

# AMBLECOTE HISTORY

Number 10

The Newsletter of Amblecote History Society

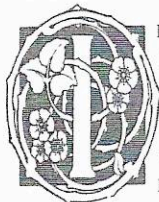
January 2005

## Spanning Four Centuries of Amblecote History

2005 EVENTS!



TURN TO  
BACK  
PAGE



Information contained in recent Newsletters has resulted in contacts from two individuals living far from Amblecote, but whose interest in the area is focused on once special part of it – yet for entirely different reasons and four centuries apart.

Firstly the Reverend Cyril Blount has written from Huddersfield concerning the Blount (Blunt) family resident in Amblecote in the seventeenth century, and secondly Claud Tennyson has provided a short article on the old Stourbridge Gas Works of which he was Works Superintendent between 1956 and 1961. Coincidentally the Blunts of the 1680's almost certainly lived in a house on the site where the gas works would later stand – a site now awaiting redevelopment.

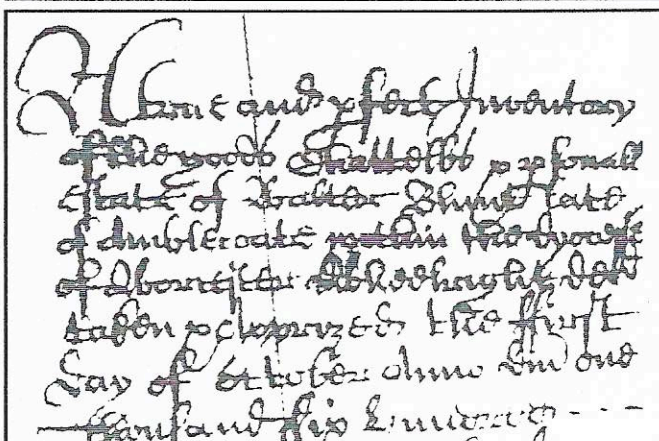
### The Blunts of Amblecote

Reverend Blount contacted the Secretary as a result of an article in the *Black Country Bugle* which arose from Bugle reporter John Workman's interest in the 1688 estate plan mentioned in newsletter No.9. Cyril has been researching the Blount (sometimes Blunt) family for over thirty years and has traced several documents that place ancestors in and around Amblecote and Old Swinford in the mid to late seventeenth century. Did the map, he wondered, have any mention of Blount/Blunt? The Secretary, armed with a magnifying glass, determined immediately that it did, and by the wonders of email forwarded an enlarged image of a dwelling clearly labelled 'Blunt' situated on the west of (what is now) High Street Amblecote. Arriving on Christmas Eve the e-mail revelation quite made Cyril's Christmas! Cyril, who has since joined the Society – along with making a considerable donation – subsequently forwarded copies of his Amblecote documents along with a genealogy of the family in the area.

The earliest of these are husband and wife Walter and Elizabeth Blount. Walter was possibly born in 1614 and appears in the Hearth Tax returns of 1666 as resident in Amblecote. He died in 1679 (buried at Old Swinford) and on October 11<sup>th</sup> that year a document granting administration of his estate was issued to his widow. Cyril has a copy of this along with a fascinating inventory of goods taken at Amblecote on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1679.

Charles, the son of Walter and Elizabeth, was christened at Old Swinford on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1655. Cyril's research shows that Charles was a wheelwright

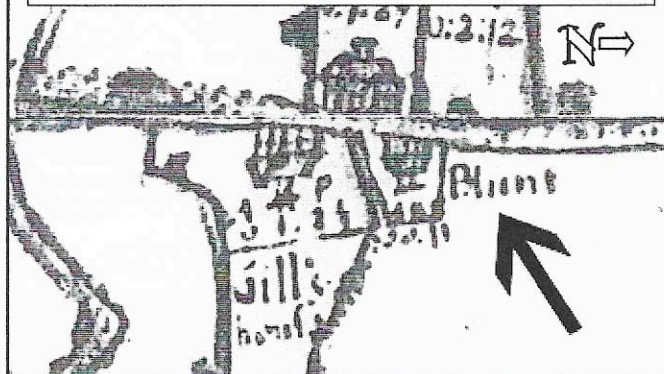
*Inventory of 1st of October 1679 from the home of "Walter Blunt late of Amblecote". Was this the house on the 1688 map?*



