

## **East Brent Parish History Group**

### **Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

#### Diamond Jubilee Celebrations

Some discussion took place regarding the Parish History Group providing a display at the Parish celebrations on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. A few members have taken up the challenge and will be providing a display involving items also from the Somerset Heritage Centre. Due to the nature of some of these items, the Heritage Centre is not keen on them being available out in the open. This is understandable and the display will probably be held in the Village Hall. Further details later.

#### Parish Website

Ideas regarding this have moved on and discussions taken place with a Parish Council member and others interested. From a Parish History Group viewpoint this is a very useful development and anyone with ideas and/or experience in web design are welcome to be involved.

#### Cheddar Valley Dairy

John Rigarsford gave an extensive presentation on the history of the Cheddar Valley Dairy and the people who worked there. There cannot be many people who have lived in the area of East Brent during the last 100 years or so, whose lives were not touched by the existence of the Rooksbridge dairy before it closed in 1993. A few brief details are :-

1874 - The dairy was founded by local farmers William Arney & Edward Clothier and became one of the largest cheese manufacturers and bottled milk supplier in the area. The area around the Parish was dairying country and many herds were within just a few miles of the dairy. The main product was cheese and by-products whey and skim milk so over 600 pigs were also fattened on site. (In 1932, a pig fattening unit for over 1000 pigs was built opposite the dairy and whey piped direct to the pig houses.)

1890 - the dairy was occupied by Boley and Woods but about 1900, the partnership ended, the dairy sold and John Woods moved back to Ashbourne, Derbyshire.

1901 - The Cheddar Valley Dairy Co. owned the factory. It was set up by a group of local businessmen and farmers, mainly the Cox family from High Littleton. Gilbert Brown of Cheddar and John Counsell of Lympsham. The manager for more than 50 years (1902-54) was Charlie Emery, one of 15 children of local farm worker George and Hannah Emery.

1958 - Horlicks acquired the dairy as a source of milk for their Malted Milk drink. The Beecham Company bought out Horlicks in 1968. The Rooksbridge dairy now employed over 120 people. New offices, maintenance workshops, canteen and restroom facilities were built in 1968. And a brand new high speed bottling unit was planned.

Mid 70's - the British dairy industry had reached its peak. Increasing foreign imports and competition from supermarkets put pressure on producers.



1981 - Cheese production ended at Rooksbridge when Beechams moved it to Ilminster however, milk processing continued.

By 1985 - the Rooksbridge production Dairy and all its retail depots and outlets had been bought by Unigate (an amalgamation of United Dairies and Cow and Gate). Under Unigate and despite investment, the viability of the Rooksbridge site was not to last and John drove the last load to Bournemouth at 9-00 am on July 3rd 1993.



John has many more memories and photographs that he is willing to share. Please contact him if you are interested.

#### Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on – **2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012** when there will be a presentation concerning the history of the Parish of East Brent.

All meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month - 7:00 pm in the Village Hall. Everyone is welcome.

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