

BRANSCOMBE PROJECT - HISTORY SNIPS

Barbara Farquharson: 'Talking Heads' – Sixty Years of Change

Last year the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) was sixty years old. But, with Covid and Lockdown, it was hard to celebrate, and so, instead, this year they asked the various East Devon AONB parishes to come up with exhibitions or some other project that played with the theme of changing parish landscapes over the last sixty years.

The Branscombe Project decided to try their hand at a Talking Head video. Some of you may be old enough to remember an romantic sit-com with Judi Dench called 'A Fine Romance'. As I remember, it began with Judi Dench and Michael Williams posed within oval picture frame.

So we 'framed' seven people who'd lived in the village all, or a lot of, their lives. They introduced themselves and sometimes recalled an early memory. Then we recorded them talking about the past and spliced these recordings with images from the Parish Council Archive (on the Branscombe Project website) and contemporary photos. Each person talked about a particular aspect of change, and we also asked them about their feelings – positive or negative – to the changes that have occurred.

Chris Bass volunteered to create the video. I suspect he didn't quite realise how much work it would be – so grateful thanks to him. I helped structure the interviews. Sarah Jones went into the archives to come up with some statistics about changing demographics. Paul Newman was called upon to conjure up contemporary images.

Here's just a flavour of things they touched upon –



Linda Hughes remembered John working on the beach – a thriving fishing and tourist business.



She talked about the decline in fishing and how the last fishing boat has gone. She talked of climate change and how the profile of cliff and beach have changed dramatically.



John Bass, builder and long-time chairman of the Parish Council, talked about the council houses built in the late fifties/early sixties (and earlier ones built in the thirties), and the effect of Mrs Thatcher's Right to Buy.





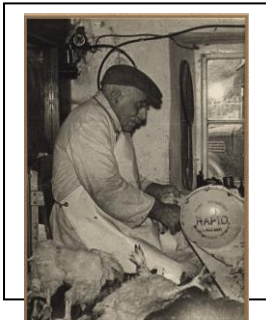
He remembered building the private houses that took up small pieces of land. As Parish Councillor he was very aware of how difficult it was to build new houses in an Area of Outstanding Beauty with draconian planning regs.

As a life-long bell-ringer, John worried about how the number of local bell-ringers had declined.

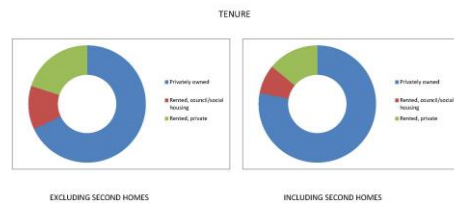
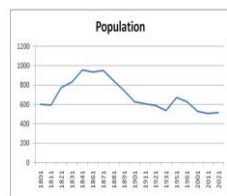


Jean Brimson, the oldest person born and bred in the village, recalled early school days and the effect of post-war education legislation. How it became possible for children who passed the eleven plus to go to grammar school, and how this opened up work opportunities. She talked about how the numbers of children in the primary school fluctuated and how in the last decades the numbers had gone down.

She remembered marrying Norman in St Winifred's in 1958,. She's worried about the dramatic decline in church-goers.



Sarah Jones looked at changing demographics – the decline in overall numbers, the aging profile, the increasing number of second homes and holiday rentals, and the changing farming landscape.



IC



Marion Ivey remembered the string of village shops, many of which survived right through into the seventies, and how, over the last decades, they have disappeared.

She also tells the story of the Chapel and how, in the mid-eighties, it finally closed its doors and became a private house.



Ralph Cox and Nicky Westlake talked about farming.



Ralph comes from a family that farmed at Bulstone. He listed the large number of farms in the parish in the late fifties and remembered that most of them survived through to the eighties. In the last decades, most have been sold as private dwellings. He talked about the number of people that used to work on the farms, and how farming has become a lonely business. He talked about the community – about building the new village hall, and Variety Night.



Nicky, farming the National Trust Manor Mill farm with her husband Andrew and brother-in-law Ian, talked about the effect of Brexit and of climate change; about the difficulties, challenges, and possibilities. She talked about a precarious future.



When asked about what was positive – or negative - about the changes, people expressed a lot of worry. Much of it was about the lack of housing and work, but also the 'hollowing out' of the community, and climate change.



I talked a little about what came out of these recordings. None of us were much good at marshalling chronologies. Decade drifted into decade, punctuated by events that could be tied down – leaving school, marriage, death. And people didn't talk much about wider changes over the last sixty years – the nuclear threat in the sixties ... AIDs ... the economic melt-down. These things affected our lives, but weren't seen as part of a parish remit.

It seemed clear that there's a distinction between the view from *outside*. For the tourist of second-homer it seems an unchanging, tranquil landscape. And the view from *inside* – where there's frustration at the lack of affordable housing, local work, and the hollowing out of community.

Our Talking Heads recording and the offerings from the other Parishes will go on display at Kennaway House in Sidmouth from July 17th to 21st, and then again, for just one day, at Woodbury Park on September 27.

. We thought that we might show the Talking Head recording at one of next year's Winter Talks in the hope that other people might like to take part in the discussion.

Meanwhile, grateful thanks to all the people involved – most particularly all the Talking Heads and Chris Bass.