

A land of *mills* and *honey*

Ashley Franklin puts Milford and Makeney under the microscope and discovers what's great about the piece of Derbyshire he calls home

Writing features on Derbyshire towns and villages, I strive to pen a comprehensive portrait of a place that will fascinate, inform and entertain the readers. I am also anxious to satisfy the residents. That said, I am content to know that once the piece is printed, I am out of sight and, eventually, mind.

However, with this feature on Milford and Makeney, there is no sanctuary from the villagers. I live amongst them. The good news for them is that this is the one and only place I've resided since coming to Derbyshire 33 years ago – and I still love it. I had previously lived in a village but not one with Milford's profound sense of history.

My initial impression was of a place that has rugged beauty rather than picture postcard prettiness because of the sombre colour of the local gritstone of which almost the whole village is built. However, as Roy Christian discerned, Milford has 'rarity value as a sort of living museum of industrial housing, comparable only with Darley Abbey.'

Furthermore, as it's the southernmost village of Derbyshire stone, it feels as though we are part of the Peak District, yet we're conveniently only 6½ miles north of Derby. It seems even more like Peakland because this is also where the Derwent Valley first rises. From either side of the valley, there are green fields and thickly wooded trees, a reminder of the green expanse that was once the

Royal hunting grounds of Duffield Frith. I wish I had written this article earlier because after 33 years here, I had begun to take Milford for granted.

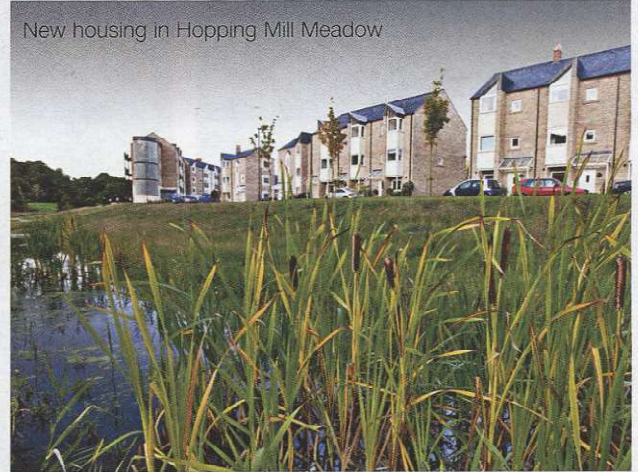
'Milford is a fabulous place to live,' local resident Sheridan Piggott reminds me. 'I have never lived anywhere that has this unique mix of community spirit, beautiful rural setting and easy access to the rest of the country.'

For John King, Milford 'sits in great walking country – the local footpaths always surprise and delight.' Sally Garner is surprised and delighted by the abundance of wildlife. In her garden alone she has recorded 20 species of butterfly, nine different mammals and an astonishing array of bird life – sparrowhawks, buzzards, kestrels, tawny owls, ravens, woodpeckers and even the ▷

