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# COUNTY LIFE

## HERTFORDSHIRE

SPRING ISSUE 2024

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### Down Your Way Berkhamsted

Kings, princes, a castle, a canal and famous writers have all played their part in adding to the town's fascinating heritage.

### Grand Days Out

*County Life* visits **RHS Chelsea**

For five glorious days in May, the RHS returns to Chelsea.



Image © RHS/Marc Pereira

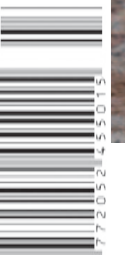
### Aspects of County Life

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THROUGH TIME**

Harpenden's Avenue St. Nicholas, in the town's conservation area.

A SPRING CANVAS - on the cover

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## Your Spring Edition

Warmer days, blue skies and prolonged outbursts of glorious sunshine will be very welcome this year following the long drawn-out, and very dull, winter months! Our barbecue summer may not have been as long-lasting last year, but we did at least have a few fine days, which provided an opportunity to get out and explore the delights of our splendid surrounding countryside. Perhaps this year will offer a slight improvement?

In this issue, you'll discover a selection of beautifully illustrated articles, including our regular look at selected towns and villages in our popular series 'Down Your Way', which features Berkhamsted. Our reader recollections and 'Aspects of County Life' educate, entertain and, no doubt, bring back fond memories and in this issue Derek French writes about Harpenden's Avenue St. Nicholas in 'A Street through time'. We regularly publish articles from our extensive back catalogue, and this is encouraged by the regular emails I receive suggesting the importance of giving our new readers an insight into what they have missed over the past decade.

With spring chasing at our heels, it provides renewed opportunity to venture out and, with so many great events taking place this year, we showcase a selection of the best available. And for readers with a sense of adventure our featured 'Great Escapes' and 'Grand Days Out' articles will take you on a journey of exploration and provide two great away-days! Symonds Yet is the focus of 'Great Escapes' and the magnificence of the RHS Chelsea Flower show features in 'Grand Days Out'.

If you are looking for gifts, 'Serendipity' offers some inspirational ideas. The County Gardener gets us ready to venture out into the garden and the RSPB writes about springtime at their nature reserves in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Our short story will, as always capture your imagination while 'A Very British Tradition' and 'A Picture of England' both have a foody theme.

I hope you enjoy your spring edition of *County Life*.

*Alan*

**Pen-ultimate letter** **HERTFORDSHIRE'S RICH HISTORY AND FOLKLORE ...**

Dear Editor.

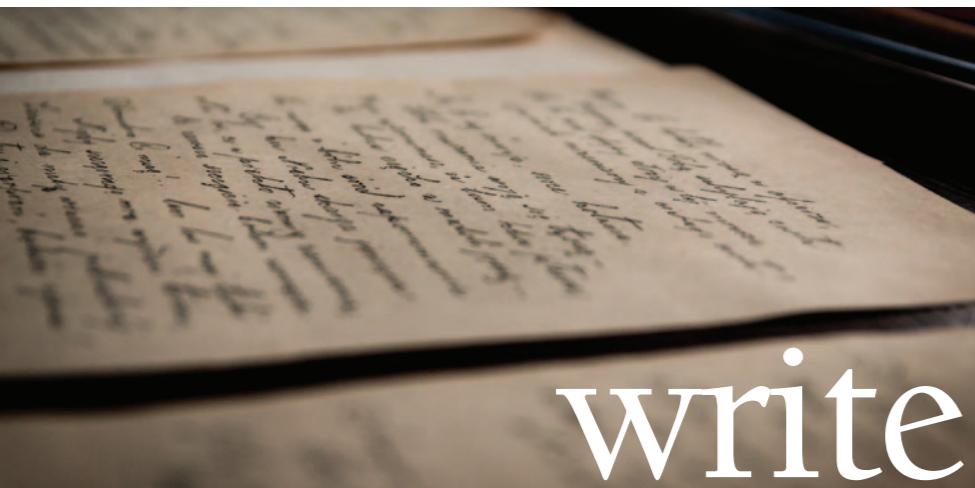
I read with interest your article on Piers Shonk. Hertfordshire has a rich history and folklore, and there are many intriguing legends and stories associated with the county. From haunted castles and mysterious ruins to tales of ghosts and witches, Hertfordshire is a treasure trove of folklore waiting to be explored.

A well-known legend is that of the Black Knight of Radlett. His ghostly figure is said to haunt the lanes around the village of Radlett and, according to local folklore, the Black Knight was a Norman knight, who was killed in a battle during the Middle Ages and whose spirit is doomed to roam the countryside for eternity. We must also not forget the famous legend of Dick Whittington and his cat, which is said to have taken place in the town of Berkhamsted. These are just two examples of the many legends and stories associated with Hertfordshire that I hope you will consider writing about in future issues.

Sincerely

**Paul King - Dunstable**

*From the Editor... Who doesn't enjoy reading local folklore - I will explore the two you have mentioned.*



# writeback

## Write to County Life at ...

### email:

[editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk](mailto:editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk)

Have your say - make a comment or recommendation. Our 'Pen-ultimate' letter will receive one year's subscription to either our Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire or Hertfordshire edition; redeemable as a gift subscription to a friend if preferred.

