

This is an article written in 2020 by Mary Norton, a previous long-time Chearsley resident, for 'The Buckinghamshire Village Book', a publication by the Buckinghamshire Federation of Women's Institutes to celebrate the centenary of the organisation in the County.

CHEARSLEY

The village of Chearsley is a small village on the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border. The village is bordered by the Thame/ Aylesbury Road, from where the pretty traditional sunken lanes meander downhill towards the church and river. These lanes have been carved out by the cartwheels, livestock and generations of footsteps made by Chearsley folk over many years.

The hub of the village is the village green, wrapped around by traditional cottages, the Bell village pub and the village shop. This is the heart of the village where people meet and chat over a bottle of milk or a pint of beer, new friendships are made and old ones nurtured. The pub and shop have changed hands over the years, but with village support both are still going strong.

Many a celebration has been hosted on the green, including barbeques and village fetes.

The village is also host to numerous other events such as rounders matches, pram races, men versus women cricket matches, bonfire nights and yearly, tug of war across the river against the neighbouring village of Cuddington, where most competitors usually end up in the river. Any excuse to have a fun time in Chearsley.

One image never to be forgotten was of Chearsley children gently floating across the local fields on every inflatable craft imaginable when the river had burst its banks and flooded the surrounding area, a pretty normal day in the life of Chearsley folk.

St Nicholas church in Chearsley provides the bedrock of life in the village. This 12th-century church has a special place in the hearts of many of the villagers. The churchyard is a carpet of snowdrops in spring, softly guarding all those who have gone before. The new church bells, the pride of hardworking fundraisers, ring out to call the congregation, old and young, to join in prayer and praise. This small, ancient, beautiful church is a peaceful place to just sit and watch the sun stream through the windows and enjoy the silence. It has been described as feeling like someone is wrapping a warm blanket around you as you walk through the door.

Beside the church lies one of the local farms, once a pick-your-own fruit farm employing local people to grow, nurture, pick and sell its fresh fruit to the local community. Sadly, this has had to close but there was nothing better than sitting in the sunshine, chatting to neighbours whilst eating far too many strawberries.

There have been many groups, clubs and activities in Chearsley over the years, from lace-making in 1890 to ladies' Morris dancing in more recent years. The Cherry Bumpers group was created and managed to dance their way round most of the local

public houses. The name gives a clue to the standard of dancing, but it was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

A popular present-day get-together is the weekly Friday morning coffee and cake in The Bell pub. Lovely home-made cakes and as much coffee as you can drink, in the company of as many villagers who can squeeze into the pub, makes this a morning to look forward to.

Another thriving activity in Chearsley is at the village cricket club. Revamped in the 1980s to provide an activity for a glut of small boys prevalent in the village at that time, a junior cricket team was launched. Land for a new pitch was agreed with the local farmer and, with the help of some enthusiastic fathers (in some very dubious old cricketing attire) the new joint senior and junior club was formed. The club has gone from strength to strength, with a new pavilion, regular league matches and now with girls in the team.

Chearsley has produced many colourful characters over the years, all contributing to village life's rich tapestry. A local hangman found his home in Chearsley in 1900 and an unfriendly poltergeist called Old George had to be forcibly removed from a local property by the then local priest. An eccentric vicar prone to wearing three hats at once, outrageous actors, shopkeepers risking life and limb using a demon bacon slicer and finger snatching Arkwright's till, have all played their part in Chearsley's colourful life, to mention just a few!

It was a sad day in Chearsley when we lost our fight to keep the village school open. Despite all our efforts, the doors had to be closed. Fortunately, the village children are now happily settled in surrounding village schools and life goes on. CHUF, the under-fives pre-school is still going strong, providing laughter and learning for the little people and is now settled into the new village hall. Several years of hard work and fund-raising has resulted in a brand-new building for the village hall. The WI now meets in the new hall, but some feel just a little nostalgic over the demise of the old village hall, a building which would tell many a tale and make many a villager blush! However, the hall and the village must move forward together. New homes are being built, new families are moving in and Chearsley will grow and move with the times. Its heart will continue to beat loud and strong and will embrace the future with love and laughter, just like it has always done in the past.

