

**ANNUAL REPORT BY ANDREW VESSEY
(Local History Recorder)**

for

THE PARISH OF FRESSINGFIELD, SUFFOLK

January - December 2022

JANUARY

One obvious result of winter weather and any remaining Covid restrictions is that there are fewer events and occasions for reporting on during the next couple of months. Several residents would usually escape to warmer climes during January but most have remained this year, preferring to stay as safe as possible. Although continuing risks from public events and travel have lessened considerably, there are reports from our clubs and societies of low turn-out to meetings, raising the danger of membership levels becoming unable to support a programme of speakers or warranting the hire charges. Masks are still required for entry to our Village Shop and Surgery, while those attending worship in our churches are urged to also comply.

The Annual Programmes of most Fressingfield Clubs that publish their diaries of speakers to a wider public, such as the W.I., Mothers' Union, History & Archive Group, Gardening Club, have now been published in or distributed through our Benefice Magazine 'Six Sense'. They each offer their members the option of retaining masks for anything other than refreshments.

Having called representatives of all parish organisations and clubs/societies together, the Parish Council encouraged discussion of forming a Committee to begin planning for a Village Fete celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on June 4th. Cllr Neil Venton and several others, principally chairpersons of those clubs and organisations, have now begun to establish a timetable and outline programme of the Big Day, which is to be held on the grounds of the Sports & Social Club during the morning, afternoon and evening of the Jubilee Bank Holiday, Saturday 4th June.

Two adjacent properties on the Stradbroke Road have begun driveway improvements and extension/building works to either the front or rear of their homes. During the month initial ground-works have begun on the School Road site development, alongside the new Baptist Chapel. Initially stalled by problems of water retention and surface water dispersal, due to the removal of trees, the first phase has begun with roadway markers and deep drains being put in place.

Yet again there have been exploratory investigations by the Water Authority on Low Road, resulting in short periods of road closure. More severe but temporary disruption however has been caused by roofing repairs to Woodyard Cottage on New Street. The necessary traffic lights had to be extremely close to the staggered crossroad junction and pedestrians forced to detour along the passage way behind the Old Forge. The consequential danger to pedestrians needing to continue Eastwards or turn into the Stradbroke Road was considerable, underlining the dilemma of the lack of pavement at exactly the pinch-point place where it is most needed.

FEBRUARY

A major report by the 1st Fressingfield Scout Group has highlighted a significant one-off grant made by the Sapphire Trust which has enabled the Group to hold a number of mountain bikes together with maintenance equipment and safety helmets. When the Scout Centre is occupied they are also welcoming the public to take advantage of there being a clothing bank and shoe-re-cycling facility available on site. A further grant by the Hoxne Parish Council has enabled the scouts to build a clay wall back-stop to their air-rifle shooting range that is being established with monies given them by Sport England.

Over the last two years the initiative known as Fressingfield Good Neighbours Scheme (*initially researched and promoted by the Parish Recorder when he was a Parish Councillor*) took a back seat under the more urgent need for emergency provision of help and assistance, targetted more accurately under geographical sectors. This month Cllr Nigel Lucker, Carol Darling and Jane Gemmil have resurrected the original scheme, teaming up with a G.N.S. Group at Stradbroke under the County-wide GNS organisation. This seeks to ensure that every community has an appropriate network and that, through a pool of volunteer drivers, clients can be taken to appointments and undertake essential journeys. The drivers are each recompensed and become properly insured. But principally this

initiative it is about a village community helping each other and offering friendship to those who otherwise would not be able to enjoy a proper quality of life.

At their Annual Meeting on Feb 3rd, the Mothers' Union Branch elected Christine Mendham to replace Anna Vessey as its Branch Leader. This remains the only formal activity within the Church of England that, in addition to worship, remains open to membership from across the whole Sancroft Benefice of six churches. Membership at the start of this new year stands at 27.

