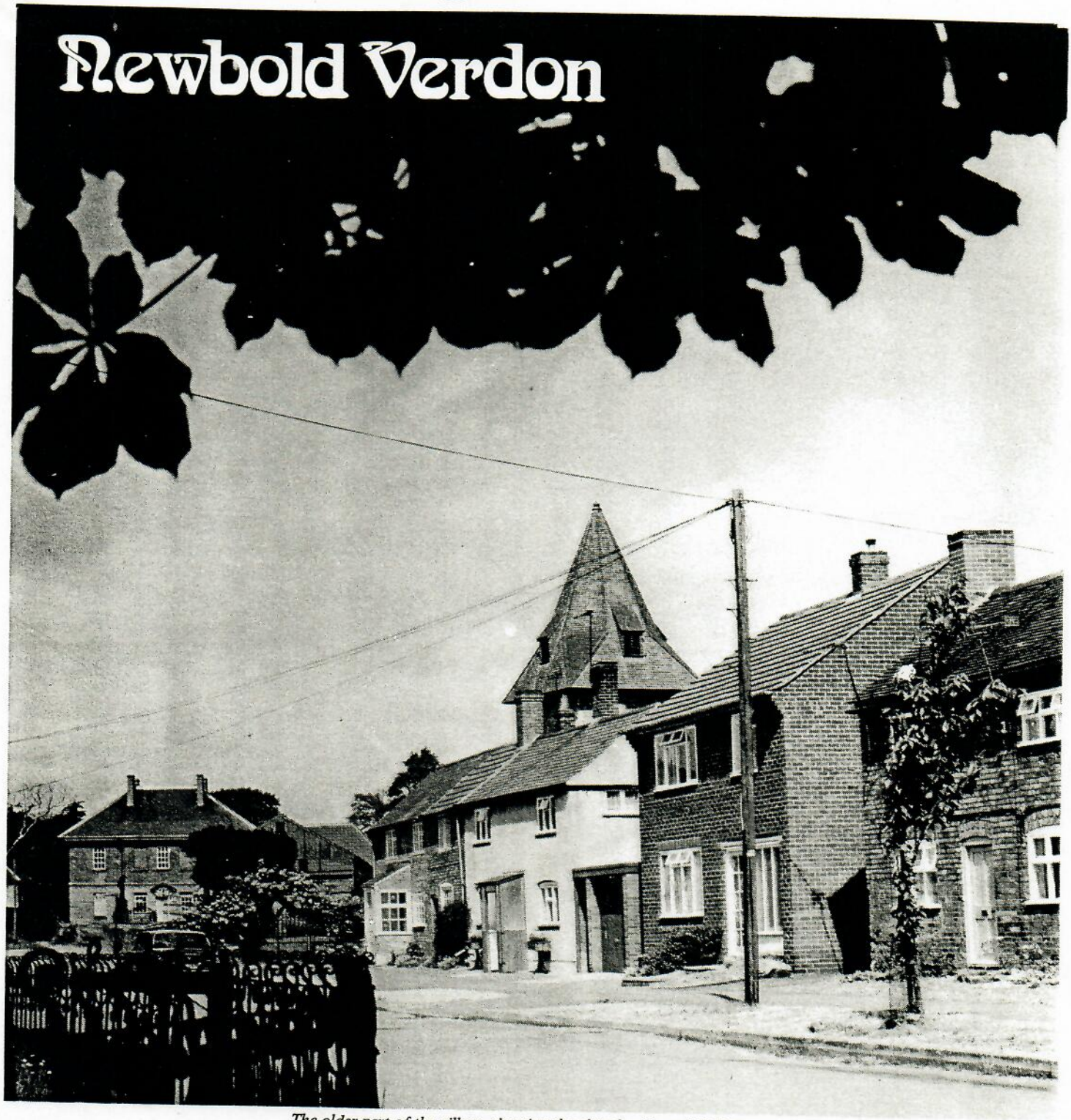
Around the Villages

Newbold Verdon



The older part of the village, showing the church spire and Hall Farm.

