring having reached 80 years of age. Secondly the rent paid for the use of Vicarage Close Community Centre has doubled. We have fortunately been reinvigorated by Jayne White who, with her enthusiastic helpers, have transformed the Lunch Club. We had to put up the cost to our members to £3 for lunch and also drop the weekly raffle in favour of a better raffle on special occasions.

About 32 elderly residents of Melbourn & Meldreth meet each Thursday for lunch and a chat with old friends. We currently meet at Vicarage Close Community Centre and for those who are unable to get there we have a small group of volunteer drivers who collect them and take them home free of charge.

We have an excellent cook, Mary Daynes who week by week provides very good and much appreciated meals. We have a new group of helpers who assist in the kitchen and with the serving and clearing up afterwards and also the driving. For those people living in close proximity who are unable to get to the centre a meal is taken to them.

At Easter and Christmas we try to create a festive atmosphere. This year our members received a free lunch at Easter and Christmas and a visit from Father Christmas.

A mainstay of the continuing success of the Club are the generous Grants from both Melbourn and Meldreth Parish councils. All income is used to rent the Community Centre, pay for Public Liability Insurance, pay the cook a fixed rate of £75.00 a week, pay for the free lunches and any extra little luxuries that we can afford.

Without the willing and dedicated help of our volunteers, some of whom are getting nearer retiring, we could not operate. We desperately need more drivers. Volunteers welcomed.

Currently, we have no waiting list for membership.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Neil Wilson
Treasurer

MELDRETH VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

Meldreth Village Association has continued to work in the background to help and support other village groups.

We started the year by helping the new table tennis club buy more equipment by buying a new table.

We brought the traditional MVA games as usual to the Church Fete in June

We gave a donation to a student in the village to buy books for his university course. He had helped us at previous MVA events so we felt it was appropriate.

We gave a donation to the new Meldreth Local History Group to pay for some early printing costs

We held the annual Quiz in October. This was well supported and some of the profits went towards Christmas trees for the Christmas tree festival. The rest went into the MVA funds so that other events can be held in the future.

We supported the Xmas tree festival at Holy Trinity Church by providing a Christmas tree

Also at Christmas the usual tree was provided by the MVA and put up outside the Village Hall, with another placed in the station waiting room.

Please look in Meldreth Matters for the publicity for our events. It is only a small number of villagers working on the committee who provide these activities. We could always do with more.

Sadly our dear friend and loyal helper Ken Singleton passed away this year. We all miss him so much and will never forget him.

Thank you to the Parish Council for their support.

Joan Gane, MVA Secretary

COMMUNITY ACCESS POINT

The Community Access Point continues to be a useful resource in the village offering **free** tuition for anyone who wishes to learn any of the various exciting aspects of using a computer.

The village is extremely fortunate in still having the same tutor-volunteers on board as signed up at the start in 2005. This has meant that we have been able to develop our tuition skills even to the point where some volunteers are actively engaged in teaching computer usage to blind people using special software and techniques. The volunteers all have a wide variety of professional IT experience so that practically any IT subject can be covered. From basic skills to desktop publishing, digital photography and web design. The software available includes a full office suite, training programs for beginners, and a publishing program for those with advanced needs for leaflet or newsletter publication.

Most of our 50 odd members, as expected, continue to be in the senior age ranges who are keen to learn how to use the technology for communicating with relatives and friends or to use the Internet for research, study, on-line purchasing or leisure use. Members book one hour weekly sessions, either during the day or in the evenings when a volunteer is on hand to help or offer guidance. We continue to run about 5 sessions per week either on a one to one basis or in small groups. Additional to these learning opportunities the facility is now regularly used by the enthusiastic Meldreth Local History Group who have already arranged exhibitions of their work in the village and with whom the CAP works closely.

As is so often the case with IT, technology moves on very fast and both the CAP and the History Group have technical concerns about the ability of our equipment to meet user group needs and aspirations. We hope, however, that these issues can be addressed with SCDC sponsors in the next year.

Whilst we offer training principally to village residents to which preference is always given, we have recently been pleased to welcome students from Melbourn and Whaddon. The scheme offers free tuitions open to anyone in the village wishing learn or enhance IT skills. Those interested should use our contact number, which is posted every month in Meldreth Matters.

Although we make a small charge for consumables, we are grateful for the Parish Council's support in financing our modest needs for replacement print cartridges and paper.

Graham Borgonon
Coordinator

MELDRETH PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP

1. Introduction

This is the first official report for the Annual Parish Meeting, although this group of volunteers and councillors have been working for nearly five years as a result of the Parish Plan questionnaire.

