

Margaret Loding
Recorder's Report 2011-13

With harsh winter conditions, wet autumns, late springs and either dull or magnificent summers, interesting developments have taken place in our beautiful and ancient village over the last few years.

Three new houses have been built - 'Gunn's House', two storey and detached, on the Main Road (A1060), adjacent to 'Old School Cottages'; 'Sweetings', a similar property at the end of the Gossetts; and a modern bungalow at White Hall Farm.

A new car-park, for the use of residents at the centre of the village, where once a small number of old, free-standing garages stood, has been installed, with solar-powered lighting.

Wooden, field footpath bridges spanning ditches have been renewed along with the restoration of a public footpath through Marks Hall Farm. Hedging and ditching has ceased in a number of areas, resulting in beneficial fruiting and flowering of native shrubs for birds, mammals and insects, but causing ditch stagnation and some localised flooding. Flooding has been marked at the northern end of Marks Hall Lane - an area which once contained a natural pond - and also around the river as it flows through the fields, in particular



St Margaret's Church
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and dramatically, at Whapules Mill, where water cascades over the bridge at the weir, turning the bridge itself into a temporary river. Storms with strong, gusting winds have brought down trees in a number of places, including at the Old Mill.

It has been noticed that a number of Ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) have shown symptoms of blackened leaves which fall early and, in a recent storm of powerful winds, it has been the Ash trees which have fallen in the woods. The village Walnut trees (*Juglans regia*) have responded wonderfully to recent hot summers with abundant crops of sweet fruits.

The main agricultural crops grown in the village at present are winter wheat and oil-seed rape, with some central fields being made available for grazing horses and a hay harvest. The landscape here slowly changes.

The renovations and conversions at the Green Lane 'Brick House' have been completed. Sadly, however, the village has lost a rare and well-established orchid and cranesbill meadow. The new wildflower meadow, installed opposite the woods, has been resplendent with hedgerows of fruiting native species and ox-eye daisies in abundance.

This has been echoed, this year, in the verges around the village, a valued reservoir of diverse flora, with enlightened verge-cutting. In turn, butterflies and moths and a variety of bumble-bee species are noticeably returning — a beautiful sight to see in midsummer, as well as a vital harvest and food source for bees, other insects and small mammals and then, later, as seed for the birds.

Common buzzards are regular visitors to the skies above the village, often seen circling on thermals in

high summer, or quartering the fields and woods the rest of the year, searching for prey. It has been exciting to see the Red Kite here on a number of occasions. Jays, ring-necked doves, the grey heron, green and great-spotted woodpeckers, finches and tits in variety, blackcaps, the occasional red-bunting, kestrels and sparrowhawks, as well as flocks of sparrows, starlings, rooks and jackdaws, blackbirds and thrushes, robins and wrens, thrive as residents in our gardens and the surrounding fields. Fieldfares and redwings can be seen regularly as winter visitors, swallows and house-martins in the summer. We are lucky here to have deer, badgers, foxes and bats as delightful country neighbours.

The hunt is seen less often in recent years, but wedding parties travelling down Marks Hall Lane in vintage buses, limousines and horses-and-carriages to the Reid Rooms at Marks Hall Farm, provide colourful passing interest throughout the year.

There have been a number of break-ins and burglaries around the village. As well as surface flooding, there have been two fires in Marks Hall Lane — one a domestic house fire and the other a field crop fire, consuming standing straw stalks and bales, to which fire-engines were called out in 2013.

A most useful addition to the village has been an attractive, wooden bus shelter, erected on the main Harlow-to-Chelmsford Road, servicing those villagers who catch the once-a-hour 10.59 bus to the nearest towns — a great comfort to travellers in inclement weather.

Light pollution in our rural village has noticeably increased in recent years, to the concern of many residents.

A Christmas visitor, in the shape of a new vicar, has just arrived in Margaret Lodge and everyone is hoping that our beautiful, little, one-thousand-year-old church of Saint Margaret of Antioch will, once again, become an integral part of our village's life.

Marion A. H. Polley
Recorder of Uttlesford History
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