### NEXT EVENT. FEBRUARY 9th VISIT TO BROADFIELD HOUSE MUSEUM

See Back Page For Details

*The name Blunt is clearly shown on the 1688 map next to a dwelling in (what is now) High Street Amblecote. Could the path to the east be the surviving 'Gas Works' Lane' the Society explored in April 2004? It certainly follows the same line.*

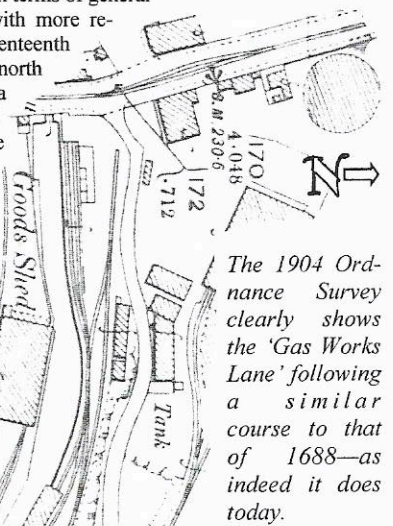


living in Amblecote in July 1686 along with his wife (name unknown) and a daughter named Elizabeth aged about one. A son named Peter was born in 1688 (the same year as the map). Charles the wheelwright died in 1691 and was buried at Old Swinford, whilst Cyril thinks that Peter Blount moved to Cleobury Mortimer where he worked as a clockmaker.

Therefore, it seems highly likely that the Blunt house marked on the 1688 map is that of the family outlined above. If so, how wonderful that we have managed to put even more historical flesh on the bones of the map! Was Walter living in the house in 1651 when the bedraggled Charles Stuart and his close companions clattered past on tired horses during the first leg of their flight from the Battle of Worcester? We may never know - but what's history without a little romance!

Rather more certain is the location of the Blunt house. The 1688 map is proving incredibly accurate in terms of general locations, and an overlay with more recent maps shows the seventeenth century house sited on the north side of what appears to be a pathway leading to a field boundary. If this is the case then this path may in fact be the lane that still runs between the old gas works site and the trading estate (formerly the GWR Goods Yard), emerging into Church Avenue. Members who came on our Gas Works walk in April last year will recall discovering the peculiar patched wall made of old refractory bricks half-way along this. Cer-

(Continued on page 2)



*The 1904 Ordnance Survey clearly shows the 'Gas Works Lane' following a similar course to that of 1688—as indeed it does today.*



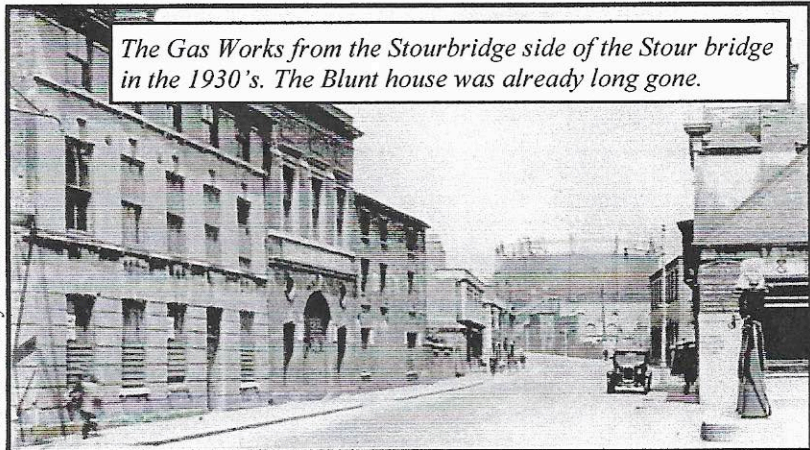
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tainly the 1688 'path' follows the same general line as the existing pathway, and it would be entirely logical that despite several centuries of development such a track (which may be very ancient indeed) would remain in use to this day.

Indeed, it might even be speculated that the point where the track enters High Street, several yards above the modern Stour, might even be an ancient 'high water mark'; the point where early inhabitants came to the river to cross.