Initial publicity has appeared this month for an oral history project, in which senior members of the community would be interviewed and their recorded memories placed in the Village Archive. To be known as 'Fressingfield Voices', the scheme was to be open to suggested participants as well as more obvious candidates. *(Unfortunately due to changes of assisting personnel and a long protracted investigation into copyright/ownership and safeguarding issues, this Project has not yet begun but hopefully might begin in 2023.)*

MARCH

The month began on March 1st with the funeral of the late Janet James, a previous post-holder of the Local History Recorder for Fressingfield. Taken by the current post-holder who is a retired priest (!) and who had also officiated at Janet's husband's funeral, it was an opportunity to mention Janet's profound gifts and passionate interest in history and architecture, alongside her stewardship of this particular responsibility.

Following the funeral the usual Annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Lunch was held in the Sancroft Hall organised by Caroline Day, the proceeds of very nearly £300 being sent to both the Waveney Foodbank and Norfolk Emmaus.

On Sunday 6th the Parish Church was the setting for a Service of Licensing of Lay Elders and Local Leadership Team. This is a first in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich in which local churches are encouraged to flourish through the hands of local community leaders rather than rely solely upon a Parish priest who may be distant geographically and who will probably have multiple parishes for which to care. Conventional parochial ministry remains a complex and demanding web of administrative and pastoral demands. By narrowing that down to the particular community, the Fressingfield Ministry Team, FMT as it has become known, consists of residents Ann Lawson and Nick Stolls under the leadership of the NSM/LOM Revd Peter Schwier, together with Churchwarden Malcolm Wood, all commissioned at this service by Suffragan Bishop of St Eds & Ips., Rt Revd Mike Harrison.

There has been consternation within some of the village Clubs and Societies as to the falling away of regular membership and the need to attract new ones. The Bowling Club announced they would be holding an Open Event at the end of April at their club headquarters in the grounds of the Sports and Social Club, at which they would offer free tuition and supply equipment. Interested participants were asked to contact Richard Mattison, Club Secretary.

On St Patrick's Day, 17th March, The Fressingfield and District RBL held the first of its new-Programme aimed at providing better social circumstances for members and friends to meet and extending the hand of friendship to other organisations. The speaker this evening was Richard Baxter, a veteran of the Falklands Campaign, talking on the subject of that conflict in this the 40th year of the Anniversary of the South Atlantic Campaign.

At their meeting this month, Thursday 22nd March, the members of the Fressingfield Local History and Archive Group (FLHAG) held their AGM in their new meeting place of the Methodist Chapel on New Street, at an earlier time before the designated Talk. Most of the current Committee were re-elected but Chairman Andrew Vessey, having retired, was replaced by Ken Rowbottom.

This month also saw the conclusion to the ministry of Revd Gini Williams, Curate to the Sancroft Benefice. Writing in 'Six Sense' she acknowledged the difficulties Covid had brought to her initial training and experience but wished to thank many in the community who had helped her settle into her, new role and welcomed her into their activities. She has moved to become Team Vicar in the Halesworth and Blyth Valley Team Ministry and will be living at Holton.

A report by the Parish Council has highlighted the provision of a set of speed indicator signs, placed across several sites in the Parish and which are having a positive effect at the most dangerous junctions and on roads in and out of the village. The Council remains keen to take advantage of appearing at the regular weekly Coffee Mornings and monthly Produce Markets to answer any questions and engage in discussion with members of the public.

An update on the planning for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee has been circulated to all village clubs and societies, churches and branch organisations. The substance of the Programme has been established, containing details as to how the village will be entertained on the Sunday following a united church service, and a general call for Street Parties to be held between neighbours and friends.

Due to further serious concerns over water discharge and evidence of significant surface water retention, work on the School Lane Housing Scheme DC20/01820 has halted this month. Matters have been reported to the MSDC and for the attention of Jason Skelton, Suffolk County Flood and Water Engineer, with respect to conditions being flouted and elements not yet sufficiently clear within the Planning Application as to how these difficulties might be resolved.

