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Village bring out winner of a journal

It was reported in this paper last week that little Hempstead had achieved the incredible feat of beating far larger places with their village community project, the journal of their festival weekend on November 11 and 12, 1972.

The festival was organised by Hempstead Village Society and was intended to involve as many of the younger members of the community as possible. In this it certainly succeeded. Runners-up in this countrywide competition were the town of Harwich, second, and Waltham Abbey, third. Very much a case of David taking on Goliath!

The journal itself is by far the largest book I have ever seen and is strongly bound and well illustrated. Many of the excellent contributions about aspects of the village are anonymous, but I was particularly impressed with a group of eight-year-olds who had sung solos in the church performance of the Messiah and who wrote about this afterwards in the journal. I hope it not invidious to mention their names when so many others made excellent contributions. They include Carol Harding, Brenda Cox, Sian Weedon, Sarah and John Graham, Robert Shepherd and Susan and Jane Harvey. The festival weekend obviously made a lasting impression on their young minds.

DEVELOPING

Perhaps the very special charm of the journal lies in its obviously unedited freshness, straight from the pens, pencils and crayons of many of the young contributors with corrections and even some small errors left to show it was their own unaided effort.

Articles include far ranging subjects from Dick Turpin to William Harvey, the shame and the glory of Hempstead; the village pond with a lovely page of drawings of lifelike frogspawn and gradually developing tadpoles, pressed flowers and grasses that grow beside the pond.

The Village Society has worked to improve the whole pond area and they tell me that a kingfisher now visits it regularly. There can be few villages in the country that can boast a kingfisher in the very heart of human habitation!

There are articles about local personalities like Mr. Frank Marsh, who was baker there for 30 years; about the church and many fascinating diagrams of William Harvey's discovery of blood circulation, the war memorial, the old mill, and the Rose and Crown, to mention by some.

I was intrigued with old photographs of the school and Sunday school and of horses and old farming methods.

DEVOTED

Mr. Raymond Slee, head music teacher at Hockerill College, Bishops Stortford, conducted the Messiah. The idea was for everyone to come along and take part and not to employ a professional choir. In the event it all worked out well, although one or two

soloists offered to sing for the pure enjoyment of it and took no fee.

The orchestra was made up of more than 40 players, mostly children from the County High School, Saffron Walden, trained by Mr. Gray, but some also from the Friends' School and from Bishop's Stortford College. Even very young children contributed from Radwinter Primary School.

Ald. Gerald Curtis, also joined in the singing of the Messiah and wrote later that the secret of its success lay in the devoted efforts of all concerned. He described it as "an evening to remember."

I chuckled over the report of a rehearsal in which one youngster writes: "We went to rehearse with the harpischord as we had trained with the piano but a violin and four cellos turned up so the music was bottom-heavy."

The book also includes brass rubbings from the church, drawings and plans and a bold modernistic picture of the Bishop's chair.

UNRIVALLED

There is some well-researched information about the danger to Hempstead Wood which is estimated to be 10,000 years old, probably unchanged since just after the Ice Age. It is good to know that the trees, wild life and oxlips are unrivalled there and one can, if quiet and lucky enough, see deer, foxes, hares, woodpeckers, hear nightingales; many other rare birds are to be seen there and it abounds in grasshoppers and unusual butterflies and moths. Once again there are carefully pressed flowers and leaves from the trees in Hempstead Wood.

Looking ahead there is an article on the idea of a by-pass for Hempstead and on the number and type of houses in the village. Footpaths of course feature, as they always do, in village life, also the playing field, local geology illustrated with good diagrams; the aftermath of the ice age, today's soil. Perhaps my favourite are the charming pieces by children called simply "Our Houses."

"Salute the Past — but look to the future" is a splendid and practical title for this journal. The journal itself will be a treasured record not only of that 1972 Festival Weekend but of contemporary Hempstead; a community writing its own history which may prove invaluable to some student of 20th century village life in years to come.

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