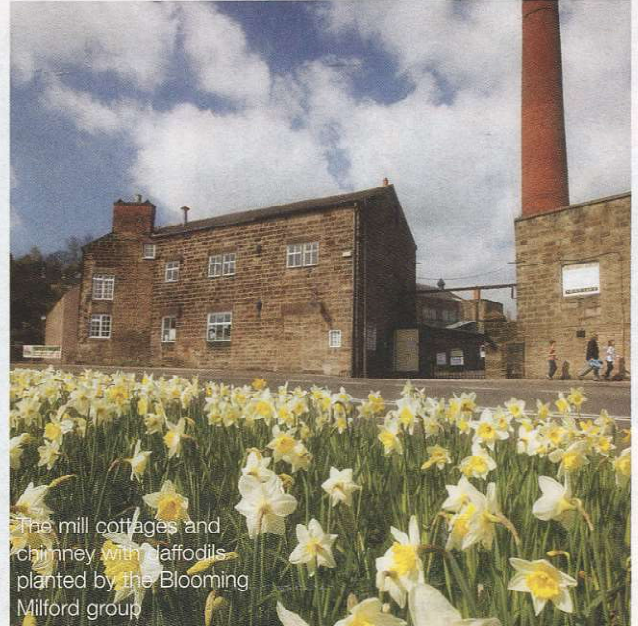
Angelo's at the New Inn



New housing in Hopping Mill Meadow



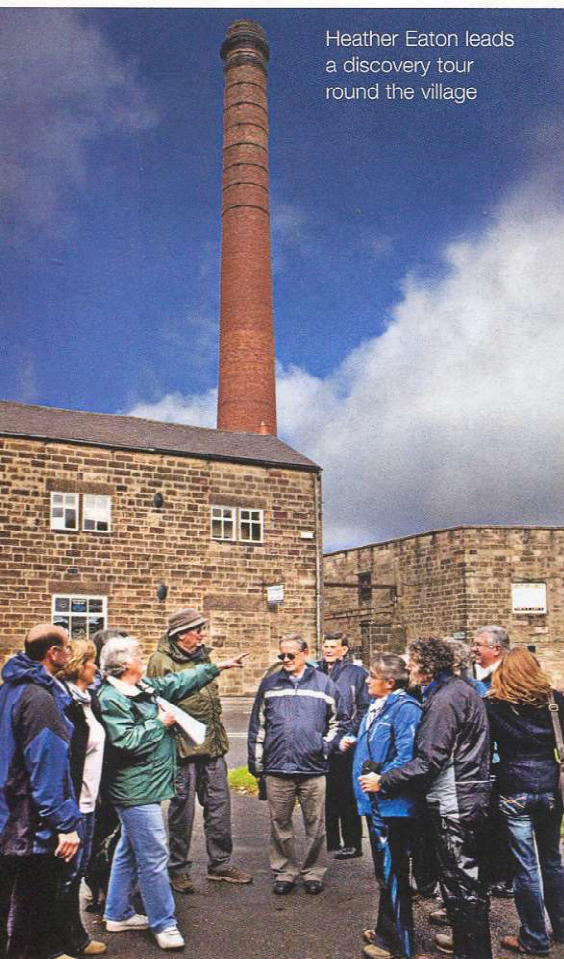
Baptist chapel



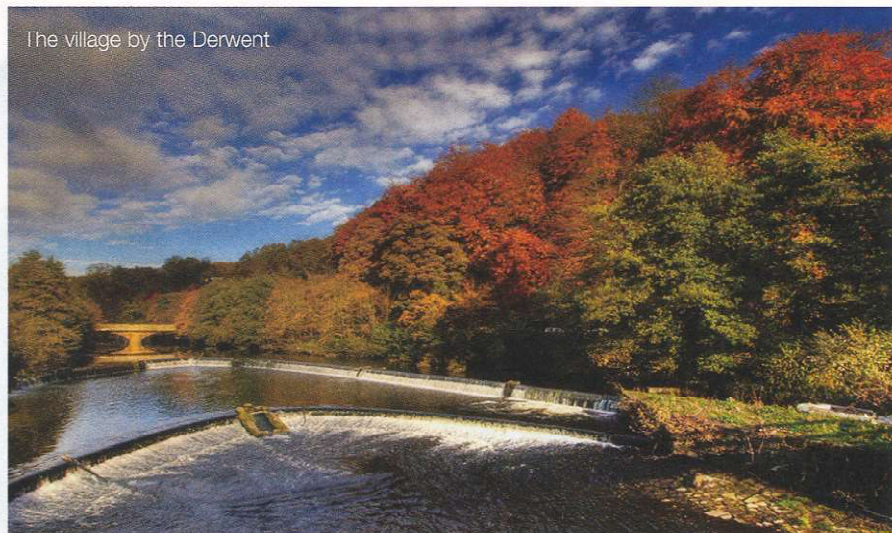
Mill workers' cottages



VILLAGE: MAKENEY & MILFORD



Heather Eaton leads a discovery tour round the village



The village by the Derwent



Milford Primary School with Headteacher Simon Field (standing)

occasional heron. Kingfishers have been seen by the river, too.