APRIL

After the last couple of years of inactivity, properties for sale in Fressingfield here have suddenly begun to appear on the housing market, beginning with the final stages of completion of the 3 new homes towards the far end Harleston Hill, set in a corporate front garden beyond the stream which abuts the road. These have been priced at £700K and above, and consist of 3 large 4 bedroom detached homes. There are also 2 properties for sale on the Cratfield Road, both beyond the Old Baptist Chapel and yet 2 more on the Stradbroke Road, one of which is rumoured to have already sold and a large portion of its rear garden established as a separate parcel of land. Within New Street and the cul-de-sac Tansy Meadow, there are several properties undergoing significant extension and adaptation. Opinion seems to suggest this latter activity is the direct result of Covid and Lockdown, with parishioners realising the value of living in a good community and therefore seeking to remain and adapt their homes rather than move to new locations.

The Clerk to the Parish Council has advised the LHR that he would be made aware of all further Planning Applications.

Easter Services have been well advertised across the denominations and in the village's publicity channels, each able to return to pre-Covid conditions and with a multiplicity of options across Holy Week. Across the Anglican Benefice use was made of each constituent church to host a specific service or activity while the new Baptist Chapel was able to continue to invite the village to experience the convenience and splendour of their new accommodation.

Shortly after Easter the stained-glass window that had been given to the Parish Church by Dr John and Mrs Pam Castro was finally completed. Delays had been caused because essential stonework repairs were found to be necessary along the southern and eastern faces of the church building, including the area into which the actual window was to be inserted. The window's bold design signifying the Holy Spirit in the form of a descending dove, has delighted many worshippers. The glass artist Surinder Warboys who worked through the design of her husband Rowland Warboys, was commended in the following extract of a note of appreciation. ".....she has been skilful in her own creative energy,

delicately interpreting and then presenting a unique and stirring work of church art.” The donors have also placed on record their thanks to the Rector, Rev’d Canon Susan Loxton, for her unfaltering support, to the PCC in whose name the Faculty Application went forward to the DAC for its recommendation to the Diocesan Chancellor. They also have publicly thanked the Churchwarden, Malcolm Wood, for his oversight of the project on a day by day basis and to Mike Cox who, as Church Treasurer, has been responsible for the financial & strategic contract.

The Local History Recorder (LHR) left during Easter Week for a prolonged holiday returning in mid May

MAY

As a consequence of the LHR being away for much of this month the recording has been less intensive than normal. However, plans continue to be finalised about the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. Numerous site-specific meetings have been taking place to anticipate requirements and plan final details. These include a Concert, a Treasure Hunt, a Poetry Reading, Community Fun-Day with races, Fancy Dress Competition, Afternoon Teas, Produce Competitions, followed by music and food; while on Sunday 5th, encouraged by HM’s invitation, and after a United Church Service, there is planned to be a variety of Street Parties.

Fressingfield Scouts held a Celebratory Evening in honour of all mums, with cooking and other skills being honed by many of the boys and girls so as to entertain their mothers. Now that the evenings have become lighter, a whole range of further abilities, such as swimming, photography, modelling and others that demand teamwork, have once again become possible. There was also a report in Six Sense this month about their very successful Group Camp, held at the Eaton Vale Activity Centre near Norwich.

Right on the border of Fressingfield Parish lies the 56 acres of Wakelyns, renowned as an Organic Agroforestry Farm. Many in the Parish know them through Wakelyns presence at the monthly Produce Market, selling vegetables and bread. Wakelyns are rapidly gaining a national reputation as only 1 of 2 UK farms highlighted on the global map of Oxford University’s ‘Nature-based Solutions’ for tackling climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Their current advertising also highlights their educational work for those keen to learn willow weaving and bread making.

As mentioned above, this month has seen the re-start of the monthly Produce Markets which through table-rents and some specific stalls of their own raises money for the Parish Church. Normally the stalls are grounded in locally produced items across a wide range of foods, hobbies and products. These currently include soap products, jewellery, craft work, cards, cakes, paintings, greengrocery and a variety of different meats. As the interest grows ever wider so do the stalls which now include some from out of the geographical Parish. Through the initiative of the local Roman Catholic congregation there is a stall directly committed to promoting CAFOD, while those selling refreshments and bric-a-brac raise funds directly for the Parish Church.