Newbold Verdon would be the Uranus of Hinckley's Solar System. It lies fully eight miles out, and beyond it begin the foreign parts with such outlandish names as Bagworth, Thornton, and Ibstock.

'The village is large' says ever-helpful Nichols 'And lies scattered'. Even today you can see what he means — while hardly comparable in size to such neighbours as Barwell, Newbold was evidently designed by people who did not feel themselves restricted as to space. Or by farmers, whose open spaces were their livelihood. As a second opening comment, the description of Newbold by relative new-comer Mr. Malcolm Mould, Headmaster of the school, might serve. 'It's not as picturesque as a village in the Cotswolds, for example..... but for sheer friendly character, it takes some beating.'

The settlement began, it seems, later than that of nearby Market Bosworth, since its name is of Norman origin. It relates to one Bertram de Verdun, who had the tenure of the place from the ubiquitous Hugo de Grentemaisnell, in the twelfth century. From the fact that it was Bertram, rather than Hugo, who surnamed the village, one can infer that until his time the settlement was not considerable enough to be named in its own right. The prefix 'Newbold' signifies 'New Built' or 'New Buildings', according to authorities.

From the inception of the village with its little Norman church which has now been replaced with first one and then another later building, Newbold changed hands between several noble

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families in a series of legal and marital settlements characteristic of a time when land, as much as gold, was currency. The population seems to have averaged some twenty cottagers and their families through the middle ages, and the village must have been a satellite of Bosworth rather than Hinckley in those days, when the Market was the centre of economic life.

Two distinguished holders of the Newbold Verdon manor were the Crewe family, and that of the Montagues. Lord Nathaniel Crewe, most of all, is remembered as Archbishop of Durham (he was instated at the end of the seventeenth century).

A royalist to the core ('a rotton cavalier' – one staunch Cromwellian called him) he 'was a good mimic and having a quick apprehension' (prima facie, hardly adequate recommendations to an archiepiscopacy).

Nevertheless, he made an impression on Charles II after the Restoration, and that was how one got ahead in that period. He quickly received his first church appointment and was a relatively young Archbishop, but by all accounts an exemplary churchman nevertheless.

The story of the Crewe family and others like them would fill a book (the sort Anthony Trollope might have written), but there is a uniform lack of connection with their tenant village, with the notable exeption of Lord Crewe's founding of a village school, the ancestor of the one found there today.

The Montague family were less of absentee landlords. The most well-known of them, Lady Mary Montague, was an inhabitant of the exclusive literary world of Swift and Pope, but reserved a special affection for the Newbold estate. 'One of the most charming and pleasant places I have ever seen. . . everything about it is in elegant taste'. Lady Mary was one of the first of the so-called 'Blue Stockings' (the term originated from her period and circle), and her association with Newbold parallels Byron's with nearby Kirkby Mallory.

Even today, Newbold has the air of an agricultural village – but perhaps deceptively so for trade and industry have always been important. In 1801 89 persons were engaged in agriculture and 116 in trade, the total population being 339. This might have been surprising were the village in another part of the country, but follows the Leicestershire pattern. At present the heavy industries at Desford and the nearby mines provide much employment, and the village is convenient for daily travel to either Hinckley or Leicester. As for the population, a survey by the late Mr. Walter Preston in his capacity as war-time A.R.P. warden revealed that it was around 1,200. Now the figure has risen to 4,000, and is stable.

For tourists spilling over from the attractions of nearby Market Bosworth (if any do) there is little in the way of ancient monuments – a modern writer called Mary Montague's 'elegant' hall 'rather plain brick', but the village has a lively, homely manner to it, and an air of prosperity too.