Resident Martin Harvey provided the salient reminder that as Milford is built onto hillsides either side of the Derwent Valley, virtually every part of the village – ‘this has an important psychological effect,’ affirms Martin.

It must also be psychologically beneficial to live on the street called Sunny Hill. ‘The views from my little Sunny Hill house are stunning,’ says recent incomer Elaine Penton, ‘and the view of the mill chimney is a proud reminder of this village’s history. My neighbours are also delightful.’

There is a glorious view of the chimney and the former mill works, along with the whole of Milford’s west side, from the high terraces on the east side. Many would be envious of Penny White who wakes up to this view every day. ‘I will never tire of it,’ says Penny; ‘this view changes from season to season, and every day it still has the power to enthral me. I love just taking it in, sitting with a cup of tea and a paper, soaking up the gorgeous backdrop of the Chevin and Derwent Valley.’

Architect Derek Latham’s observations as a visitor are another reminder of the special quality of this living heritage. Leafleting and canvassing in Milford on behalf of his MP wife, Pauline, he covered every nook and cranny of the village and was charmed: ‘Although the mill, by dint of its size and mass, looms over the valley, it’s the buildings on the hillsides around that really define the unique, distinctive core of these mill settlements. On the western side, small alleys and courtyards off Sunny Hill have the quaint, intimate character normally anticipated in seaside beauty spots such as Clovelly or Polperro in Devon. Indeed, if the sea were located at the bottom instead of the River Derwent, Milford would exceed both these resorts in attracting tourists. But in Milford, the added bonus is the higher you walk, the more you see of the historic terraces lining the contours across the valley.’

‘On the east side, there is an innovative layout to the attractive gritstone Hopping Hill back-to-backs off Shaw Lane, with the West Terrace comprising three-storey single-fronted houses on one side overlooking the valley, “backed” by the two-storey double-fronted properties facing uphill on the East Terrace. Each property had its front patio and, beyond the stone walled access path, a garden or allotment, accessed either up or down by a shared set of steps. It has a beautiful intricacy.’

This also may explain why so many villagers told me that Milford people are ‘accepting’ and ‘inclusive’. As Hopping Hill resident Ann Whitlock notes: ‘The houses here are packed together so you’re forced to get to know each other.’

I discovered all this while on a historical tour led by Heather Eaton as part of last autumn’s Discovery Days. What the tour crystalised was that

Jedidiah Strutt deserves his place in the pantheon of pioneering industrialists alongside Richard Arkwright. Arkwright is credited as the man who 'drove Britain at speed into the 19th century', yet Strutt was on the same highway and, arguably, driving more quickly.

Milford was a loose association of farms before Strutt established the mill complex there and with the introduction of the Factory System he also founded (as he did in Belper) a sort of privately run Welfare State 150 years before anything like it arrived on a national scale. Along with the solidly-built houses, the Strutts built the *Strutt Arms* and a school, set up water pumps and even communal mangles, enabled villagers to build churches and chapels and also provided medicine, milk, nursing care, Sunday schools, day release classes and other subsidies. Chimneys were regularly swept and 'night soil' men toured the village every night.

Watchmen also toured the village at night to check for 'miscreants' staying

up too late. It has been said that most houses had holes drilled in their shutters so that internal lights shone through. If downstairs lights still shone after 11pm, warnings or fines would follow. Such was the surveillance and supervision of the workforce that the Strutt family operated what could be defined as a benevolent dictatorship.

At its height the Milford Mill complex employed 700 people. At one time Milford and Makeney between them had 15 shops, six churches and chapels, and nine pubs or beer houses. There are only two churches remaining. Sadly, the Sunday congregation at the Church of The Holy Trinity struggles to reach double figures, though the Baptist Chapel is buoyant, with over 30 attending every Sunday.