2. Background

Initially the Parish Plan questionnaire highlighted that over thirty residents were interested in the rural paths network. Some of these people met and formed a working group. This group in the first year carried out path surveys, contacted landowners adjacent to paths network and made contact with Cambridge County Council (CCC) P3 officers for advice and assistance. Following this, we prepared a Working Plan for 2003/04, which we achieved most planned maintenance work on our fourteen paths. During the subsequent years our group of volunteers and councillors continue to maintain our path network. CCC contractors cleared Meldreth Bury Lane, which is now maintained by our group.

3. Workload 2007/08

During the last year our group have laid wood chippings twice on fp6 (Flambards to Topcliffe Meadow). We have cleared fp9 - railway station to Melbourn (Meads Path) and fp9A - Station Road to Meads Path on three occasions. Also we have had a working party on our section of fp1 (Whaddon to Malton Lane). This party had to clear fallen trees and strim paths through Kingswood. We have started a path sign maintenance program in North End. Prior to the start of our new village litter picker, we had litter picked on several paths and along Station Road and Bury Lane.

The Parish Council requested assistance from our group to clear up the deceased Chestnut leaves on the Stocks triangle, which we cleared up and burnt, thanks to Mr John Elbourn for allowing us to burn in his field. We hope that our efforts will save this ancient village landmark. We have also carried out way marking despite the removal of some markers by vandals. Finally, all paths have been surveyed, which assists me to prepare the CCC annual report and relevant documentation plus our grant application for 2008/09.

4. Thanks and Appreciation

As Parish Paths Coordinator I would once again like to thank our volunteers and fellow councillors, who have worked hard and well as a team. This group has provided their own tools and equipment to enable us to maintain the path network. Also I would like to thank Mr Stephen Marshall for maintaining computer records, taking and issuing our meeting minutes and updating our current workload schedules. Finally to thank our friendly tree surgeon, Mr Dave Thomas, who supplies us with quality wood chippings.

5. Appeal for Help

It would be nice to see volunteers from the under 50's age group plus the dog walkers who regularly use our network.

John Chamberlain
P3 Coordinator for Meldreth

TREE WARDEN

I have, once again, pleasure in giving recent news of all the tree conservation that has taken place in the village during the past twenty years or more. I keep an eye on all the village planting not only in Melwood but throughout the area, where until comparatively recently, the Cambridge County Council (CCC) offered trees and hedging on an annual basis.

The first stretch of trees runs along one side of Fenny Lane. There in 1985 I planted Rowan, Whitebeam, Birch, Cherry and Ash, which are not firmly established and stand almost thirty feet high. Then again on the outskirts of the village stretching towards Malton I planted with help in 1989 a longer area of Hawthorn, Whitebeam and Field Maple, which in a more exposed spot is, with a few stragglers, making progress. The first planting of hedgerow interspersed with trees in the early 90's has been cut at least three times and breaks up the bare landscape of the first bit of the Whaddon road with blackthorn and hawthorn. Likewise the two planting of trees on the Kneesworth Road in 1998 and 2002 have all survived despite weeds, dry summers and wind and are gradually gaining height.

In Melwood where I started clearance in 1986/7 the original ash and sycamore are tall trees, some of which, have been felled to let in more light for groundcover plants. The snowdrops here and in my adjoining copse have been spectacular this January and February. The Beech, Hazel, Whitebeam, Rowan and Cherry planted some fifteen years ago are strong and healthy. This winter a number of straggling hawthorns, which never flowered, have been coppiced and those cut back over the last two years are now showing healthy growth. Wherever possible, the ivy, which strangles and prevents good growth along the branches, has been cut. It sometimes reached a thickness of four inches and is deadly where healthy development is concerned. The now attractive wood is covered with daffodils and a few primroses, violets and cowslips. To someone who saw it in the 80's as a sometimes, impenetrable jungle of bramble, thistle and nettles it has proved well worth the challenge.

Margaret Hunter
Tree Warden

MELWOOD CONSERVATION REPORT

The year has largely been one of consolidation. We held our first formal AGM early in the year followed by an interesting talk by Peter Vince of the Woodlands Trust and since then we have concentrated our efforts on managing the wood in accordance with our Management Plan.

Although we aimed to hold one or two public events, all our limited volunteer resources were needed to target the woodland management and so we had to forego arranging anything this year. Together with the County Council we had hoped to involve the local school in an autumn 'Tree Dressing' event but this could not be arranged the year.

This year Cambridgeshire County Council granted us a draw-down Management Fund amounting to £475 to be used for designated purposes. This was put to use early in the year when professional tree surgeons were needed to remove a dangerous willow overhanging the public footpath, which runs through the wood.

Resulting from the visit of a Woodland Trust representative we were able to mark trees, which needed removal to create a more open canopy in designate compartment of the wood. The idea is to let more light into selected areas and these were cleared of elder and sycamore self-plantings. Sycamore is a non-native species; it grows quickly and can soon crowd out indigenous varieties. Other targeted stands will continue to be removed gradually through future management to avoid undue disturbance and so that affect can be seasonally assessed and adjusted.