A second contribution on a different theme but involving the same place has come to the newsletter thanks to members Adrian and Kathryn Skelson-Reece who forwarded a copy of newsletter No.7, containing the Gas Works walk article, to a relative now living in a retirement home in Leicestershire. By an incredible coincidence another resident of the home is Claude Tennyson, a former Superintendent of the Gas Works. He was inspired to write a short piece about his time at the works, which we reproduce in full. It is interesting to note that Claude mentions the refractory remains within the pathway wall as being of a type long since redundant by his time – somewhat deepening the mystery surrounding them! Whilst some steps noticed during our walk which appeared to have no function are, in fact, the remains of a now redundant Superintendent's private entrance.

Picture: Many thank to Annette Marshall



The Gas Works from the Stourbridge side of the Stour bridge in the 1930's. The Blunt house was already long gone.



## Superintending Stourbridge Gas Works 1956 – 1961.

By Claude Tennyson (Now resident in Wigston Leics.)

Early in 1956 I moved from the West Midlands Gas Board area headquarters at Dudley to become Works Superintendent at their Stourbridge Gasworks. The Works Manager was Mr.A.G.Cranmer. He looked after the business side of things and I was responsible for the day-to-day running of the works. I stayed in this job until October 1961, shortly before the works was closed down.

I lived in the Gas Board's house at No. 49 Church Avenue, near the corner of the lane leading to the town centre. My daily route to work was by a private path from my house, past the large gasholder which still remains, across the flat ground which is now occupied by Transco, to the steps down the face of the sandstone cliff (observed on your Gasworks Perimeter Walk), to the top of the purifiers. A second (steel) staircase led down to the works ground level.

I must tell you of a very traumatic experience in 1959 (I think).

I was wakened by a phone call at 3 a.m. and told "the purifiers have burst". Dressing hurriedly I ran down my private path and down the wooden steps. Reaching the top of the purifiers I was horrified to see what looked like a huge mouth, 30 feet wide, and open about 2 feet in the middle. Gas, looking like smoke because it was un-purified, was pouring out of the 'mouth' towards me. I should explain that the purifiers are large boxes, 30 feet square and 6 feet deep, mounted on 8 feet high posts to give access underneath. There were 7 such boxes, 4 made of steel and 3 older ones made of cast iron. The lid of one of the cast iron boxes had split from end to end, and one half had bulged up about 2 feet forming the 'mouth' I saw.

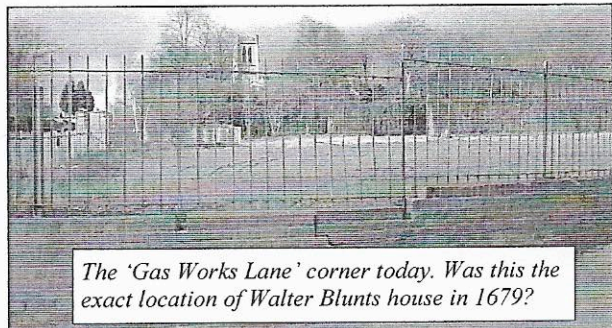
I realised that all the gas being made in the retort house, and all the gas stored in the gasholders was pouring out of that 'mouth'. How was I to seal it off?

The boxes were linked to each other by 18 inch diameter pipes with

correspondingly large valves, each with a 2 foot diameter hand-wheel, but all the valves were in the space underneath the boxes. By the light of my hand torch, (I dare not switch on the lights), I located the correct three valves, one to be opened and two to be closed, to isolate the damaged box. Usually we took two brawny labourers with us to operate these very stiff valves but, not surprisingly, there was not a soul in sight. However, fear lent strength to my arms and in a few minutes all three were changed to their new settings. I climbed the staircase to the top of the purifiers and saw immediately that the flow of gas was reducing. Very soon the gas stopped, but with so much gas around there was still great danger if anyone approached with a lit cigarette. We took the necessary precautions and all was safe. Thank the Lord.

Your very interesting article shows a picture of the Refractory wall. The 'D' shaped bricks indicate that at one time there were horizontal retorts at Stourbridge, but at the time I worked there we had the more modern vertical retorts built by Woodall Duckham. The work was very labour intensive; we employed about 110 men, plus about 12 Staff.