A further ‘Fund Raising’ initiative is taking place on the field of the Fressingfield Sports and Social Club, with two ‘Car Boot Sales’ being held per month. Both the RBL and the SASC plan to take the proceeds of providing food and representation on each of their respective events, namely the 2nd and 4th Sundays in the month.

JUNE

Much of this month has been concerned with the making of history by our Queen in reaching her Platinum Jubilee. Significant national programmes, documentaries and televised events have done nothing to dampen our enthusiasm or dissuade Fressingfield from making her own contributions to the holiday and celebration that comprised several days this month. Much of our Programme, planned for months now, has been hinted at earlier in this Report, organised to cover a wide range of age-groups and interests as well as accommodating anyone who simply wished to turn up and enjoy the atmosphere. Thus, the Afternoon Teas on Saturday 4th, needed to prepare as if everyone in the village might be coming! Similarly, the Opening Concert, rather than charging tickets, was to take a retiring collection in aid of the Queen's Green Canopy and the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. This latter disaster has inevitably cast a shadow across the whole of the nation and it was felt here in Fressingfield that a corporate expression of solidarity and fiscal support was the best way of giving thanks for the peace and stability brought about by the loving example of duty and service shown by Her Majesty.

More specifically and itemised in a generous and free Jubilee Programme included a 'Happy and Glorious Concert' on Thursday 2nd, with local performers entertaining us in song and verse (*held in the Church*). The various acts included children from the Primary School Choir, the singing trio 'Station 366', organ music, monologues, sung duets and soloists, woven together by a compere. On Friday 3rd a Village Treasure Hunt (*starting and ending at the Baptist Chapel*) was held, followed by a 'Poetrython' of 70 chosen poems for the 70 years of HM's reign (*held in the Church*) and including contributions of readings of Her Majesty's previous Poets Laureate. Across the whole event an 'Open Garden' was held at the Old Vicarage, encouraging visitors to bring a picnic and enjoy the view. Meanwhile, on the major public day of Saturday 4th, a significant Village Get-Together was held in the afternoon on the Sports & Social Club Ground with a Produce Show, many competitions, games and races, fancy dress and a splendid 'Afternoon Tea', before an evening of Disco Music and a Hog Roast. All this necessarily and minutely organised village activity was suspended on Sunday afternoon when, following an interdenominational service that morning in the marquee on the Sports Field, jointly led by Revd Peter Schwier and Pastor Stuart Balmer, residents of the village gathered in their own informal small groups of friendship and neighbourliness; mini-versions of the traditional Street Party. There was much to recall from the 70 years of Her Majesty's long reign, being for many of us the only monarch we will have ever known. The Souvenir Programme summed it up well in paying tribute to Her Majesty's "*.....serene style.....being an anchor in the storms we all have to cope with, facing innumerable crises affecting our nation, the Commonwealth and across the world.*"

The village of Fressingfield was chosen for a major feature by the Diss Express, carrying lots of photos and quoting Mary Newton, who most usefully being the Chairperson of the local W I Branch. Also co-chaired the Jubilee Planning Committee. She made the point that with new people moving into the village, this Festival had been a chance to gauge what Fressingfield has to offer, helping newcomers in settling into a new community. After all costs had been deducted and the Jubilee grant from the Parish Council applied to defray expenses, it was good to learn that a grand sum of £726 had been raised from donations and will be split between the Queen's Green Canopy and the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal.

On Friday 10th the Parish Church held the first of a series of Open Meetings to discuss the issues contained in the Church of England Report 'Living in Love and Faith' highlighting the choices facing society in connection with identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Clergy across the Deanery report an increase in willingness to debate these issues, especially among young people and students within their curriculum studies, which therefore becomes of more importance to parents, grandparents and youth leaders, many of whom will be the 'listening ear' for the young people in our Parish most affected by these questions and their outcomes.