The old Ebenezer Chapel is now a holiday home, ideal for a family party with room for 22 guests. Some can sit on the original pews or say a few words to the assembled from the old pulpit. The *King William* pub is next door, too.

From 2003 Milford and Makeney had

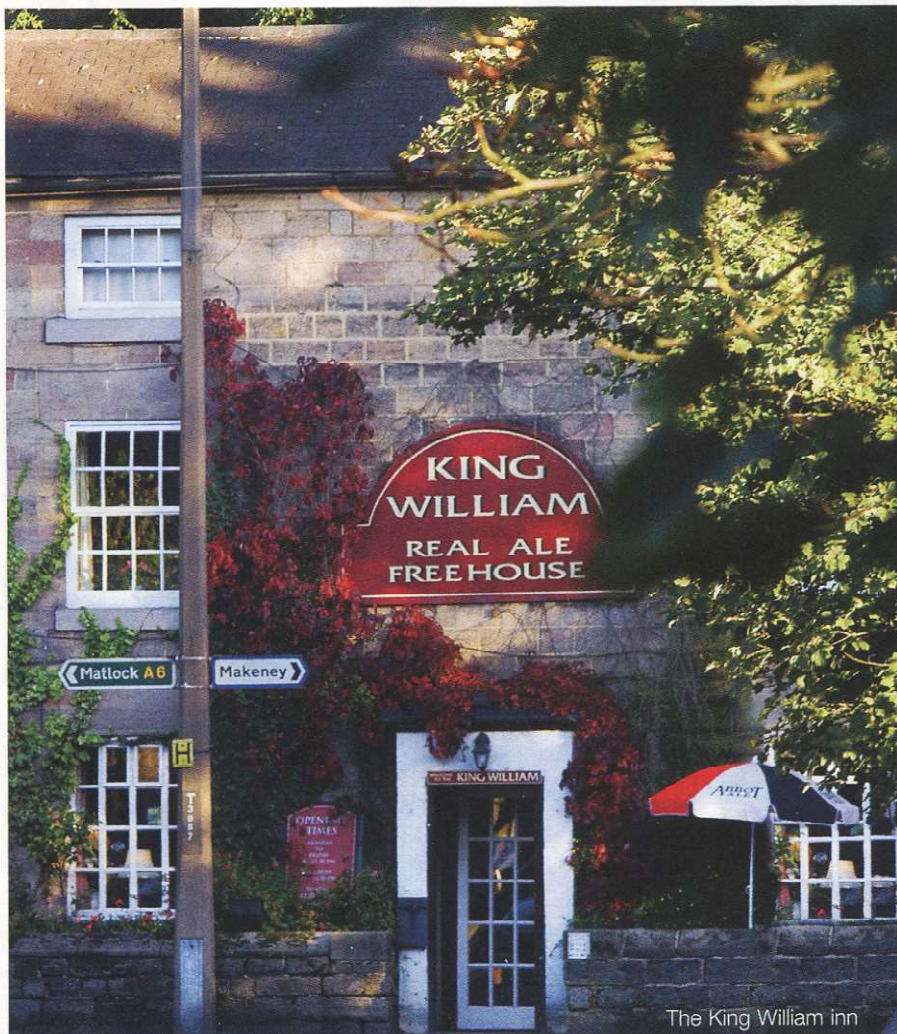
the Riverside Garden Centre as its only retail unit following the closure of the post office/store, so it was pleasing to see the opening 18 months ago of the Milford Village Store on the site of the old Co-op.

It's run by a local couple: Ken and Jean Greensmith have lived in Milford for over 20 years. It took them a year to convert the 'grim interior' and it's now a spacious, well-stocked and well-run store. A keen motivation for Ken and Jean was another, much bigger conversion right behind the store: the building three years ago of over 90 dwellings on the site of the old Glow Worm factory. Called Hopping Mill Meadow, this small estate is arguably not greatly in keeping with the Strutt buildings in the village, although their three storeys do mimic the terraced properties of Hopping Hill over the road, and the development has brought improved access to the riverbank.

