

## SNIPS

### On the march

WOMEN in Cambridge are planning a march to reclaim the night as part of a series of events scheduled to celebrate International Women's Day.

The march, which seeks to demand safer streets and an end to violence against women, will take place on Tuesday, March 7. Last year, 300 women took part in a similar march and the organisers hope more will do so this time.

Other events planned for the Women's Festival '95, organised by Cambridge University and Anglia Polytechnic University, include music, talks and workshops.

International Women's Day is on Wednesday, March 8, when there will be a meeting at APU to celebrate feminist spirituality.

Childcare is available at most events if notice is given at least one week in advance.

More information about the programme of events can be obtained from Lucy Cartwright on Cambridge 356454 (for Cambridge University events) or Jo Gough on Cambridge 460008

(Anglia Polytechnic University events).

### Gathering support

A WEEKEND of activities for women is being organised by the Cambridge Women Gathering for March.

The Gathering was formed a few years ago to provide a focal point for women's activities in Cambridge.

This year these events include creative dance, dream therapy, building self-esteem, sexuality, iridology and herbalism, and reflexology.

The programme will take place on Saturday and Sunday, March 18 and 19. More information is available from Jill or Pauline on Cambridge 316173 or 571807.

### Picture the past

DO YOU remember the war years? *Web Feet and Green Wellies (part 2)* will be a pictorial look at events from 1900 to the present day, (including both world wars and the fen floods) by Mike Petty of the Cambridgeshire Collection.

It takes place at Castle Street Methodist Church hall on Thursday March 2, 7.30pm. No admission charge.



Sam Cobley with his parents, Jan and Paul . . . "There seems to be so much going on inside him, but the question is, how do you get to it?"

Picture: Dave Parfitt 884954

# Autism and young Sam

SAM Cobley is the picture of health. He loves walks with his mum and dad or singing with gusto.

The only child of Jan and Paul Cobley, his arrival had been eagerly awaited, and his birth eight years ago the best of news.

Paul is head of drama at the City of Ely Community College, and Jan is a primary school teacher at Ely County Infants. They love books and plays and looked forward to sharing them as their lovely son grew up.

For months there was little to shake their confidence as they settled into being a family at home in New Barns Road, Ely.

"He seemed to do everything at about the right stages or a little later, though he walked later than average at about 18 months. Sam was quite sociable and so at that put us off the scent," said Jan.

Probably because they were aware their little boy's language was not developing in the normal way. Mostly importantly, though, he didn't ask questions.

Jan said: "At first, the doctors thought it was a primary language disorder."

"I think parents do

begin to wonder long before anything is said, we had our own private fears, but it wasn't until Sam was six years old that we were told he was autistic."

Though they had begun to fear something was seriously wrong, the news was still shattering when it came. "It seemed a life sentence. Initially we were very shocked."

They got in touch with the Cambridgeshire Autistic Society and became members of that and East, reading all they could about the subject.

"Sam doesn't have the rigid behaviour problems that some do, but all those things you hope for for your child, all the things you thought you had to look forward to, are suddenly gone."

Sam likes to look at books but doesn't read and doesn't seem to have much patience with the idea of reading. "I don't think he can see the point," said his mum. "He is a bit of a loner. But he loves to sing, and can do so beautifully in tune — sometimes he will perform, too, if asked."

It is not unusual for some children with autism to be very gifted at something like art, music or even maths.

"He also loves machines," said Jan. "He is almost obsessional about them. He wants to

know how they work and what they do.

*"He knows where every vacuum cleaner is kept in the homes of people we know. It can be quite cute to begin with. He likes to take them out of the cupboard, see how they work, and talk about them, but it can get wearing when you have to go through the same routine every time."*

"He does have language, which helps. We can explain things to him though it may take time and we can prepare him for things, unlike some parents are able to do. And we are not so hide-bound by routine as many families are."

"There seems to be so much going on inside him, but the question is how do you get to it?"

His future is something they have already thought of with some trepidation, though at the moment he is happily attending Highfields Special School in Ely. The thought of him having to move away at 19 would be very painful.

"He is only eight I know, but I am 43 and my husband 51, and we do worry about his future. If there was a residential home in the area it would be wonderful," she said.

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