According to Michael Preston, now deputy Mayor of Hinckley and Bosworth and always a leading citizen of Newbold Verdon, there was a time when the village would have thought of itself simply as a coal mining community. Another established figure in the village, Mr. Lesley Hill, sees it as still the ideal place of residence for anyone connected with mining – far enough from the fields to be safe and clean, but near enough for convenience.

Mr. Preston, is, indeed, in the solid fuel business himself, although he feels there is far more to Verdon than merely coal, these days. And he has ancestors who occupied much the same central position as himself in village life – even before the days of intensive mining. 'It must be in the blood' Councillor Preston comments, speaking of the family penchant for office-holding. He thumbs through old records pointing to entries by Great-Grandpa William Wildman (it was the Wildmans whom at one time 'ran the village'), and mentions also Thomas Hargrave, an



Mr. and Mrs. Michael Preston, in their garden.

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auctioneer who had much to do with enclosures, and another ancestor. Michael Preston himself has as much enthusiasm for the New village, however, as the old (if indeed you can make that distinction in what has grown as an integrated community). The expansion plan 're-vitalized' Newbold: 'In a way, it's now a completed village'. Concerning the neat new estates with their flower beds, lawns and rose bushes – he remembers a time when housing in the village definitely stood in need of improvement. And architecturally, there was a renewal – Mr. Trowbridge, surveyor for the new plans, commented that it only needed a couple more rows of houses to go – and Newbold Verdon would be completely new.

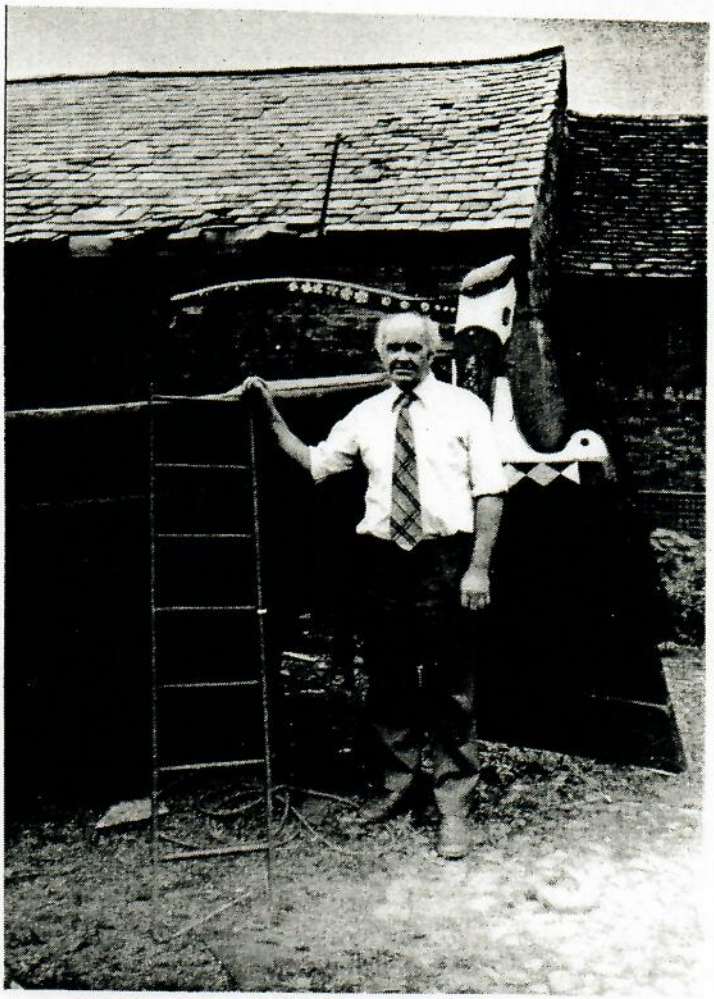
'It depends what you're after, the way you see changes', Mr. Lesley Hill adds. 'They've certainly been good for trade'. A villager all his life, Mr. Hill remembers the time when half the inhabitants were called Statham and you had to put a nickname on ('Whiskey Statham, Esq., High Street') if you wanted to be sure a letter was delivered correctly.

