

# The Elsworth Chronicle



*Holy Trinity Church*

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## **ELSWORTH CHRONICLE**

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### **A FOND FAREWELL TO KAREN AND MATT**

It is with sadness that we have to say ‘goodbye’ to Karen and Matt as they leave us to open the next chapter in their lives in Sowerby Bridge. They will be sorely missed, not only by their many friends but also markedly by the village for the countless hours and service given to our village shop, by Matt in particular, so well supported by Karen.

It seems the custom these days for people to describe another as ‘my rock’. Such an expression used with regard to Matt with respect to our shop would seem most appropriate. Many will be aware of his almost daily commitment to administrating the shop’s finances at the end of the day, of the number of occasions he and Karen have served behind the counter, but perhaps not so many to the background work of assisting with the purchasing of stock and the responsibility and routine work of being treasurer. But in this case the term ‘rock’ would seem applicable to Matt over and above what has been written above. It was to Matt that people turned when the freezer or refrigerators were playing-up; it was Matt who had the physical strength if and when required. But above all his unflappability and good sense were for all to see, giving a feeling of confidence that the shop was in good hands.

It is generally thought not to be a good idea to live ‘over the shop’. In Matt’s case it was ‘across the field’, which turned out to be much the same, for he was readily on hand. When he and Karen moved into The Manor House that was doubtless not in mind - perhaps more likely was the proximity of the playing field with a chance to watch cricket, an absorbing hobby, or maybe being close to an ale house. Whatever it was, it was so good for Elsworth that they came.

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## PREPARING FOR GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

Global warming will soon be back in the headlines after being deposed in the media by Covid-19 for many months. We are warned that future extremes in the weather are likely, and in Elsworth of particular concern is the likelihood of heavy thunderstorms bringing short torrential rainfall bursts beyond the capacity of our drainage system. Brook Street could be cut off by floods on many occasions.

The cause of flooding from the brook at times of flash downpours is clearly the inadequacy in size of the culverts in Brook Street, a fact so clearly demonstrated some ten years ago when flooding occurred shortly after the Victorian sluice had been dismantled - it had erroneously been thought by parish councillors of that time that the sluice impeded the water flow - and against the written advice of four professional independent water engineers as well as the Environment Agency and a vigorous campaign in the village, the sluice was replaced by a modern structure. Periodic flooding continued after the removal of the sluice, bringing dismay and generating activity resulting in an examination of the downstream buried culverts and the discovery that **dislodged internal bricks were responsible for impaired water flow**. If only the state of the culverts had been investigated before the pointless destruction of the Victorian sluice had been put in hand a unique part of our heritage could still be treasured.

Flash floods still occur, notwithstanding the clearance of the culvert blockage which brought some improvement, as clearly the culverts are inadequate in size to cope. In the recent years heavy downpours of rain on saturated land have not occurred and the culverts have been able to cope, bringing perhaps a danger of complacency. It would seem unacceptable that we wait until the predicted heavy storms come our way before protective measures are considered and implemented. In the first place it would seem vital to focus on the catchment area upstream and the free flow of the brook into the village. Upstream an obvious location to control the flow of water is where the brook enters the village at the gate at the southern end of Brook Street. Here the amount of flow could be regulated to the amount the culverts downstream could accept, with the excess not flooding the village but held in the water meadow and allowed to pass through in a regulated manner. The water meadow is ideal for this purpose, the configuration of the land lending itself well to temporary holding ponds. Regarding the less voluminous drainage water entering the village in the west via a ditch near

the sharp bend in the road as it turns to Papworth, control could be achieved by imposing holding measures in its deep ditch upstream. In both cases government grants would be available to the farmers, in part to compensate for a possible temporary loss of the use of land and/or environmental benefits.

Downstream the measures required to regulate the flow of the brook are much simpler - the basic need is to ensure the stream course is unimpeded by vegetation or debris. In the past our District Council has been helpful in this regard.

We have been given ample warning to expect a marked increase in the near future of severe thunderstorms bringing torrential rainfall. This note is to urge that measures are seriously considered now by all in the village, not only those in authority, and implemented. A working party to look into the matter would seem vital. The advice of independent consultant water engineers, the Environment Agency and W.S. Atkins who act as the water engineers of Cambridge County Council are on the parish council files - all advocated that the brook should be controlled before entering the village rather than tinkering within. This advice must be heeded and not ignored as it was a decade back. The letters would make a good starting point for future action.