Of course, the gasworks never stops. So I, being a regular member of St. John's church in the town, had a private agreement with Mr.Cranmer, that early each Sunday morning I would check all round the works to satisfy myself that all was well. That being so, I was then free to go to church as much as I wished, and Mr.Cranmer would stay within reach of his telephone in case of emergency. This amicable (and unpaid) arrangement continued for my 5 years service at Stourbridge. We had other problems from time to time, but nothing to compare with the purifier incident.



The 'Gas Works Lane' corner today. Was this the exact location of Walter Blunt's house in 1679?

### A LOST PUB OF AMBLECOTE ?

Kieron McMahon, who presented a fascinating talk at our November meeting on some of Amblecote's older pubs, has written regarding a reference he discovered to an inn of which even he has no knowledge. This is the Bee Hive, Amblecote, run by one William Skeldring (not Skelding – though is this a misprint?), which appears in the 1860 *Post Office Directory*. There is no further information from that source and Kieron will no doubt carry out further research. However, in the meanwhile does anyone have any knowledge of this 'lost pub' of Amblecote?





## Document Donations

A number of document donations have been made to the Society over the past weeks which, following the decision made at the Annual General Meeting, will be deposited, after further discussion, as part of the Society's collection in a local archive.

### Vale Street Documents

These are a number of conveyances and indentures concerning a plot of land and its subsequent sub-division and development on the west side of Vale Street. Originally carved from the Dennis Estate and sold by the 'Dennis Land Society' in February 1872 to one Edward Parsons 'Glassblower of Brettel Lane', this oldest document is sprinkled with local famous names including Thomas Hill (III), William Seager Wheeley and several Webbs dating back to a previous deal of 1838. The ownership history of the property is then followed from Edward Parsons to Edwin Aston (March 1877), Edwin Aston to Edward Aston (April 1877), Edward Aston to William Barker (February 1878), William Barker to John Guest (August 1884), J.Guest, B.Guest and Clara Bagley to William Hayes (August 1926), W.Hayes to W.Bridgens (February 1956), Wildred Bridgens to Jessie Evans (October 1960) and finally J Evans to Mrs & Mrs Heath (July 1963). There are also a number of will extracts relating to the property title and other mentions of property sub-division. The documents were donated by a former resident of one of the properties via the good offices of the Black Country Society.

### High Street Photographs

Photographs of the recent (1992) redevelopment of High Street Amblecote at the Fish and Brettel Lane junctions taken by Derek

Signatures of Charles, Thomas Wilkes and Walter Wilkes Webb on the 1872 conveyance.

Burford. This wonderful collection of contemporary pictures illustrate how quickly things can change – and how quickly we forget what was there (who can recall A.J.Mees 'Photoprints' Ltd?). There are also some views across the Stour valley, briefly opened up between demolitions and subsequent re-buildings.

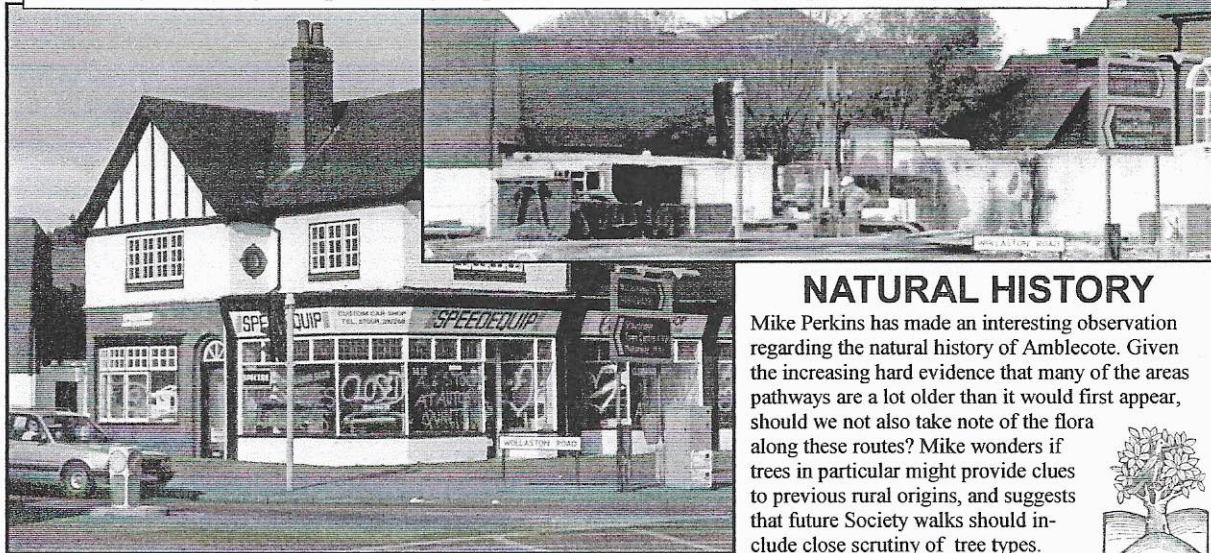
*Charles Webb*  
*Thomas Wilkes Webb*  
*Walter Wilkes Webb*

**SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE**  
**2005 SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
**ARE NOW DUE. THESE REMAIN AT**  
**£3.00**

Please pay at the next meeting or by using the enclosed slip.

*Now You See It; Now You Don't...*

*Derek Burford's early '90s pictures of shops at The Fish show how just quickly things can change.*



### NATURAL HISTORY

Mike Perkins has made an interesting observation regarding the natural history of Amblecote. Given the increasing hard evidence that many of the areas pathways are a lot older than it would first appear, should we not also take note of the flora along these routes? Mike wonders if trees in particular might provide clues to previous rural origins, and suggests that future Society walks should include close scrutiny of tree types.



## SEVEN WONDERS?

Jonathan Lees has come up with a wonderful idea to promote interest in Amblecote's heritage inspired by a recent BBC History series *Seven Wonders of the Industrial World*. Ranging from the Brooklyn Bridge to the London Sewers a series of 'docu-dramas' vividly brought to life seven wonders of the Industrial Revolution to illustrate that human creativity was as much alive in modern times as in the ancient world.

Well, all things are relative, and Jonathan would like to propose the Society pursue the Seven Wonders of Amblecote. Indeed, it would be marvellous to have more than seven submitted in order that a competition can be held to determine which are the truly most wonderful. Perhaps we could have an evening when various nominated wonders are considered and put to the vote?

So, do you know of something historically wonderful in Amblecote (please note that the nomination of Father Paul will not be accepted), which could be put in the fray? These could range from things large, such as Dennis Hall, to tiny architectural details such as the etched windows of the Robin Hood pub. What about the refractory brick wall mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, or an open natural space like the Corbett Hospital meadow? Ideas to the Secretary please, and if enough interest is shown we will inaugurate a proper competition later in the year.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Forty-nine members attended the Annual General Meeting of the Society at the Church Hall on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> of January. The officers presented their reports which show that the Society had grown rapidly in its first official year with seventy-two paid up members and a healthy £350.00 in the bank. The busy 2004 programme of meetings, campaigns, talks, visits, walks and social events was reviewed. It is anticipated 2005 will be just as busy, with the Society again aiming to carry out the mix of organised and spontaneous events that worked so well during 2004. The existing officers were re-elected. Chairman, Father Paul Tongue; Secretary, Mr Nick Baker and Treasurer, Mrs. Doreen Easthope. Special note was made of the considerable voluntary efforts and contributions made to the Society without which it would be much the poorer. One item of business was raised at the AGM and that was the possibility of depositing material donated to the Society within a suitable archive. Several possibilities were explored and it was decided that this important issue should receive special consideration over the coming months.

### GENERAL MEETING

A general meeting followed the AGM and a number of items of interest explored, which will undoubtedly demand our attention during 2005. Of particular concern are the various building and infrastructure developments planned for Amblecote, and the meeting was, as ever, grateful for the attendance of Councillors Pat Martin and Colin Banks who helped explain and further action a number of issues.

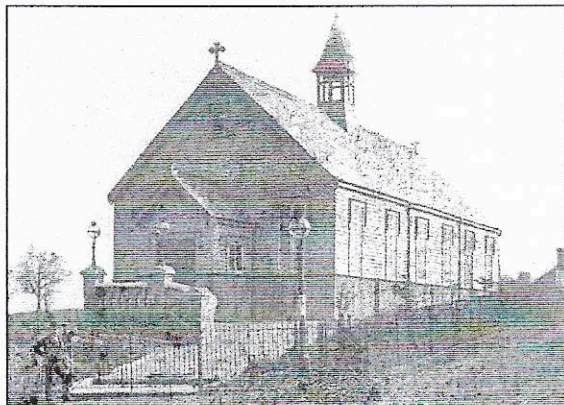
### THE OLD GAS WORKS

A plan was on display, obtained by Father Paul from Dudley MBC, of the proposed development of this site. Quite apart from the ongoing issue of ring-road access, this shows proposals for four story flats on the site! That these would spoil the view of Holy Trinity Church both 'of and from' is a certainty and the Society will be paying close attention to this matter.