Mr. Preston lives at the beginning of what might be called the Chimney Corner of the village, where the past lingers longer than elsewhere. the houses have not been renewed, and many of the longest established residents have their dwellings. There, too, is the twice rebuilt church, of which only an arch and two windows remain as reminders of its origins. According to Mr. Preston the congregation is surprisingly young, although this holds true more for the morning than the evening service.

Here is Hall Farm, backing on to the old manor estate, and here too is Church Farm, in which resides Mr. John Vernon, a farmer by profession and an expert in all types of engineering by – one might almost say – vocation. Walking into his yard (through a level crossing gate) you could be excused for thinking you had mistakenly ended up in Cadeby Rectory. Mr. Vernon has his own traction engine, his own narrow gauge railway, and countless other projects in hand: making everything from narrow boats to camera fittings.

It is Mr. Vernon's house that is perhaps responsible for the greatest influx of strangers to the village – for they come in coach-loads to see his engines. Mr. Vernon obliges many steam enthusiasts by getting up steam for his visit, but will not be tied to a timetable, and is quite prepared to give his engines a rest for a year, if he has other projects on hand. It seems to be the satisfaction of doing a job that means most for him (the steam engine was 'a pile of bits' when it came to him) and some of his achievements are awesome. Such as the enormous boiler which would impress D.I.Y. enthusiasts and self-sufficiency bods alike – it heats the whole house using only waste wood as fuel.

After the narrow-boats, his latest project, are finished, what then? 'A divorce, I should think. . .' Mr. Vernon replies, looking sidelong at Mrs. Vernon. But while her husband's work might occasionally be a little trying – Mrs. Vernon must be the envy of any wife who has difficulty persuading her husband to do jobs around the house. . .



Mr. John Vernon, by the Narrow Boat hull on which he is currently working. Mr. Vernon bought an old 72ft. hull for £500, and is turning it into two 36ft. boats, fully fitted out for cruising.



Harry and Violet Bell at the Jubilee.

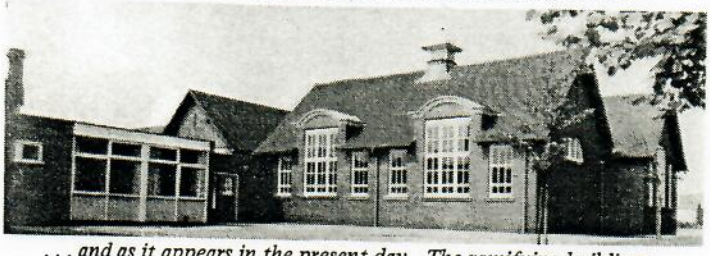
Over the fields and down the Desford Road lives another well-respected villager of farming stock. Mrs. Mary Fisher was born at the other end of the village where Fields Farm is now, opposite the Dragon, and but for a short sojourn in Huddlescote has always lived in Newbold. She is honorary historian to the village, whether by recall (she is old enough to remember a very different Newbold), or by painstaking research. Invited to do so by the Rev. Hall, the Rector, she contributes a regular historical article to the Parish Magazine, and taken altogether her work would appear to be as useful and informative a survey as ever escaped publication because its author was not ambitious. Her themes, week by week, have gone right from the Medieval past to a record of village pub landlords – and she has more in the pipe-line. In the articles of recent interest the text is cut with little reminiscences from the Author's memory. In speaking to Mrs. Fisher, her vivid and precise memories of cycling trips to Bradgate Park in days before the lanes were much used by powered vehicles, of her father and his insistance that 'the land is what feeds you', and other 'characters' of the time, are a joy to listen to.