The implementation of the scheme noted above would not only bring protection from flash floods but could greatly enhance the appearance of Brook Street. At the present time the course of the brook varies between what might be described as an overgrown ditch, with perhaps only inches of water in the summer months, or perhaps dry, to possible overflows at times of flash floods in the autumn and winter. At the present time the parish council is endeavouring to keep it tidy, but the water-course had been allowed to become an eyesore and now at its best gives the appearance in the summer of but a ditch, as noted above. However this stretch of water could be transformed into one of beauty in the form of a tranquil longitudinal pond, perhaps graced by ducks and ducklings, with water-control mechanisms at the kissing gate where the stream enters the village and another at a reinstated sluice gate where the stream flows into the culverts.

During the seasons of expected high precipitation the water entering

the village would only be the amount able to pass through the culverts without over spilling the banks, but during the period of summer drought the northern gate control by the culverts would hold back the water to allow the pond to form, with a small amount allowed to pass through the two gates to keep a constant height. Should a thunderstorm bring torrential rain during this period, the electrically controlled mechanisms would be activated, the rise in water level causing the upper sluice to shut and the lower gate by the culverts to open. Should there be a power failure, fail-safe mechanical controls would come into play. In addition, electronically linked rain gauges in the upstream catchment area would give adequate warning of possible flooding and would activate the sluice gates.

Brook Street would thus not only be free of future flooding - the principal purpose of the scheme - with the debilitating fear of what might occur linked with insurance repercussions and the probability that the flooded road would be inaccessible on many occasions, but the landscape could be markedly improved at the same time. The accompanying photograph is of the ponded back stream dating from the 1920s.

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Brook Street in flood

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### **TWO ELSWORTH PHOTOGRAPHERS – CAN YOU ADD TO THEIR MEMORIES?**

William Rogers Billing (1853-1937) was the village schoolmaster at Elsworth from 1887 to 1912. William was a man of many interests and talents: teacher, musician, adult educator, beekeeper, woodworker, member of the local Conservative Club and a Freemason. But a recent find has shown that William was also a talented photographer and at one point he was exploring the possibility of taking this up on a professional basis.

No advertisements or other records have been found suggesting that William was also a photographer, but clear evidence of this interest, and of William's photographic skills, comes from the survival of the cabinet photograph below, which appears to date from around 1910. The photograph is a full length portrait of a young man with a flower in his lapel button hole and watch chain across his waistcoat. (Does the buttonhole decoration suggest this could be a photograph relating to a wedding?) He is standing in what appears to be a

