

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Continuing our series looking at Stewkley past and present

Fishweir, 'Stewkley Feast' and the 'Stewkley Riot'.

Fishweir forms the transition from the High Street and Chapel Square to open countryside. The lane winds down into a peaceful, low lying wooded space occupied on the lower side by a tightly clustered row of cottages with views of countryside towards Swanbourne, and on the upper level by a row of modern bungalows. The wooded space in between once contained one of the village's natural ponds, the last one to be infilled in 1961. The pond was replaced by closely grouped trees consisting of mainly silver birch with oak, alder, lime and poplar.

Today's modern image shows two homes, Nos 10 and 12, derived from the three original brick cottages in the old image.

But Fishweir was not always a haven of peace, as you will discover.

'Stewkley Feast' was celebrated beyond living memory as a time for village family gatherings and reunions. Feast Week took place in the week following Feast Sunday which preceded Old Michaelmas Day, then on 11 October. It was the Festival of the Patron Saint of St Michael's Church.

Years ago, a large fair with roundabouts, swings and sideshows was held throughout Stewkley Feast on Swan Field, where the Village Hall now stands. According to the late Kate Mayne, 'the hot sausage stall did a roaring trade, offering an enormous sausage and a large piece of bread for a halfpenny each. The school children were given holidays on Feast Monday and Tuesday so that they might enjoy the fun of the fair.'

Around the turn of the last century, it was here that the 'Stewkley Riot' began. Arguments erupted between the fairground operators and irate villagers about the latter being short-changed for rides during Feast Week. Fighting broke out between the fairground people, wielding iron coconut-shy hoops, and locals led by 'Dumpy' Dickens, 'Bossy' Mead and George Alder. Police arrived to clear the field, whereupon angry villagers pent on revenge, turned their attention to the fairground caravans parked

nearby at Penfold End. They hauled them down the slope and pushed them into Fishweir Pond. The fairground folk were said to have never again crossed the Stewkley threshold. The late Robert Dickens conjectured that it may have been this incident which gave rise to the well-known saying, 'Stewkley! God help us!'

Down Memory Lane Editors Note: To add some flavour to this month's Stewkley Past and Present tale on Fishweir, the Grapevine was pleased to learn about 'A Lovelorn Riot', the latest rendition from that old village crooner, Brian 'Lofty' Bottomley, written and performed by Brian and Richard Gleave. You can find it on YouTube at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=8U204x63u11>