Something common to people of Mrs. Fisher's generation and contemporary youngsters, would have been the village school. As our photographs show, it grew up with the village – the nucleus is the same building that formed the entire school when constructed in 1909. In showing visitors round, headmaster Mr. Mould points out the varied and interesting environment this continuous growth has produced. The school has now had three successive 'main halls', each bigger than the last, and each time the previous hall became a teaching area. There is plenty

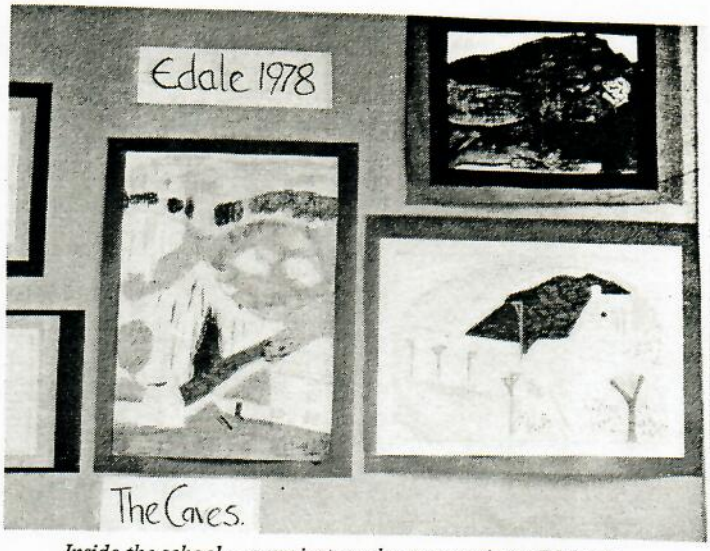
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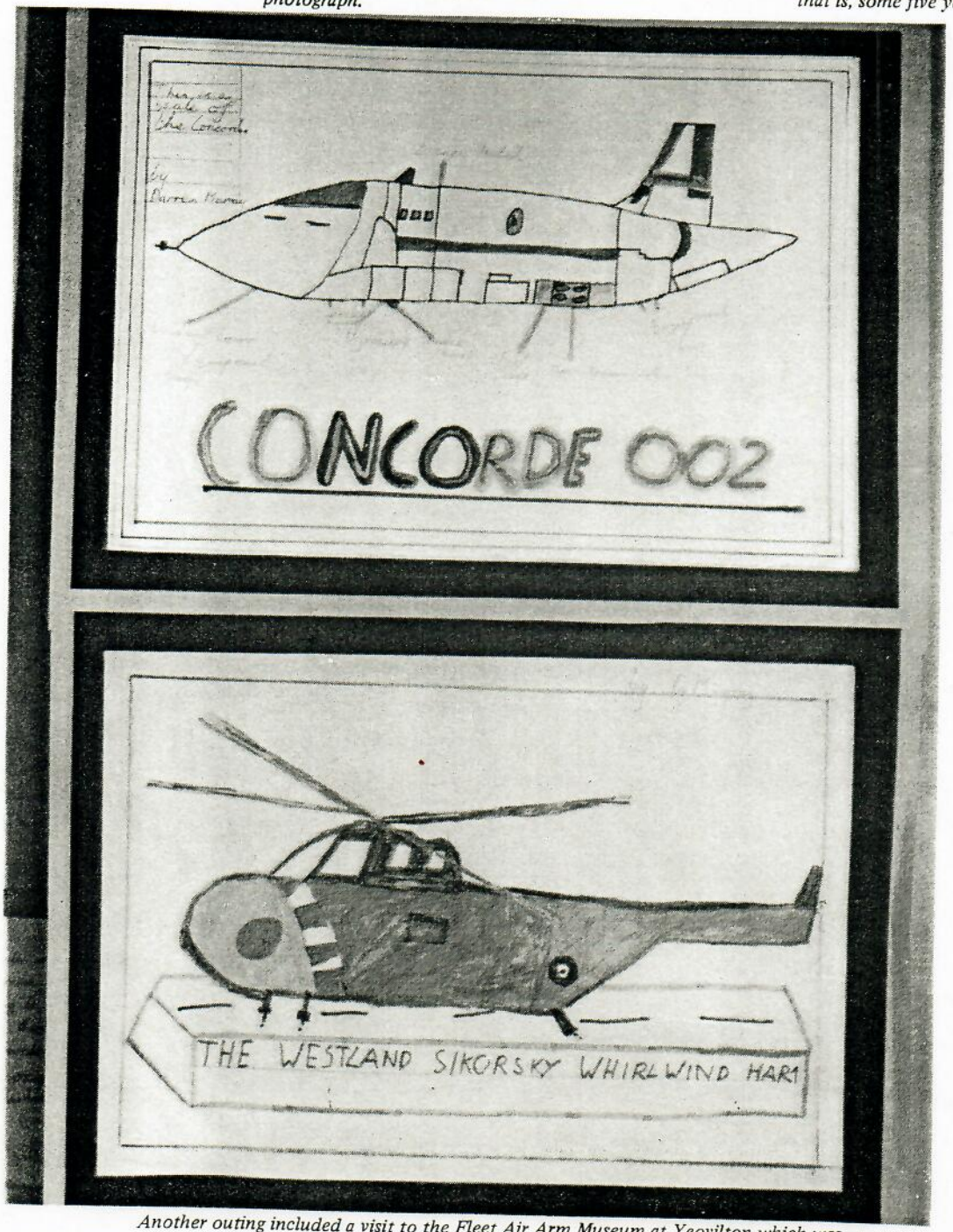
Newbold Verdon School, soon after its construction in 1909. . .



