

AND NOW WE ARE TEN

It was beyond the wildest dreams of the original working party that this local magazine would ever reach double figures. But here we are printing Alresford Displayed No. 10.

Barbara Carpenter-Turner sowed the seed. She gave a series of lectures to an adult education class at Perin's in the autumn of 1973 and some of us were hooked. We knew Isabel Sanderson and Edward Roberts were already hard at work on the history of the locality, but wasn't there some help that the eager but ignorant could give?

The lecturer had suggested that surveying the original bounds

of the parish was a good way to start and Professor Hoskins' Local History echoed this. So we set to work.

By February 1974 Jane Underwood and Peggy McKerracher were at work on the Old Alresford section of the bounds, Jack and Nell Orr on the Itchen Stoke edge, Miss Landon and Mrs. Spileman were investigating Cheriton and Tichborne while John Adams and I were at work on New Alresford. But at a meeting at Cranley some wise voice asked, "To what purpose? Who wants to know and who's going to foot the bill?"

Then started a long period of "humming and hawing"! The bounds project was shelved and it was realised that people would be interested in the past of Alresford only if they could also read something about the modern Alresford in which they lived. We would call in the professionals. Brian Gush agreed to tell our readers about Gush & Dent, who were exporting world-wide their tubular steel farm gates from New Farm Road. Isabel Sanderson volunteered to write about our inns. I managed to find out what it was like to live in Alresford a hundred years earlier and Freda Kensall told us what it was like to begin living in the town in the 1960's. Her article, the first we ever published, set the fashion of giving information and entertainment at the same time, which I hope we shall always strive to follow. Her opening words are worth quoting: "You're going to live WHERE?" "Alresford in Hampshire". "Never heard of it". "Just this side of Winchester". They had heard of Winchester. "Wait a minute Alresford? I think we've been through it". In her quiet, effective way Freda was telling us to put Alresford on the map, and that is what we have been doing ever since - showing Alresford to a busy world.

The first number sold out and paid its way, so that the Alresford Society thought we were worth sponsoring to the extent of £65 if ever we couldn't pay our debts, and the Historical and Literary Society agreed to encourage their members to support us with articles. But (even more important) their secretary, John Adams, was willing to become our secretary as well; and if you have John Adams in your team half the battle is won.

The time had come to form ourselves into a working party of Jane Underwood, Isabel Sanderson, Freda Kelsall, Jack Orr, James Longland, Edward Roberts and me.

The term 'working party' was used with discretion. We had all had experience of committees at which much was said but little done. We wanted an organisation which met only four times a year but worked hard between meetings on tasks that had been allotted to members. This gave those of us who were already fully employed time to fit in our Alresford Displayed stint with our everyday job. Of course, the individual members met and discussed their problems, especially with Isabel Sanderson, who was a constant source of help.

We were lucky that our second number coincided with Jubilee Year. Freda wrote a never-to-be-forgotten account of the Jubilee at Alresford, Dick Richards gave us a sonnet to Her Majesty, Donald Soley researched blacksmiths, John Adams brought H.M.S. Alresford to the attention of the town and Edward Roberts produced an authoritative paper on the watercress industry. James Longland illustrated the articles meticulously.

Once again we sold all our work, which was just as well, for we suffered what seems to be termed consumer resistance to No. 3, in spite of the boost an article by John Arlott was expected to give and the trouble taken by the working party to make an article on the Broad Street Fair interesting and attractive. The small nest-egg that we had put aside from previous sales was swallowed up by the losses on this number.

No. 4 was a disaster and we couldn't understand why. I have a copy before me as I write and I'm convinced that it is among the best work we ever did. Patrick O'Donovan's "Observation" of our antique shops was scholarly and entertaining. John Adams told us of travellers' opinions of Alresford through the centuries. We were sure we had found a winner in Sidney Pullinger and his carefully researched story of Perin's. Surely past pupils and present pupils would be interested to read about the old school! And what about our survey of part of the town? This is probably a unique piece of work. Do the people who live in the Soke or east side of Broad Street or the north side of East Street really not care who owned their property in the 1550's? We had expected to see James Longland's brilliant comparative map framed in many of the houses. A fond hope! We still have a large surplus of No. 4 stored away. Perhaps a new batch of residents will show interest in this gem at £1 a copy.

