

NOSTALGIA NOTEBOOK

Village has pride in its 150 years

By Terry Gilder

IT may not have a pub or a church and appear to be a line of houses either side of a village street at the end of a motorway exit, but that is no reason why the community of Creswell should be feeling sorry for itself.

While neighbouring parishes were building their own village halls at the end of the First World War, Creswell managed without because its population of around 300 hardly warranted it.

It has just completed 150 years as a civil parish (under the Local Government Act of 1858) and has good reason for celebration, not least the changes of that village street from being almost a country lane in the horse-and-cart era to today's busy thoroughfare.

Creswell Parish Council clerk Tom Doubtfire admits that being without a village hall may have limited the village's growth as a community. "Even the parish council has met since 1977 in Stafford - at Tillington Manor Primary School - and before that, meetings were held in clerks' homes. My garage was once Creswell's polling station."

"Traffic from the Junction 14 of the M6 rattles along the main street - Creswell Grove - morning, noon and night. "You can hardly hold a conversation with anyone out there, never mind crossing the road," says Mr Doubtfire.

Creswell doesn't meet the criteria for the annual best-kept village contest, so for years village stalwart Lillian Howarth organised a successful best-kept front garden competition.

The difficulties of giving the community an identity are compounded by the different authorities which Creswell - like any 'border' village - has to contend with.

It is policed from Stone, the motorway is the responsibility of the Highways Agency, the county council looks after its main road - as for the motorway roundabout, the parish council has to deal with three different authorities.

"It's a nightmare," says the veteran clerk, who once served as a parish

SYMBOLS: The newly-designed Creswell Parish Council's badge of office comprises the copper beech planted to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, gates marking the date of it becoming a civil parish and the M6. Right: The memorial to village hero Captain John Pershing Pörrin.

councillor and recalls that before the advent of the M6, Creswell parish included part of Trinity Fields and Parkside.

"We are now much smaller, but we now have the largest industrial estate in Stafford and don't get a penny in rates from it," says Councillor Richard Thomas, the clerk adding that just one per cent from the estate's council tax income would provide enough capital to build a village hall.

With so much to regret, why has the council been celebrating its 150 years as a civil parish, starting annual parish meetings in 1894 and with few records of meetings between the end of the First World War and 1962?

Back in 1894, the council had

several notables including pottery manufacturer Joseph Elliot Meakin, of Creswell Hall and lord of the manor Henry Hilderley, but it tended to gather once a year for the parish meeting.

In 1963, Creswell was given parish council status and it coincided with two issues which weakened the population of Creswell to the need for a voice - the M6 was being built on its doorstep and the Stoke City Council was proposing to buy Seighford airfield to use as the city's airport.

Those first councillors, Lillian Howarth, Eileen Jeffery, George D Jeffery, John Rostance, E. Harry Lovell, Leslie Salmon and Henry S Ward, found plenty to concentrate



their minds, including the lack of a footpath from Creswell to the other side of the new M6.

Not surprising, then, that Creswell Parish Council is jubilant after nearly 40 years of campaigning to have persuaded the county council to establish a path which was opened earlier this year.

Over the years, Creswell has dealt with other "problems" including speeding vehicles, lack of a bus shelter and the usual dog dirt and lack of lampposts agenda familiar to most other parish councils.

Next month - on Saturday July 4 - it will mark its 150th anniversary with a memorial service to remember the war-time heroism of the USAF's Captain John P Perrin who died when he steered his blazing Mustang fighter aircraft away from local housing, thus saving countless lives.

Afterwards, the first-ever badge of office created for the Creswell Parish Council's chairman will be handed over by the Mayor of Stafford, Councillor Jean Tabernor, and the present lord of the manor - Henry Hilderley - will cut an anniversary cake.

The venue of the celebrations will be on the Primepoint/Pro Logis business park - where else for a village without a church or hall?

That shortfall could be solved if any future housing development included the building of a Creswell-by-pass to cope with extra traffic, transforming today's busy thoroughfare back to its country lane status. Now that's a thought.