

Feature on Hemyock for the Blackdown News

Introduction. The village of Hemyock lies on the River Culm in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the parish covers some 5000 acres and includes the hamlets of Ashculme, Culm Davy, Mackham, Madford, Tedburrow and Simmonsburrow. This bustling village community supports a population of 2,211.

Background. Hemyock was first recorded in the Geld Roll of 1084 and again in the Domesday Book of 1086. The meaning of the name Hemyock varies but one Celtic meaning is "summer stream". St Mary's Church dates back to the early part of the 12th Century and has some impressive Norman masonry and a peal of 6 bells. The Normans improved the Castle in 1380 with turrets, and battlements and during Cromwell's brief administration it was used as a prison to hold Royalist sympathisers; however, with the return of the monarchy in 1660 King Charles 2 endorsed the castles destruction! In 1874 the Culm Valley Light Railway was opened and overnight the village had instant access to the whole of the UK. Not surprisingly in 1886 the Culm Valley Dairy Company was founded (later called St Ivel) and with daily milk collections around the Blackdown's butter was manufactured on a large scale. Linked to the dairy factory was the founding of the Young Farmers Club in 1920 and this is now a popular UK organisation.

The Village. Hemyock has always been a forward thinking village and is blessed with some well managed facilities. The Parish Council is actively engaged in village life and over the past couple of years has achieved the formation of the Healthy Living Centre, the Longmead Sports Complex and the flood plain footpath. Information is freely available to all and can be accessed via the Notice Boards, the website www.hemyock.org, an active and vibrant village magazine, the Parish Pump and Council meetings on the first Wednesday of each month. Importantly the village boasts a very effective Litter Picking organisation which keeps the village clean and tidy.

The Churches. St Mary's and Hemyock Baptist Church are both awaiting new incumbents. St Mary's Church has a full programme of worship and has a Sunday school, a bell ringing club and St Mary's Guild who organise events to raise funds. The Church fête was open by our MP, Neil Parish. Hemyock Baptist Church is a Bible based church emphasising sound doctrine and teaching the un-compromised Word of God. It boasts a friendly group of fun loving people who run a variety of groups including Seekers, Tempo for Tots, the Alpha Course and an excellent Chapel café. Between them the churches run the holiday club each August.

The Primary School is a successful school in this thriving village and serves both Hemyock and Clayhidon. Built in 1982, there are excellent facilities and in the spacious grounds there are hard play areas, an adventure trail, a sports field, a swimming pool, a wildlife area and a bird box with a camera linked to the school. Classrooms share practical areas for 'hands-on' arts and science activities and there is also a small kiln room for firing ceramics. The school has two libraries and a well-equipped computer suite. There are interactive whiteboards in two classrooms and data projectors in a further three classrooms. The large hall is used for physical education, music lessons, collective worship, drama productions and as a dining hall.

The Village is fortunate to have excellent facilities. The **Parish Hall** and adjoining rooms are popular meeting areas and the Hemyock Monthly Market was 30 years old on Saturday 17 September. The **Longmead sports fields**, completed in 2008 are owned by the Parish Council and is a versatile and functional sports and recreation field for use by all. A management group oversees the development and maintenance of the facilities which include 3 tennis courts (two with floodlights), 2 football pitches, a children's play area, a flood-lit multi-use games area, boules pitch and a state-of-the-art pavilion. **The Blackdown Healthy Living Centre** opened its doors in the Summer of 2010 and is a registered charity, set-up with the aim of delivering informal and fun health education and

activities to the local community. This community driven initiative works closely with the local surgeries, religious groups and schools to provide a preventative approach to health care. This includes classes ranging from cooking for young mums to reading with toddlers, from high energy exercise for the young, to interest groups for those with a little less energy. In October, 2011, over 50 diverse activities will take place at The Centre, aimed solely at promoting good health and well-being and this includes day care for the older members. The Blackdown Practice with its main surgery in Hemyock has 3 modern, fully staffed surgeries providing all primary care services to the residents of the practice area and with a dispensary at each site. The Practice is well supported by a full complement of staff and their aim is to provide a high standard of medical care in a friendly and professional manner. The Blackdown Support Group cares for the young and the old, for those in need of extra help when sick or suffering from accidents, disabilities or in their advancing years. Practical help includes visiting, shopping, lunch clubs, transport and wheel chair loan. The Old School Court is a sheltered housing scheme based in the old primary school which is at the heart of the village. It is managed by an independent trust and gives homes to a dozen people.

Hemyock has an excellent Post Office and Spar shop with off licence, extended hours and cash machine. The Catherine Wheel pub offers a friendly local welcome with real ales, a reasonably priced restaurant, function room, beer garden and skittle alley. The Ivy Café also provides eat in or take away food and a B&B service. There are many award winning B&Bs and holiday accommodation in and around the village.

The Blackdown Hills Business Association supports the many thriving businesses in the village. Brookridge Timber supplies everything to do with timber, there are a number of good builders including Hart's, Lane's, Pring's and Redwood's, 2 hairdressers, funeral directors (Pring's and Redwood's), a family bus company run by Paul Redwood, Dobles garage for car sales and a workshop and a new owner and venue for Hemyock Motors to name but a few. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty office and a Land Agent /chartered surveyor are based in the former milk factory offices. There is also a Veterinary Clinic based on Station Road.

The Village is proud to have clubs for all ages and they include the Cameo Club, Acorns (over 60s club), Hemyock Men, Hemyock Women, WI, dancing, keep fit, walking group, YFC, cub, scouts, brownies, the baby and toddler group, pre school and the successful gardening club. For the more competitive there are sports teams for badminton, bowling, short mat bowls, cricket, football (senior and junior), snooker and tennis to name but a few.

There are a number of thriving art societies which include the Hemyock Singers and the Valley Arts and Social Society who have a musical performance coming up soon! The History and Archiving group now has over 3,050 images stored in a database with keyword access and the images can be expanded, improved and then printed. There is an active Upper Culm Twinning Association and about 60 people regularly visit each other alternate years.

The Future. Hemyock continues to be a sought after location in which to purchase property and the Council remain dedicated to improving and providing the necessary infrastructure/facilities to keep the community vibrant and attract new businesses and families. Eight new flats are currently being built opposite the Blackdown Surgery and will be ready by Christmas 2011. Two will be for affordable housing and the rest are 'open market'. The income generated from 2 of the flats will go towards the upkeep of the Recreation Field and Parish Hall. The flats will provide an excellent chance for elderly folk to downsize yet remain in the village with their friends; it will also release a 3/4 bedroom house to another Hemyock family. The building of a new Youth Centre is in process. The old Millhayes garages have to be converted into a safe and functional centre with the right

facilities but this will require raising lots of funds first. There are many other projects under way including the virtual footpath on Station Road, the proposed Penn Cross lay by, the Culm Valley Trail and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in 2012.

Finally. One must not forget the stunning views and particularly when coming down Pencross Hill looking over the village towards Castle Hill. Hemyock is certainly a great place to live but please a warning. Do not retire to Hemyock for a quiet life; there is far too much going on in this active and vibrant community!

David Barton

David Barton
Clerk to Hemyock Parish Council
Tel: 01823 680975
E-mail: clerk@hemyock.org