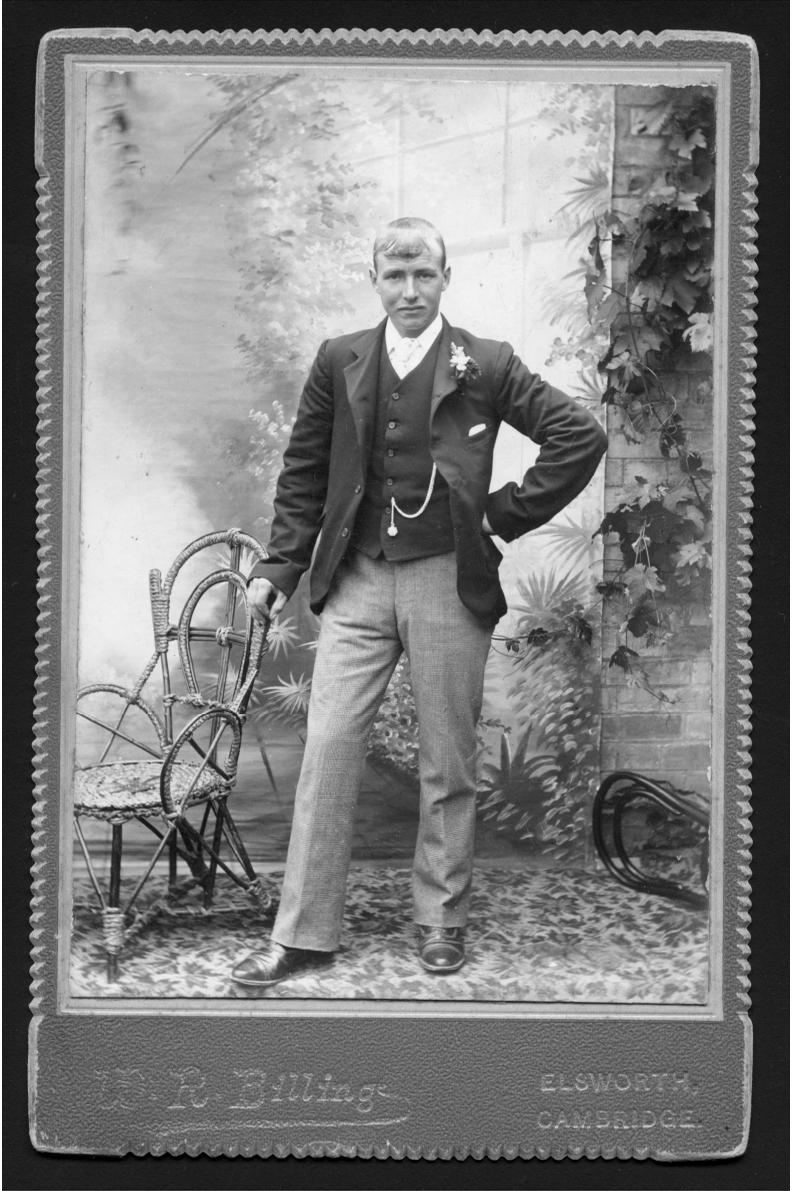
naturally-lit outdoor studio space. Behind the sitter is a brick wall and part of the wall is covered by a painted back-cloth. The backcloth depicts a large window with vegetation around the edges. The design of the backcloth is unfocussed and a number of the plants have a spiky appearance. On the right hand side of the image, the vegetation in the back-cloth blends in with real vegetation, possibly a vine, growing against the wall. The backcloth may have been hand painted by the photographer rather than being purchased commercially. The young man is standing on a floral pattern cloth or carpet. A rustic bent-wood chair is used as a studio prop, and part of a second chair can be seen lying on the floor. The subject is well framed and perfectly focussed. The photograph is mounted on a green, cloth finished, card mount with serrated and gilt edge, printed in gilt "W.R.Billing, Elsworth, Cambridge". The reverse of the mount is blank cream card. William must have had in mind operating commercially to have purchased these expensive and personalised mounts. Another photograph, of the same sitter and from the same source, has the name "Braybrook" written in pencil on the reverse. There were a number of Braybrook families in Elsworth in this period.

There is now an entry for W.R.Billing on the website for local and family historians on "Cambridgeshire Photographers 1840-2000" at <http://www.fadingimages.uk/photoBi.asp> . The webmaster for this site would like to know if any other photographs from W.R Billing have survived , so, that the entry on the site can do full justice to his talents. So, if you are looking through your old family albums, can you spot any photos with Billing's name on the mount, or which resemble anything in the photo below?

While you are looking through your old family photos, keep an eye open for survivals from another Elsworth photographer from the same period, David Andrew, about whom even less is known. David's name appears on the bottom of a number of real photograph postcards of local views.

If you can add anything to our knowledge of either of these local photographers, please contact Les Waters, [webmaster@fadingimages.uk](mailto:webmaster@fadingimages.uk)

**Les Walters**



## **WILLIAM BILLING - HEADMASTER AT ELSWORTH 1887 - 1912**

As a supplement to Les Waters article on William Billing, it is felt that readers might be interested in his time here as Headmaster of the village school.

A man from Devon, William came here in November 1887, being 32 years of age, married to Elizabeth and with, at that time, two young children who were later to be joined by three additional siblings. Both William and Elizabeth were qualified teachers [2<sup>nd</sup> class] and both taught at the school.

The image possibly now held of a village school of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a gentle peaceful community was not true of Elsworth National School at the time. In writing of 1887 and the years which followed in Issue No. 4 of this magazine, Betty Evans gives a daunting overview of the state of the school William Billing's inherited. She wrote "The troubles which had beset the long line of teachers before him were to plague him too. Poor attendance due to illness or the weather; disobedience, indiscipline and insolence in the classroom; and a constant turnover of staff all contributed to the backwardness of the school. The Inspector's report for 1886-7 states 'The new Master found the attainments in the school very low so its present condition must not be reckoned to his discredit. The reading is fluent, but writing and spelling are very bad. Arithmetic is almost a total failure and no class subjects are attempted'."