JULY

During the daylight hours of Wednesday 13th the village held a Second Consultation over the future of the historic building known as 'Fressingfield Stables'. Over 100 people have registered an interest in maintaining and developing the structure, rather than see it further collapse and decay. Over many years a variety of initiatives have attempted to produce a workable plan for its conversion and use as a viable and small commercial centre. Now that the concept of a Village Hub has become a byword for many imaginative and timely restorations of existing buildings, it is hoped that this wider awareness and generous possibilities of grant might work in our favour. The historical importance of this site cannot be stressed enough as well as the many constrictions that will determine its boundaries, access and public usage. It lies opposite the Fox and Goose, adjoining their Car Park and the green space behind it known as Fox and Goose Green, itself used by users of the Sancroft Hall and the Village Croquet Club. The public were able to see several suggestions as to how it could be developed and invited to make their own contributions as to priorities or environmental concerns regarding the whole area on which these three buildings sit. The overwhelming objective is to provide the community with a new vibrant small-scale facility.

On Saturday 16th July another successful Fressingfield Produce Market was held with a markedly higher level of interest by stall holders from across the district. This means the Committee have to organise stalls both within and outside the Hall, providing an added 'attraction' to bring in more families and widen the level of purchasing public. The hard-working committee, consisting of Virginia Skoyles, Anna Vessey, Zoe Clark, Matthew Newman, Pat Douglas and Rosemary Cox, continue to develop and extend this valuable opportunity for village cohesion and interaction.

A report has been received on the specific proceeds raised from the Poetrython. A total of £114.50 is to be put towards the costs of planting new trees across the village, under the auspices of the Queen's Green Canopy tree planting initiative. Further details are to be published later.

For the second month running the Fressingfield Scouts have been inviting the local area to make use of a Squirrel Scout Group for boys and girls aged between 4 – 6 years, meeting for an hour between 4.15 and 5.15 on Tuesday afternoons. At the other end of the age spectrum, 3 senior members of the Pioneer Troop have been helping at a fund-raising Quiz for the Friends of Hoxne Church as part of their Community Service experience.

Generally the Fressingfield Good Neighbours Scheme keeps a low profile but this month it has done some publicity in the ways its members help with collecting emergency supplies, obtaining medical prescriptions and ferrying those unable to otherwise travel to keep appointments. Any potential drivers are encouraged to make contact with Cllr Nigel Lucker who is the FGNS Co-ordinator.

On Tuesday 26th July, FLHAG members travelled to Thelnetham Windmill for their summer outing. Several spoke later of being reminded of the windmills that once graced the skyline of Fressingfield, providing necessary power and profit for the grain growers, regrettably only seen nowadays in the collection of such images in the Village Archive or commemorated by the names of certain roads in the village.

In recognition of the fact that the Fressingfield Art Club now meet in the Weybread Village Hall and were holding their Annual Exhibition, at the end of this month many from Fressingfield made the journey to see the Annual Art Exhibition and Open Gardens events coinciding over the same weekend. Several of the Fressingfield clubs and societies are increasingly benefiting from the support of Weybread residents, as the two villages grow ever closer in terms of sharing the same optional elements of infrastructure such as primary schooling, medical practice and village shop etc. all located in Fressingfield.

AUGUST

Across several months work has been continuing on the upgrading and improvements to the facilities at the Sports and Social Club with new furniture, bar provision, lighting and indoor recreation facilities. On the 1st Tuesday of every month they are holding a Bingo Night, while several other organisations, among them the RBL and Gardening Club, hold their regular meetings at the Club helping to support it by making use of its bar and the more than adequate car parking.

Through the Parish Council by means of an article and supporting posters, an Appeal was made early this month regarding the future of the Play Area adjoining the Sports and Social Club building. The Playingfield Management Committee and Parish Council hope to go beyond repairing and maintaining the equipment. What is envisaged has to do with new landscaping and fresh equipment. Volunteers are asked to consider how a group might be formed, find grants and plan for such improvements. This month's call has been followed up by a meeting on Thursday 25th August to initiate a coherent plan of action.

Following on from the Platinum Jubilee Fete, the Royal British Legion (RBL) has written to say that after all the income was totalled, which included the sale of special commemorative mugs, raffle tickets and donations etc., the sum of £600 was to be donated to Halsey House, the RBL Care and Dementia Home, near Cromer.