. . . and as it appears in the present day. The ramifying buildings in fact extend back far beyond what could be captured on this photograph.



Inside the school – a project on the recent trip to Edale, in Derbyshire. These school trips are so popular the Headmaster recalls a parent trying to make sure her child was booked on one before the child even joined the school – that is, some five years in advance. . .



Another outing included a visit to the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton which was tremendously enjoyed by pupils.

of elbow-room and classrooms are anything but stereotyped – touring the school is like touring the architectural styles of the century. An environment that has to be enlivening.

Mr. Mould has been here six years, hasn't an ill word to say of the village, and maintains that the school is worthy of it. 'A single school means an integrated community' he observes. 'It's really nice there – especially the maths and the writing. . .' This testimonial comes from one of the pupils themselves, Rachel Gerrard, who was kind enough to guide our reporter through the perplexities of the new estates, in search of the headmaster. She liked the way she had the freedom to write her own stories and essays, rather than just following the teachers.

'Last year's presents in this years wrappings' is the formula to which, Mr. Mould feels, the school owes the twin laurels of happy pupils and satisfying results. They kept their heads at a time when, educationally, all around were losing theirs.

The school also forms a focal point for the community and the evening activities. About twenty associations are affiliated to it from the 'Verdon Players' to cycling clubs and a little club aptly named 'Chatterbox', so the school is not in disuse when its 500 children are not there. And it all helps villagers to look upon it as **their** school, rather than their children's.

With an industrial tradition, Newbold Verdon has its share of skilled tradesmen,

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but one who is making a name for himself, his firm, and his college is Andrew Mensley, who has won a place at the 'Skills Olympics' to be held in Korea. At nineteen, Andrew is working for his father's local plumbing firm – so villagers are assured of the very best, when he comes to call.

Another trade represented in Newbold is an increasingly rare one. Behind the unlikely facade of the modern houses in Dragon Lane – there is the last thing that one would look for – a Blacksmith's forge.