William Billing was to stay for some 25 years and presumably therefore happy in the post. It might have seemed at times the school was a family concern as both a son and daughter acted as pupil teachers, and his wife was a class teacher before family demands took precedence, subsequently fulfilling the roll of temporary replacement when a teacher was absent. It would seem it was a talented family. Mr. Billings was church organist and had a good singing voice. He and some of his children would take part in village concerts and, it seems, were in demand in neighbouring parishes.

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## ELSWORTH VILLAGE LUNCHESES

The traditional Elsworth bi-monthly lunch had to be curtailed from March last owing to the restrictions imposed by the Corona virus. The popularity of this gathering seemed ever on the increase, now attracting over forty people on each occasion, at times rising to over fifty.

The setting of long tables so as to bring a community sense to the occasion and perhaps to bring together, side by side, people not usually on chatting terms, was clearly not now possible. However a trial modified version was introduced in September which would conform with Government regulations. On a specified day those wishing to join for a village lunch would book a table with friends on a table for six, four or two according to need.

The event seemed popular, attracting over thirty of us. People could wave to each other and chat when making payment - keeping the required distance no doubt - and therefore sharing the occasion with so many from the village and surroundings, bringing an atmosphere quite different from the usual meal out. Of course the requirement of having separate tables took away the inter-action of people not well known to each other, for even though friends would naturally wish to sit together when at the previous customary long table, at the edge of a group there would be the juxtaposition with others. In order to allow for such inter-action in the future, a modification of the September scheme when people booked with friends, would be the added option not to specify an exclusive table of two, or four, or six when booking but rather request leaving seating to the George & Dragon and await with pleasure who your mystery companions will be. Regretfully the return to more stringent regulations as we go to print means the proposed November gathering cannot now take place. Hopefully the scheduled Christmas lunch on the 17<sup>th</sup> December will still be possible.

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## ELSWORTH SPORTS CLUB

Sport, along with other social activities, has been severely disrupted due to the current pandemic, but the sports club continues to survive with the help of financial grants.

The cricket season brought marked success to Elsworth, and Stephen Logue in particular. The South Cambs League this season was divided into groups and culminated in Elsworth finishing top of Group T and going on to defeat the winning team of Group S - Fulbourn Institute - in a play-off, winning an exciting match by 8 wickets. Stephen Logue had a remarkable batting average of 96, which was the best of all players in Group T. Three friendly matches were also played and the season ended with a club pairs competition.

The local football season is now under way and it was hoped that Elsworth would have fielded a team in the Cambs Sunday League. However, having entered a team in the league for a start on 20<sup>th</sup> September, the team had to be withdrawn as the main contact/secretary moved out of the area and no replacement could be found. Swavesey Spartans continue to use our facilities, mainly on Saturday mornings.

Regarding table tennis, both the Cambridge and Ely leagues decided that last season's league positions would be decided on the average points per match gained when the pandemic brought an early close to the season. The outcome was that Elsworth's first team was placed 5<sup>th</sup> of nine teams, the second team also 5<sup>th</sup> of nine and the 3<sup>rd</sup> team 3<sup>rd</sup> of nine.

At the time of writing there is some uncertainty concerning the 2020/21 season, with many players of several clubs deciding not to participate. However, the Ely League is hoping to start matches on the 16<sup>th</sup> November. There will be two divisions of six teams in each, with Elsworth entering two teams. The Table Tennis England guidelines for competitive play will be followed and therefore there will be no doubles matches. Club and social table tennis can be played when there are no league matches, with no more than six people present, no doubles matches and social distancing observed.

The sessions of snooker on Monday mornings and the monthly whist drives on Friday evenings have both been suspended due to the pandemic. It is hoped to re-commence these when circumstances permit, possibly along with carpet bowls as some renewed interest has been shown.