As part of their Annual Programme, Wakelyns held a Butterfly Awareness Day on Saturday 6th August. The activities available that day included themed walks around the Farm, weaving wings classes, taking part in the National Butterfly Count and opportunities for learning more about ways these insects contribute to sensitive horticultural and arbortorial husbandry.

With extraordinarily hot temperatures and no rain, gardeners across the Parish have watched helplessly as the ground become baked hard and plants have suffered. The public flower beds at the village crossroads and vegetation around both the cemetery and churchyard have also been affected by this drought. As a further consequence of such hot weather work has continued very slowly on the School Lane building site. There is also particular concern over the many young oak trees planted on the perimeter of the cemetery While there is no hosepipe ban in Suffolk considerable restraint has been urged on all citizens to conserve water and refrain from unnecessary usage such as on lawns and car-washing.

SEPTEMBER

Having endured significant traffic constraint on New Street earlier in the summer, this month saw the first element of a two-month scheme of works to the drainage systems on Low Road and Cratfield Road. By hosing through the complete sewage route, in order to properly inspect the pipework, the second phase has included inserting a new pipe-liner. The road closure proved more complex due to Church Road and Victoria Terrace being used by drivers as a short cut, the former illegally due to it being a 'closed' road and the latter with considerable risk attached. It resulted in much consternation by homeowners on the Terrace who understand only too well the inappropriateness of such actions by some drivers, only making entry and exit at either end even more dangerous than it is already. The Parish Council took steps to appeal for everyone to be patient and compliant.

On September 8th it was reported that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had died, aged 96 and, like much of the nation, Fressingfield was gripped by the communal expressions of mourning for her passing. Having reigned for 70 years and for many people been the only monarch they had ever known, the sense of loss was palpably deep and felt across the whole community. The Books of Condolence opened within the churches spoke of peoples' awareness of the passing of an age of certainty and

comfort, having our late Queen so visible for so long and representing our nation and our values around the world. The conversations overheard in the village were full of the respect with which she has been held and how her sense of duty and public service had ever been a source of inspiration. Glued to our TV screens on the day of her actual funeral, 19th September, and accepting that the 'old order' had gone, there was also voiced by many, from pulpit and other positions of community responsibility, a growing measure of respect and transference of loyalty to the new monarch Charles III. It would appear that he is only too aware of the difficulty the nation faces in accepting such huge constitutional change as well as acknowledging the debt we all owe to his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II.

The Annual Ride and Stride Historic Churches Trust Sponsorship Day took place on Saturday 10th September. Tradition has half the funds raised going to the Suffolk HCT and the other going to Fressingfield Parish Church. Between them, the Clark Family and Matthew Newman raised the substantial sum of £480.

Prior to a further Market at Christmas, the last 2022 Fressingfield Community Produce Market was held on Saturday 17th September, which included a visit by The Mini Donkeys. These comprise a collection of miniature donkeys offered for free to communities and individuals with which to engage with their sense of well-being and restoration. They proved hugely popular with the children of families who had come to the Market and again proved the importance of the organisers having a specific attraction each month the Market is held.

The hugely successful Coffee Mornings held weekly across the whole year were joined in this month's diary by a sixth successive Coffee Morning in aid of the Macmillan Nurses and in memory of Colin Stannard. Until very recently his wife Linda has herself been an indispensable element in the development of those weekly mornings initiated by Dr David and Valerie Chase.

Work continues at 'The House' on New Street, building an extension and adapting the home for its new residents. Generally house sales across Fressingfield have slowed or stalled. Two homes have been placed on the Letting Market and, with considerable mortgage restrictions, there appears to be little prospect of property turning over quickly. The 3 new-built luxury houses on Harleston Hill remain empty and unsold at over £700,000. Several others we know to have been forced to reduce their asking price.

A new initiative has started on the 23rd of this month. Known as a 'Sofa Poetry Group', the group plan to meet once a month in members' homes to share the poetry they love and discuss the particular writers' creative insight and any issues raised.