Mr. Partridge is hardly just a village smith, since he shoes horses within a fifty mile radius, catering for discerning customers who want the traditional skills of an expert, rather than the mechanical methods some employ. But although people are prepared to get the best for their horses, they are apparently not for themselves. Mr. Partridge has given up other aspects of the smith's trade due to lack of demand. 'People won't pay for the old smith-forged iron gates that would take two men to carry. They think modern wrought iron ones – I could lift six of them on my back – will last as well'. But the horses give him plenty of trade. He has worked with all kinds, from the delicate race-horses to shire



Mrs. Mary Fisher – among other things, Village Historian.



Barry and Linda Jackson at the Dragon.

breeds, a set of whose great iron shoes takes two days to make.

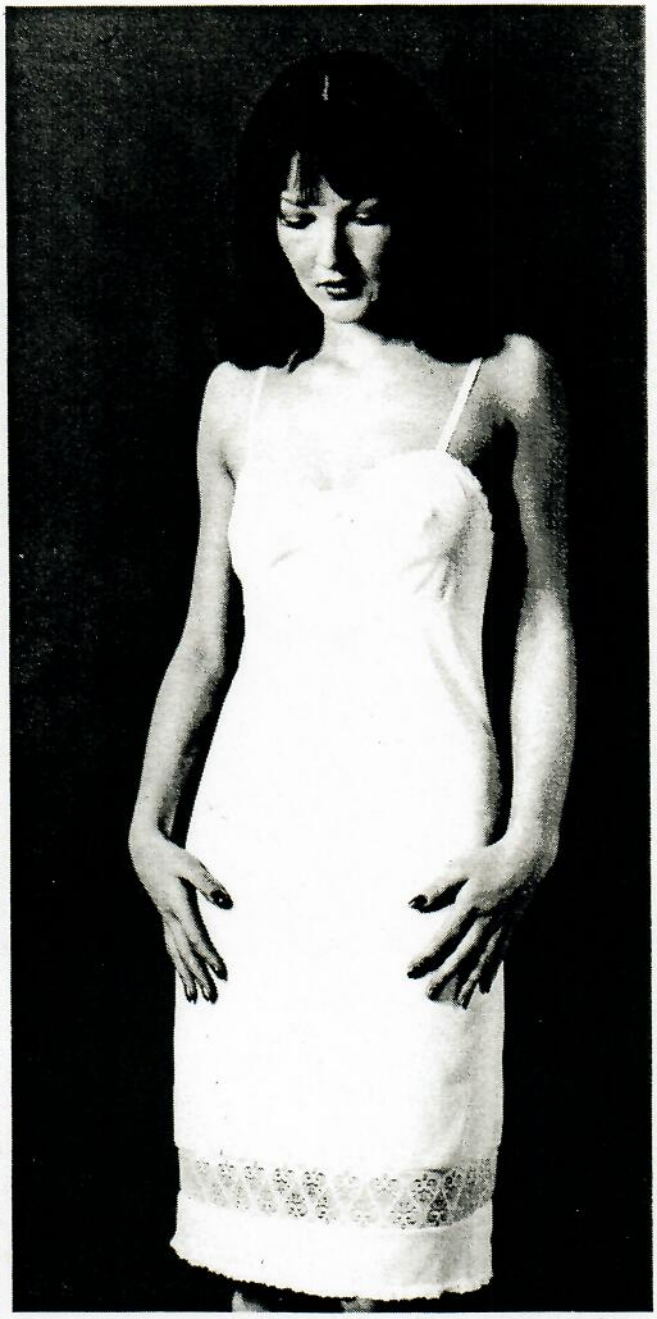
Newbold Verdon 'Lies scattered. . .'. And marking one end of it, is the Dragon pub, run by Barry Jackson. This is a modern building, completed in 1972 when it replaced the old Dragon which was damaged by subsidence. It is clean, airy, and convenient, and although Mr. Jackson called the original plan 'a little like a Squash-court' he has now redesigned it to his entire satisfaction, breaking up the 'wide open spaces' and giving the comfortable, congenial atmosphere associated with the best English pubs. He is also laying on meals, and the three-course spread of home-made food should prove a great attraction. The Bosworth Room is traditionally inhabited by locals, and there is a fine display of darts trophies, the team having won several championships, including the Barlestone league and sections of the Everards League. Custom also comes from beyond the village, and tourists from either the Bosworth Field site or Twycross Zoo often choose to break their journey home in the friendly surroundings of the Dragon. Its grassy situation makes it ideal for an outside drink, and car parking facili-



A view of one of the rather pleasant housing estates in the village.