Roger Fensom [01954 267534]

## Obituary



### **HILDA PAVEY**

**24<sup>th</sup> November 1951 - 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

Hilda was born in nearby Bourn. She was the first child of Letitia and James Stewart, later to be joined by her brother Ken. Hilda grew up in Bourn, where she enjoyed a successful time at school before moving on to work as a telephonist and various similar jobs. In 1969 Hilda met Roger and they were married the following year. They were to have four children - Paul born in 1971, Hanna in 1977, Adam in 1979 and Stephen in 1981. In 1975 they moved to Elsworth and Hilda was to live here for the rest of her life.

Hilda was best known for her childminding career. For her it was more than a job, each child being treated as a member of the family. She loved working with children and her home was like a mini-nursery. In more recent years she was to care for her grandchildren Ruby and Lucy who loved visiting grandma's house in Roger's Close.

Hilda had six grandchildren, Chloe, Ruby, Lucy, Harry, Freddie and Summer. She also took Adam's step-daughter under her wing and

treated her as one of her own. She lived for her family and has left so many happy memories with each of them; swimming; being pulled to school on a sledge in winter; family parties; holidays on the beach.

Hilda was kind and generous to all who knew her. Following her initial diagnosis of breast cancer in 2009 she bravely fought the disease and went on to support friends in the village who were subsequently similarly diagnosed. She ran in “Race for Life” on nine occasions, many with her daughter Hanna and grand-daughter Ruby, raising a staggering £4,200 over the years. Her last run was with Hanna and Ruby in 2019. Nobody knew at the time that her cancer had returned and sadly by November she was admitted to Addenbrookes with breathing difficulties and, after what seemed to be an initially positive prognosis, passed away three weeks later. When coronavirus restrictions allow, Hanna will be participating in the 26.5 mile London moonwalk in memory of her mother.

Every opportunity to enjoy and make the most of life was taken by Hilda. She loved walking with the village walking group and with friends Mary and Sairose; she enjoyed swimming and socialising and was keen on gardening and cooking and happy getting lost in a good book. She had enjoyed many holidays with the family in recent years, being with her son Paul and his family at Whitby and Northumberland, with son Adam in the Lake District for his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and with daughter Hanna and her family in Norfolk. She also spent many happy week-ends with Hanna and family, who live locally, in nearby country parks or the coast. In recent years Hilda had rediscovered her love of travel, with trips to Rome and Iceland, and had hoped for many more. Of great joy, too, were visits to see her grandchildren in Wales, Grantham and Solihull, where she was a real hands-on grandma, supporting each of them whenever needed. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

## Obituary



### **BERNARD SHAW**

**January 1931 – April 2020**

Bernard was born in Nottingham on January the twenty fifth, 1931, to parents Charles and Emily Shaw. His father was a general labourer and his mother was a nurse. Together with his sister Monica, they lived on Longford Crescent in Bulwell, Nottingham, the same road where his future wife Brenda lived. His mother died of tetanus when he was just 10 years old, after cutting herself on an air raid shelter. Although he didn't gain any qualifications at school, he was always good at reading and had a wide vocabulary which he could use to great effect. He had an artistic flair, but as he couldn't afford art college fees, he never obtained any formal qualifications, a deficit which he more than compensated in later life. As an adolescent, he joined the cadets where he learnt self discipline and acquired an interest in arms and armour, particularly of the antique variety. Bernard was called up for National Service in 1949 and was posted to the medical corps where he dealt with mentally ill patients. As these postings were in the South, he would often travel to London to visit the museums and study the arms and armour exhibits. He also got to know immigrant Jewish craftsmen who were skilled in making decorative applications for uniforms.

He met his wife, Brenda, at his sister Monica's wedding to the Canadian airman Ron Embury. After courting, they married in 1956 and in 1959 their first son, Lee, was born. They subsequently moved to a house on Bestwood Park Estate in Nottingham where they had their second son, Martin. The family had a very happy life there, and Bernard built a small workshop in the back garden where he would spend hours repairing antique weapons and creating engraved works of art in horn, metal and ivory, many of which are now in various collections around the world. Martin was a willing assistant and, following his father's example, he intended to learn engraving as a profession. Bernard was well respected in the antiques trade as a knowledgeable,

reliable and skilled restorer with an eye for detail and authenticity. He worked for an antique arms and armour dealer in Nottingham for a number of years. He became an active member of the the 95<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Rifles in the British Section of the Napoleonic Association, re-enacting key battles of the Napoleonic Wars. Not surprisingly, he was an important adviser in all matters relating to the care and authenticity of the equipment. Martin and Brenda were “conscripted“ into the Napoleonic association and enjoyed the travel and camaraderie. One accolade he rarely mentioned was his role in providing historical and military advice to the producers of the Sharpe TV-series which is based on the adventures of Richard Sharpe, a fictional British soldier in the Napoleonic Wars. He even received an official photograph of Sharpe with a signed dedication from Sean Bean, the actor who played the leading role.