OCTOBER

The Fressingfield Women's Institute have been raising funds across the year to mark the 100th year of the Branch in our village by placing a commemorative bench near to the entrance of the Sancroft Hall, itself standing at the historic centre of the village. Installed and blessed on October 22nd by Rev'd Canon Susan Loxton, Incumbent and Rural Dean, the service was followed by a Celebratory Tea open to all village residents and their families.

During this month the Fressingfield and District Branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL) announced it had raised a further £100 from their August Car Boot Sale and Garage Trail, to be added to the sum raised at the June Village Fete, towards the work of Halsey House, the RBL Care Home and Dementia Unit in Cromer, Norfolk. At their visit to the unit on October 6th, representatives of the Branch Committee requested that such monies be used to specifically support the 'Music for Dementia Programme'. They plan a further Garage Trial and Car Boot Sale in the late Spring or early Summer of

2023, having decided earlier in the summer, due to weak evidence of participation by the Branch and public footfall, to abandon their regular 2nd Sunday in the month Car Boot Sales.

Deferred during Covid restrictions, the FLHAG Committee were eventually able to hold the Special Memorial Lecture conceived as a further way of paying tribute to the foundation of our local Doctor's Practice by Dr David Chase. The lecture was held on Tuesday 25th at the Methodist Hall when the speaker, Dr Simon Rutland, was able to explore the nature of today's general practice while also acknowledging the vision and energy of earlier practitioners such as Dr David. Dr Chase's family had been able to furnish the speaker with insight and memories, including photos and artefacts, so that the talk could do justice to the ground-breaking reality of there being a resident doctor and pharmacy in the village while also responding across many of the surrounding villages and isolated farmsteads. Tribute was also paid to David Chase's wife, Valerie, who also contributed in many ways to the running of the practice within the family home on the Laxfield Road. (*Following Valerie's death in 2019 this house has recently sold*) A near full-attendance on the night reflected the high esteem with which they are both remembered, not just in terms of medical history but also of his significant support and role with RBL, in which he had served as Branch President, as well as their shared faith and deep involvement with the Parish Church over many decades.

More evidence has emerged this month of the considerable difficulties many are facing due to increased cost-of-living demands. The need for all of us to plan our menus, shop more wisely and avoid wasting food was brought to everyone's attention by publicity distributed to every home in the village by the Suffolk Waste Partnership. Many of our problems are caused by the effect of the war being conducted in the Ukraine with either shortages in certain basic goods or rising costs of global transportation brought on by soaring oil and petrol prices. Rural poverty is never quite as obvious as it can be in urban conurbations, but nevertheless, when much of the 'new normal' is also caused by climate change and rising greenhouse gases, then any reduction in unnecessary household wastage will also offset these more invidious conditions that affect everyone's standard of living, whether in town or country.

Between 13 and 19th October, the Mothers' Union held its annual 'Pop-Up Shop' in Halesworth. The Fressingfield Branch took its turn in the relay of volunteers staffing the shop and from whose membership many of the items for sale had been generously donated. In total the shop raised an amount of £1,735 from the public and Branch members within the Northern Area of the Diocesan MU. In addition to Fressingfield this Area identity includes Branches based at Halesworth & Wenhaston, Southwold & Reydon, Hoxne and Yoxmere. In the case of the Fressingfield Branch, this too is a corporate structure being made up of members drawn from the Benefice Churches.

NOVEMBER

The Parish Council have reported that they and the Playing Fields Management Committee have secured a grant of £20K from the Mid Suffolk District Council Development Fund, to add to further funding raised in previous years by the village. In response to an earlier appeal for volunteers a Parents' Group has now been well established to take forward the plans for improvements and refurbishment of the Play Area. The immediate agenda however is to formulate ideas to facilitate further Grant applications to external sources, so that the future might include appropriate landscaping as well as new equipment.

In this connection, an appeal went out this month for villagers to increase their use of the Bottle Bank in the grounds of the Fressingfield Playing Field Management Grounds. Their invitation was couched in the language of this being an environmentally friendly way of supporting their work of raising money for these improvements.