Through out the year under the stewardship of our Work Leader, Jim Reid, we carried out 9 work parties totalling some 75 man hours of work: nest boxes were maintained, invasive cow parsley cleared, other ground cover cut back, hawthorn coppiced and some new planting in selected areas carried out.

Unfortunately, vandalism was again an unwelcome a factor this year with groups of youngsters congregating at the back of the wood to consume alcohol and spirits, set fires and damage the surrounding trees and plants. The amount of litter left behind was quite astonishing and for several weeks during last summer it needed our constant attention to clear. Whilst we can have no objection to children enjoying the wood the behaviour of a small group of youngsters was endangering themselves and others as well as harming the environment. It was regrettably necessary to involve the police before the situation calmed down.

With an enthusiastic group now in the process of restoring the River Mel we were able to pass on some of the felled timber and brush from the wood for use in the riverbank work as support or faggots. The river is now beginning to look more like the chalk stream it should be.

As in previous years we still need more local residents willing to engage in the enjoyable and practical management of the wood and we are looking at ways to see whether our pool of volunteers can be increased ... time will tell.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone in the group for their support through out the year and I make no apology for stressing again the need for more to come forward to engage in the management and practical work of making our very own Local Nature Reserve something which the village can enjoy and of which it can be proud.

Graham Borgonon

MELDRETH VILLAGE HALL TRUST

Following the Trust's Annual General Meeting in 2007, the officers were re-elected:
Chairperson: Rachel Brown; Vice Chairmen: David Coton and Faraz Kermani
Treasurer: David Smith; Secretary: Maggie Smith

The Village Hall continues to be well used by local groups and proves to be a popular venue for community events and children's birthday parties. Pre-school and Mums and Toddlers occupy the hall for much of the time Monday to Friday. Other regular users include a Scottish Dancing Group that restarted at the hall this year, a flourishing table tennis group, a children's music group. Keep fit, Old Time Dancers, Ballroom dancing and rabbit club. The Brownies found the Hall too large a venue and no longer meet here. We wish them well at their new premises.

At the September review it was decided not to increase hire charges particularly as four other local halls were found to have comparable charges. The Hall's financial situation is secure with this year's income and expenses just about balancing. This has been achieved in part by consolidating savings accounts into one high interest account, by changing rubbish collection from weekly to fortnightly collections and by changing our insurance provider to one that offers a more competitive premium but with comparable cover. Effective use of heating has also contributed to cost cutting.

The Parish Council kindly agreed to employ a tree surgeon to cut back the trees in Elin Way and at the front of the hall where they were either presenting a problem to the public or to the fabric of the hall.

The first stage of our planned redecoration took place over the Easter period. The Green Room was painted and the store room floors were replaced with new heavy duty vinyl flooring. We look forward to the summer when the lobby kitchen and main hall will be painted and a new carpet laid in the lobby. The Work over Easter caused minimal disruption and we hope for the same when work recommences.

The Trustees were really pleased that despite vandalism in previous years Meldreth Village Association again provided a Christmas tree for the front of the hall. We are particularly pleased that this year it suffered no damage at all. We are grateful to MVA for its generosity as it really does brighten up the hall and the village.

Another year has gone well thanks to the hard work of all the committee members, our House Keeper and Administrator without whom such smooth running would not have been possible.

THE RIVER MEL RESTORATION GROUP

Phase one of the works consists of a section between the railway bridge over the Mel and the wooden revetments down stream of Melwood. This work is progressing well due to the enthusiasm of our membership and our collaboration with outside agencies. Consequently a marked improvement can be seen in the river and its wildlife.

We have hosted 2 very successful fund raising events, with Robin Page providing an entertaining evening last October and Margaret and Terry Lunch opening their garden for a snowdrops and hellebores day in February. During this event in excess of 80 people took the opportunity to walk the riverbank and learn more about our works. The money raised from these events has enabled us to raise matched funding to continue the project.

All work has been carried out voluntarily by our members, but we also acknowledge the very generous support given to us in the way of advice and funding for materials from the Environment Agency; South Cambs District Council; the Wild Trout Trust.

Steve Hawkins
Chairman

Comments from members of the public

There was concern expressed about the amount of vandalism occurring in the village. Cllr van de Ven is interested in setting up better communications with the local youth workers and schools. However, it was also stated that the children or youths who are vandalising are not the children who would join any kind of youth scheme. The evenings are now getting longer and problems always appear to be heightened in the Spring and Summer months, concerns over alcohol consumption was also raised. Police Community Support Officers do inspect areas in Meldreth such as the recreation grounds but could they include Mel Wood, along with the railway sections of the woods on a more regular basis especially during the spring and summer months.

Repairs to Flambards Bridge, the wooden platforms have been repaired but when will the metal work be repaired? The Parish Council is presently looking into this with Cambridge County Council.

The meeting closed at 8.15 p.m.