We were a depressed working party. Alresford had lost interest in us and we had lost faith in Alresford. We were disappointed to find our cover picture embellishing the front of the parish magazine. What could we do but nurse the hope that the Parish Church would profit from our loss.

We had a miserable meeting on 7th November 1979. We were not only losing support, we were being treated as if we didn't exist. Should we take the hint and pack up? I'm proud to report that the working party dismissed such a defeatist attitude. We were providing a service to the community whether they liked it or not. We still had important elements of Alresford to record for future generations - the railway, the Pigs and a final article on Perin's. If our finances were shaky, we must find ways to do our work more cheaply (and this in spite of the fact that none of our contributors has ever received a penny for work or expenses). Any ideas for a new cover picture? Let us meet again in March and see how we've got on.

It was a far more cheerful party that gathered at Cranley in March. On the one hand we had almost complete papers on the railway, the lost inns of Alresford and Perin's, and the promise of an explanation of themselves by the Pigs. On the other hand some kind person had told us about Michael Rhodes and his colour-screening process for providing a coloured cover and James Longland's offer to do a sketch of the Market House as a centre-piece for the cover.

We were in business again with the Alresford Pigs in colour on the cover and excellently explained by Neville Ward in the typescript, which also contained some of James Longland's best work for us. Even if it was not quite a sell-out, No. 5 is my favourite number, for I believe it exemplifies what we were trying to do.

Two new members, Vincent Pemberton and Raymond Elliott, now

joined the working party, and both showed their mettle by offering articles -the one on Old Alresford Church, the other on the Hurdle Houses. We had already decided that local industry had been neglected by us since our first number and that both the cover of No. 6 and Jack Orr's article should alert people to the way our industries were putting Alresford on the map.

There had been a further development in the town this year (1981). A "twinning" with Bricquebec in Normandy was about to become a reality and we asked Graham Brown, the moving spirit behind the scheme, to record the successful negotiations. His paper emphasizes the fact that it is the young of both towns who are going to benefit from this liaison.

1981 was the Census Year, and as I knew that I should have to give up editorship I wrote my swansong on the census taken of the town a hundred years ago. In this I was guided and controlled by Isabel Sanderson. So No. 6 had five papers instead of the normal four.

No. 7 saw the emergence of a new star; Robert Hedge's two articles in successive years on the Golf Club provided the qualities for which we had striven - information, accuracy and humour. Sidney Pullinger prepared a valuable map and explanation of our footpaths and Peter Lyndon-Skeggs provided a much-needed paper on medicine in the district. Faithful Vincent Pemberton continued his crusade on "Old Alresford Comes First" with his account of the Children's Home.

Sadly, No. 8 was without illustrations. Owing to various pressures, James Longland had been unable to complete his sketches by the time we went to print.

With No. 9 we took the bull by the horns, changing both printer and illustrator and reducing the cost of production and price to the customer. The edition was sold out by 1st September, just as the very first number had been.

Of the original party only four remain, but five stalwart contributors have joined our ranks. Their informative and entertaining work has graced the more recent numbers of Alresford Displayed. They intend to continue their labours in the interests of Alresford, and already are planning No. 11. They have even been looking ahead to No. 12. Despite the retirement of some of the original members, the good work will go on, remembering always to combine literary merit with sound research.

Has it been worth while? Of course it has, for reasons that would be hard to explain to modern society. Members of the working party have come to enjoy their close association in a common purpose - the praise of Alresford, which we have grown to love more dearly as we have discovered more about it. We have known what it is to suffer a loss, but we have never made a profit; nor indeed have we received much commendation or encouragement. But that is perhaps typical of the modern attitude, which may take for granted the graceful hanging baskets in the summer, the

colourful lights in the winter, the beauty of the Fulling Mill, the children's Christmas Tree, Like the contents of our Alresford Displayed, they are expressions of love for the town in which we live.

We need no commercial organisation to blow a trumpet for us. We blow our own!

DIGBY GRIST, 1984.