Unfortunately, in 1978 tragedy struck when their son Martin collapsed and died at the age of 16. Although this was a terrible loss for the family, Bernard’s calm and solid character was a great strength and brought Brenda and Lee through the following years. After studying biochemistry, Lee married his German wife Beate and has been working for many years in Kiel in Germany as a biomedical scientist. Bernard and Brenda often flew over to Germany to go on holiday and spend Christmas with Lee, Beate and their grandson Colin. They made many friends in Germany and they are very fondly remembered by all of them, most especially by Beate’s parents Hans and Helga Mäver.

Bernard retired from his last job in 1994, which was at the main Boots Company warehouse in Nottingham, and in 2005 they moved to Constellation Park in Elsworth, next door to Brenda’s sister Anne and her husband Ivan, both of whom have been very supportive over the years, even more so when Brenda was ill and following her death in August 2019. After an exacerbation of an existing lung condition, he died of pneumonia in the early hours of the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020. He was cared for in the days leading up to his death by his son Lee. Bernard’s family would like to express their deepest gratitude to the GPs at the Papworth Surgery, especially Drs Cronk and Bailey who, in spite of all the difficulties posed by the corona virus pandemic, showed a tireless dedication to making Bernard’s last days as comfortable as possible. They are a credit to their profession.

Bernard was an organised and disciplined man. He was also good company and had quite a sense of humour, with the Goon Show and Ronny Barker as his favourites. He took life as it came and seldom complained. Indeed, during his retirement years in Elsworth he would often quip “ I’ve never had it so good“. He was always polite and took sincere people seriously. Many have commented that he was an “old school“ gentleman. Most importantly though, he was a caring and dedicated husband and a loving and supportive father. He is sadly missed by his remaining son Lee and by all who knew him.

## Obituary



**DAPHNE BLEET**  
**1926 - 2020**

With the sad passing of Daphne Bleet the family and village have not only said goodbye to a well loved person but also to a family name linked with Elsworth for over 200 years. Daphne herself came to Elsworth in 1953 when she married Eric. They lived in Chestnut Villa in Boxworth Road for the entirety of their married life, and it was there that their two children, Denise and Kevin, were brought up. Eric was to die in 2005 and latterly Daphne was to move to Constellation Park.

Early in her adult life Daphne had qualified as a nurse at Bedford Hospital, where she was to gain promotion as a theatre sister. Subsequently she was to move to the Middlesex Hospital in London to train as a midwife, but sadly her mother died before Daphne could complete the course and she returned home to look after her father and brother. It was then that she met and married Eric and was to work for a while at Papworth Hospital. Motherhood was to bring another break in her career, although she was to return to Papworth on a part-time basis when the children became less dependent on her. Within the village in later years the Elsworth village cricket team and their opponents were well served by Daphne as for some 28 years she assisted her daughter Denise in providing the essential tea at the appropriate break.

It would seem fitting in this tribute to Daphne to refer also to the family

of which she was part. William Bleet, the first of the family in Elsworth, moved here in 1805 and was subsequently to run the Plough Inn in Brook Street for many years with his wife Catherine. Through their sons a prosperous building and blacksmith business was to develop, with the smithy, long since demolished, situated prominently at the lower end of The Drift. The family was to acquire several properties by means of the purchase of a parcel of land in Church Lane where nos. 9, 11, and 15 now stand, but only one of the five remains. The family also had a chicken farm on land now forming Constellation Park, coincidentally the site of Daphne's last home.

Daphne lives on in memory and through her children. The family name also will still be recalled in the years to come as in Church Lane a thatched cottage formerly owned by the family has the name 'Bleet Cottage'.

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