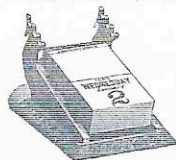
### THE TRANSCO DEPOT

Discussions took place on the proposal by Excel Europe to turn the former Transco site in Church Avenue into a freight depot operating heavy lorries. Some almost incredulous devices are being used to prevent objections to the application, and Councillor Martin outlined her strident efforts to surmount and oppose these; not least one which seeks to prevent her objecting on behalf of residents because she herself does not live close enough to be affected! The good news is that a public enquiry is to be held into the matter, and anyone interested is urged to keep an eye on the press for announcements.

## GOOD SHEPHERD CHURCH AT THE DELPH. WHAT'S LEFT NOW?



A previous meeting stirred memories of a wooden mission chapel in The Delph known as 'The Good Shepherd' an offshoot of St. Michaels, Brierley Hill. Maureen Banks spotted this photograph and notes that Ned Williams in his *Black Country Chapels* mentions that remains may still be seen in the Delph area. What and where? Please let us know if you do!



## AMBLECOTE HISTORY SOCIETY EVENTS PROGRAMME for 2005

Meetings will be held on the **Second Wednesday of the Month**, except in July and August. All meetings will be in Amblecote Church Hall commencing 7.30pm unless otherwise advertised. As in 2004, lectures, visits and walks later in the year will be organised on an ongoing basis to allow for maximum flexibility. It is anticipated that at least three walks will be held between April and August when light nights permit.

Later and additional events will also be advertised in the Society Newsletter, the local press (especially the *Black Country Bugle*), on the church railings and at [www.amblecote.org](http://www.amblecote.org).

### MEETING DATES & EVENTS ORGANISED SO FAR FOR 2005

#### 9TH FEBRUARY

Visit to **BROADFIELD HOUSE GLASS MUSEUM**  
with **INTRODUCTORY TALK**

Arrive 7.00pm

Tickets available now from the Secretary (see bottom of page).

There will be a charge of £2.00 per head to cover costs.

*Please note we are restricted to 50 places for safety reasons – if we are over subscribed we will organise a second visit later in the year.*

#### 9th MARCH

John Saunders on

**MY GRANDFATHER – WALTER JAMES CARTWRIGHT,**  
**CLERK to AMBLECOTE UDC.**

#### 13th APRIL

**GENERAL MEETING**

**WITH A SPECIAL DISCUSSION ON AMBLECOTE HALL**  
*Memories, photographs, recollections of the Hall are invited.*

#### 11th MAY

John Hemingway, Dudley Borough Archaeologist  
**THE AMBLECOTE MAPS**

*A return visit by John to discuss in detail the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century  
Enville Hall Archive estate maps of Amblecote Manor.*

#### DECEMBER 14th

**CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**

*Festive Food, Drink and a Chat*

EVENTS STILL TO BE ARRANGED FOR;

**JUNE 8th, SEPT 14th, OCTOBER 12th, NOVEMBER 9th**

#### WALKS

Walks proposed so far are:

**April** – The Amblecote Memorial Athletics Ground Part I – The Football Club.

**May** – Rogation Sunday 'Beating the Bounds' – in association with Holy Trinity Church

**June** – The Canal Arm – Viewing the Changes.

**August** – The Amblecote Memorial Athletics Ground Part II – The Cricket Club.

The Secretary would be delighted to hear from anyone with an idea for

## BROADFIELD HOUSE VISIT

### 9th FEBRUARY

**ASSEMBLE 7.00pm at Broadfield House,**  
**Compton Drive, Kingswinford**

**Tickets (£2.00)**

**MAY BE RESERVED NOW;**

**PHONE NICK BAKER**

**01384 894446**