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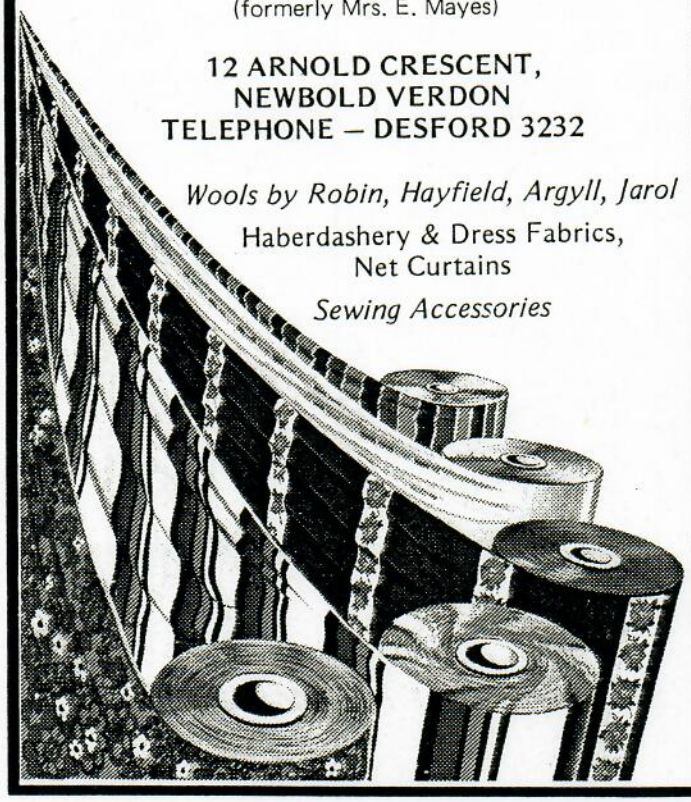
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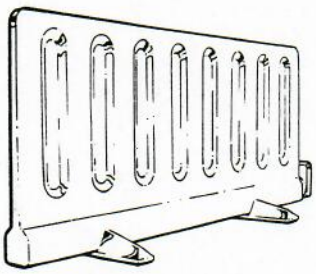
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Ivy Cottage – shades of a Newbold Verdon which is now no more. The combination of brick and timber frame construction, architecturally unnecessary, argues an origin in the period when one style was just giving way to the other.

ties are ample.

Back in the village, the Jubilee is the picture of a familiar local pub. Harry Bell is the tenant there, and he is from Newbold by birth, although he worked for a while with Wards in Barwell. In taking over the Jubilee, he had the tenancy of a pub that has been a feature of its village for over eighty years, and is very well patronized. It is also the base for the only football club in Newbold, and enthusiasts will remember that it was the Jubilee team who won last season's Hinckley and District Knock-out cup. . . the celebration back at headquarters must have been something to remember.

All in all, Newbold Verdon, with its associations with mining, and trade, industry, and agriculture, established village families and polished new housing developments, is a village of contrasts. But there is no friction between the different aspects, just as there is none between the Anglicans, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Jehovah's Witnesses that represent religion in the village.



The 'Penny Bazaar' held in the centre of Newbold Verdon until early this century. One still occasionally comes across people in possession of the large wicker baskets in which the wares were displayed.

Mr. Mould mentioned as an endearing characteristic, that even if you were a stranger, you could walk down the street and guarantee to get a cheery smile. And this, at least, is one thing to which we can testify from our own experience.