The old Glow Worm office has also been replaced by Riverside, a bright new block of office suites offering the attraction of a quiet, rural location. Another attraction is the nearby restaurant Angelo's which also carries the name of the pub whose site it occupies, the *New Inn*. Angelo and his partner Carly dish up high quality Italian, French and English cuisine which pulls in both locals and diners from afar with, refreshingly, a bar area for those who just want a drink.

I have also enjoyed the cuisine at the Makeney Hall Hotel, especially in the bright, airy Conservatory Restaurant. This 46-bedroom hotel is a grand, Victorian country mansion once occupied by the Strutts and has a reputation as one of Derbyshire's top wedding venues. Now part of the Akkeron chain of hotels, there are plans to open a new William Strutt Bar and Lounge later this year.

On the opposite side of the parish is Jedidiah Strutt's original mansion which is now an award-winning care home. Close by is another eatery, the Millhouse, a 90-seater restaurant pub where diners outside have a pleasant view of Milford's horseshoe weir. Sadly, the adjacent *Strutt Arms*, one of Milford's most handsome buildings, has an uncertain future. Word has it that a young Rod Stewart sang at The Strutt in Long John Baldry's band. ▽



VILLAGE: MAKENEY & MILFORD

Although the traditional, atmospheric, beam-ceilinged drinking house is on the wane, Milford and Makeney each have a shining example. Milford has the *King William*, run for nearly six years by Dave and Pauline Sutton. In my 33 years in the village I have never seen the pub in so healthy a state with, in Dave and Pauline's words 'good beer and lovely ambience in a cosy, comfortable and convivial old-fashioned drinkers' pub.' Along with the weekly quiz and live music gig, there is a fortnightly get-together for Knit Knatter, a 20-strong stitch (or should that be row?) of knitters which started when Jessica White took her knitting to the pub and soon began teaching her friend Natalie, eventually gathering together other interested onlookers.

'Many of us were taught to knit by our grandmothers so it keeps the tradition alive,' declares Jessica. 'We also learn from each other. We share a common bond and it's great to socialise while being creative.' Members of the group go by creative nicknames such as Knitwit, Scarface, Purlly Queen and The Holey One – as for a collective noun, Jessica suggested a skein, a cast and a knot although after consideration, decided 'a tangle' might best suit.

Makeney has *The Hollybush* where landlord of the last ten years, Andy Caulton, has maintained the *Hollybush's* reputation as a real ale haven which saw

it win Derby CAMRA Pub of the Year in 2007. One visitor, the *Daily Telegraph's* Michael Henderson, hailed the pub in his column for its wide-ranging ales, some still served from jugs, and legendary pork pies. 'See what an English pub can still be in the right hands,' he concluded.

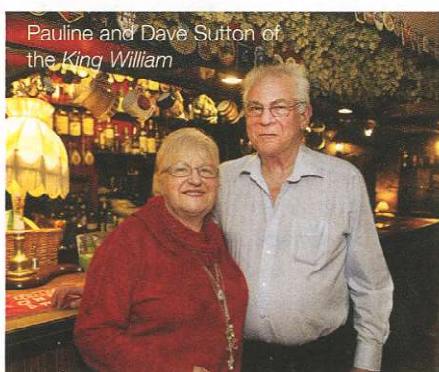
It was in the pub's Snug next to a roaring log fire that I met the refreshingly diverse bunch of people who make up Blooming Milford, a lively social group who share gardening interests and a passion for enhancing the flora and fauna of the village. If you drive along the A6, you might recall seeing the group's planting of a host of daffodils lining the verges opposite the Mill last spring. 'Our aim is to further bedeck the community with liberal, colourful plants in the spring and summer months,' says member Sally Garner. There will also be six gardens opening for the first time as part of the National Gardens Scheme and the group is gearing up for entry into East Midlands in Bloom.

