

WHICH came first – the church or the pub? Friendly arguments have long taken place in Ruardean over whether The Malt Shovel Inn or the parish church of St John the Baptist can justly claim the title of the village's oldest building.

The earliest part of the church dates back to the early 1100s, although it has long been a romantic tradition in the village that it was built in 1111.

But landlord of the Malt Shovel Mark Dew is adamant that his pub was established in 1110.

Close to the church and the Malt Shovel is another old building that has its own historical claim.

The 17th Century Stepped Granary is said to be the spot where the bedtime drink Horlicks was invented.

Brothers James and William Horlick perfected their technique for making malted milk powder "to prevent night starvation" in the latter part of the 19th Century and initially patented it as an infant food in 1875.

By 1883 it was marketed as an adult drink and the family later moved to America where it made their fortune. There is now a move in Ruardean to restore the decaying Stepped Granary and to use it as an educational facility.

The idea has the support of village folk and of SmithKline Beecham, which now owns the Horlicks trademark.

Andrew Gardiner, who was born and bred in Ruardean and now represents the community on Forest of Dean District Council, believes the site is of national importance.

"The experiments carried out by the Horlicks brothers in the 19th Century set the scene for the processed food industry," he said.

"The company did all their work in Ruardean but because of the usual lack of backing, which exists right to the present day, they took it out to Wisconsin.

"The Stepped Granary is all that is left of the Horlick factory and we believe it should be preserved."

Another project with which Mr Gardiner has been involved is the plan to install a sundial on the south porch of the church to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

The monument will be the latest in a long line of additions to the building, the site of which is thought to have been used as a place of Christian worship since Saxon times.

The oldest part of the present day church is what is now the south aisle with its Norman doorway which is said to date from around 1100.

Inside the main porch is a tympanum showing St George on horseback spearing a dragon through its mouth – one of only four such depictions in the British Isles.

The tower, with its 180-foot spire, tall enough to be seen above the trees in the Forest of Dean, was added in 1365.

One of the most remarkable parts of the church is its font which was installed in 1657 despite Cromwell's prohibition of infant baptisms.

The present day rector of Ruardean is Canon Clifford Davies whose family has lived in the village for several generations.

He took on the parish in 1987 after working as a reporter on *The Citizen* for 26 years.

And despite the apparent differences between the two jobs, Mr Davies says the roles have many similarities.

"Surprisingly there isn't much of a difference in the physical side," he said. "There are no special hours and both jobs bring you into contact with people.

"My experience as a journalist has come in very handy for writing sermons."

Mr Davies was a deacon at Ruardean before going on to take holy orders. Earlier this month he was made a canon of Gloucester Cathedral.

"The idea of becoming a priest slowly grew

Picture: Richard Bessent C215357A16



■ **FOREST SETTING:** The spire of Ruardean Church viewed from the Lydbrook road.

inside me," he said.

"There was no sudden flash. It just increased inside me that this was what I should be doing. I thoroughly enjoy my life here."

As to the debate over the oldest building in Ruardean, Mr Davies is convinced that the church reigns supreme.

"There has long been a friendly argument over which is the oldest," he said. "While I agree the Malt Shovel is the oldest house, I think the church was here first."

"The original part of the building, what we now call the lady chapel, is 12th Century and believed to have been built on a Saxon site."

Mr Davies is a familiar face at Ruardean Church of England Primary School. The school, which has 100 pupils, is the proud possessor of "beacon" status on account of its scores in SATS exams and the high standards observed there by Ofsted inspectors.

Deputy head teacher Jennifer Bancroft-Jones believes the secret of its success is teamwork and co-operation involving everybody from the caretaker and cleaners to the teachers and heads.

The school enjoys strong links with the Dagokokore Primary School near Kisumu in Kenya and pupils regularly write to their

Picture: Marlin Perry C223921-MP69

African counterparts. Teachers have also taken part in exchanges over the years.

A nursery adjoining the school, The Acorns, caters for pre-school age children from the village.

In the 1950s Ruardean had more than 20 shops and small businesses. Today that number has dropped to single figures.

The Duberley family ensures that the 1,000 people who live in the village can still buy most of their provisions locally. Brothers Reg and Robert Duberley are still running the butchers' shop set up by their father in the 1930s. Next door is the village post office and stores run by Reg's wife Edith.

Reg started learning his trade as a schoolboy more than 60 years ago. He and his brother sell their meat from animals they have reared themselves as well those bought from local suppliers.

They also cure their own bacon, cook ham, and make sausages and faggots to the same recipe which has been used for more than 70 years.

Today the Duberley's customers come from all over the district. "I started on the basket delivering meat when I was 12," said Reg. "We are a

■ **HOT DRINK HISTORY:**

The birth place of Horlicks, the Stepped Granary, is all that is left of the Horlicks factory. There are calls for it to be saved.