Remembrance Sunday this year fell on November 13th when Morning Services at two of our churches were held prior to the Act of Remembrance at the Village War Memorial. Led by Rev'd Peter Schwier, the Parish Church service was an opportunity for representatives to attend before laying wreaths during the Act of Remembrance, These included the RBL, Parish Council and principal Clubs and Societies. Colour Parties were provided by the Royal British Legion and Fressingfield Scouts. The Baptist Church also welcomed attendance at its Evening Service the same day, in a service led by Pastor Stuart Balmer, while the Methodist Chapel held their own service at 3.00pm that afternoon.

On Saturday 19th the Fressingfield Village Churches came together to take part in a National Quiz Event in which literally hundreds of churches across the country raised money for Tearfund. This is a Christian Charity supporting those living in dire poverty across many regions of the world. Several teams took part and the considerable sum of £500 was raised towards the national total of £140,000.

The Fressingfield Church of England Primary School has shared the results of its recent Ofsted Inspection. Judged to be a 'good' school, there are many wonderful aspects which contribute to this rating, it noted as being: *"a safe and friendly school, with pupils eager to learn, staff ensuring a well-considered curriculum is delivered and appropriate learning environments in place."* The Headteacher, Mark Taylor, has written of his thanks to the School Governors and those drawn from the wider community who assist and support in a huge variety of ways, including the school garden, music provision, listening to readers and celebrating key Festivals.

DECEMBER

The Annual Christmas Tree, provided through the generosity of Bob Stevenson of Holton and the RBL, was delivered and erected in time for the Big Christmas Produce Market held on Saturday 12th. Decorated with strings of LED lights, it provided a wonderful beacon to passing traffic and made a fine show-piece to the Produce Market and Arrival of Santa. This Market was one of the largest ever held in Fressingfield with 25 stalls and, despite the mercifully bright cold weather, needed to utilise both the area of the Green and the Hall itself. It raised £454.80p for the Parish Church, almost double the average income per month for the earlier part of the season.

After a considerable break due to Covid, the Fressingfield Players performed their Christmas Pantomime 'Porridge' on two consecutive evenings this month: Friday 16th and Saturday 17th. It was the first time they had worked in a new venue of the Old Chapel on the Cratfield Road. The script told the story of the Three Bears, not the popular TV series(!) and was followed by sketches, songs including an hilarious ballet.

Membership of the Parish Council changed again during the course of the late Autumn with the retirement of Philip Eastgate after many years of service. Councillors now comprise:- Di Warne (Chair), Nick Stolls (Vice Chair), Garry Deeks, Tom Lindsay, Nigel Lucker, Trevor Orchard, Rachel Troughton and two relatively new members in Stuart Balmer and Hilary Day. The Council remains served by Andy Parris as Parish Clerk.

Not only is the Parish Council website amalgamating with the Village website, creating a 'one-stop-shop' but councillors have also been able to report on a satisfactory conclusion to the drainage concerns on the Cratfield Road. Working in conjunction with Anglian Water, it is hoped that the disruption to traffic at the heart of our village can now cease and the foul-water flooding been rectified.

The Fressingfield Scouts held their Annual Fun Run on Saturday 17th, raising funds for the Scout Group while also having lots of fun with families taking part in fancy dress.

Both Planning Applications considered at this month's Parish Council Planning Committee were supported by councillors. The first is an application to create a wild-life pond within the grounds of Wakelyn's Farm. The second is the replacement of a porch to the front door of no12 Priory Close.

Finally it a pleasure to report that Carol Singing was at last possible once again. Organised across the churches but open to all-comers from the Parish, several singers met on Tuesday 22nd to sing around the centre of the village, especially to those considered more elderly and house-bound. All churches reported increase in numbers attending their Christmas Services and so the year ends with hope and expectation that with the worst of Covid behind us (mindful that some are still prone to new mutations or suffering from the effects of Long Covid) the New Year will carry the prospect of normality returning and the delights of living in Fressingfield returning to its full expression.

*Rev'd Canon Andrew Vessey,
February 6th, 2023
FRESSINGFIELD*