I remember my wife's pride at receiving a slip through our letterbox from Blooming Milford which commended her for her hanging baskets. The note read: 'Thank you for making our village beautiful with your lovely flowers!' How's that for community public relations?

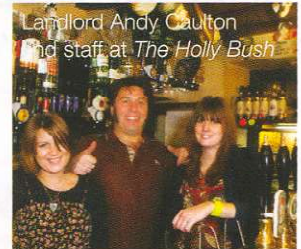
Another vital group is Maypole

Promotions which each year brings to the village a vibrant May Day festival and parade, complete with a uniquely portable maypole so that children can dance around it at various stop-off points along the festival route. A recent innovation is portable well dressings. Can any other Derbyshire village claim that? More recently Maypole Promotions issued a DVD/book *Spinning Down The Derwent* showing how this area became the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. The documentary film, which starred Gwen Taylor and involved over 200 local people, was produced by a specially-formed company Treacle City Films.

Treacle City is Milford's nickname and there are several different explanations as to its origins. According to Milford historian Heather Eaton, a likely origin is in Milford's gas works – built in 1822 and only the third plant to be built in England – which produced coal tar. Another credible claim is that the Strutts issued treacle sweets to their workers to moisten dry throats in the mill's dusty atmosphere – it's said that during the demolition of the mill some of these sweets were found under the floor boards. The more apocryphal explanations include: a barrel of treacle being delivered to a shop on Sunny Hill which spilled its contents on to the road; the presence in Hopping Hill of a well which oozed a



Below: Milford & Makeney Community Group committee members John King, Simon Fogell, John Weaver, Robert Dowling, Jeni Mobbs, Colin Chapman, Jane McCarthy, Martin Harvey, Nicola Thorn and the girls in the front Danica-Mikaela and Freya-Corinna



sticky black substance known as treacle; and, more slanderously, a jibe at Milford people for being slow-moving and thick!

The fact that the Strutts organised schooling for their workers' children 200 years ago is enough to scotch the latter explanation. Milford Primary School was an integral part of the Mill, although this meant that by the 1860s 400 pupils were being taught in only two rooms. This sounds like a disciplinarian's nightmare but woe betide any pupil who misbehaved. An entry in the School Log Book in 1867 records that a boy guilty of 'insubordination' was 'condemned to a month at the watch-house'.

Patrick Spencer was a Milford Primary pupil in the 1930s who told me of one cheeky misdemeanour he and his pals indulged in: when playing near the golf course on the Chevin they would often pick up a freshly-hit golf ball and before the golfers climbed into view, drop the ball in the hole. They would then sit back and listen to the outpourings of pride and disbelief.

Today, Milford Primary – under the motto 'Care, Share, Respect and Learn' – has 65 pupils split into five large, roomy teaching areas, one of which is a state-of-the-art ICT suite with 18 PCs.

Children also use digital video cameras, with the Year 4 children recently

An entry in the School Log Book in 1867 records that a boy guilty of 'insubordination' was 'condemned to a month at the watch-house'

receiving the wonderfully-titled DAFTA (Derbyshire Acknowledging Film Talent Award) for their film *All About Me*.

Although development is constrained by the fact that the school building is listed and part of the World Heritage Site, many refurbishments have taken place to provide, as Headteacher Simon Field points out, 'an excellent learning environment for the 21st century,' proven by the school's results in the national Key Stage 2 tests last summer which were outstanding, well above the national average.

Standing in the school playground, I looked at the empty mill buildings which have been the subject of many abortive development bids. This is

Milford's next important step. John King, former Chairman of the Milford & Makeney Community Group would love to see artisan workshops there and a Derwent Valley Mills Heritage Centre. A village hall would be an asset, too, says John.

I would hope that my village features down the years have encouraged residents to get more involved in their community. This article has certainly galvanised me. It has led me to offer my help to the Community Group as they assemble their new village website. After 33 years, it's about time! □ www.milfordandmakeneycg.org