## Reaction

### SHORT STORIES ...

Dear Editor.

I do enjoy every aspect of *County Life* but in particular I enjoy reading the short stories which have given me the inspiration to join a writing group. I am pleased to say that I now write my own short stories and will be submitting a small selection for your consideration.

Keep up the good work.

**Sylvia Spencer.**  
**Tring**



The *seasonal* photo - Credit: Marcelo Verfe.

If you have a seasonal snap you'd like to submit, please email it to [editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk](mailto:editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk) (Images submitted for consideration must be your own work and offered free of copyright and license for publication in County Life Magazines)



A SPRING CANVAS  
 ON THE COVER



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Image: © RHS/Oliver Dixon



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Image: © Raj Tent Club

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Image: Ben Andrew (RSPB-Images.com)

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 BURSTING OUT ALL OVER!

At last, spring is here and with it comes renewed hope. Winter gradually gives way to warmer and brighter spring weather, and RSPB nature reserves become busier than ever with new life and growth. So, put a spring in your step and take some time out to experience the wonder of wildlife in spring at one of the RSPB nature reserves in our region.

CONTRIBUTORS

RSPB - RSH Chelsea - Peter Dean - Peter Etteridge - Derek French - Susannah George - Robert Halliday - Alan Humphreys - Isobell Murdoch - W&H Peacock - Jess Perrin - Tim Sharrock - Russell Sole



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Image © 2018 Alan Humphreys

GREAT ESCAPES

County Life visits Symonds Yat

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A place of natural beauty, Symonds Yat has visitor attractions including a maze built in 1977 to commemorate the silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and the wonderful Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo.

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Kings, princes, a castle, a canal, a school founded by Dean Incent - of St Paul's Cathedral - have all played their part in Berkhamsted's heritage. The Rex cinema, built in 1938, stands next to the site of Egerton, an Elizabethan mansion, and the children who once lived here provided J M Barrie with inspiration for his famous character, Peter Pan.

16 ASPECTS OF HERTFORDSHIRE LIFE ...  
 A STREET THROUGH TIME

Derek French reveals some interesting stories identified with the evolution of the thriving, and attractive, Hertfordshire town of Harpenden, from its beginnings as a small agricultural village.

Avenue St Nicholas, in the town's conservation area, is a microcosm of Harpenden's post railway development. These days, it reflects modern living standards absent in so many of the decades since the area developed. Live-in servants were once common but the supply dried up and large cold Edwardian houses went out of fashion. Every house is different and those 'locally listed' provide examples of different rooflines, angled and two-storey bay windows, wooden, white painted porches, gable timber patterning, featured chimneys with terra cotta adornment, pebble-dashing and shallow angled buttresses... a street through time, perhaps?

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## Watford MP Dean Russell VISITS HERTS CARE HOME

**WATFORD MP DEAN RUSSELL VISITED** Courtland Lodge care home in Watford to talk to some of the home's residents, who are his constituents, and to take a tour of the home. He was greeted by a number of staff members including the Home Manager, Marta Carter and Wanda Spooner, the HR Director of Quantum Care, the not-for-profit organisation that run the home.



Dean's visit started in Courtland Lodge's new 1950's themed café, where residents were enjoying refreshments along with cakes, biscuits, ice cream and popcorn served by members of staff who were wearing 1950's style costumes. Dean spent time talking to the residents and staff and then took an informal meeting in the home's sun lounge where he talked to representatives from Quantum Care's Head Office in Welwyn Garden City about the challenges of social care. Following his visit Dean said "My visit to Courtland Lodge Care Home has been really valuable. Speaking directly with

both staff and representatives has provided me with insights into the daily challenges and successes within the care sector. The warmth and dedication of the staff was apparent, and residents spoke highly of the team."

Wanda Spooner, our Director of Human Resources said "We were delighted to welcome Dean to the home. As a not for profit Community Benefit Society, we welcomed the opportunity to discuss our experience in the current social care climate. Being able to speak to MPs in this way highlights the importance of collaboration between policymakers and care providers in the development of future provision and quality of care services".



**For more information about Courtland Lodge care home and the care services provided, visit [www.quantumcare.co.uk](http://www.quantumcare.co.uk) or call 01707 393293**

## Mayor of Ware on Charity Bike Ride TO FRENCH TWIN TOWN

**A TEAM OF FOUR AMATEUR CYCLISTS FROM WARE TOWN COUNCIL**, led by the Mayor of Ware, Cllr Thomas Day will embark on a challenging 4-day bike ride covering 215 miles from Cormeilles-en-Parisis to Ware. The French town was twinned with Ware in 2001 when a Pledge of Friendship was signed between the two towns. The sponsored journey will raise money for Citizens Advice East Herts, who are currently the Mayor's charity. The team of councillors and officers from the Council hope to raise £500 to support the charity's work.

The bike ride will begin on Sunday afternoon of the 10th of March, following a resigning of the twinning pledge with Cormeilles-en-Parisis, which is 10 miles north of Paris. The route will traverse Northern France and England along quiet backroads and bike paths before finishing four days later outside The Priory in Ware. Supporters can donate on the team's Just Giving page.



## Sun, Sea Sand AND SWIMWEAR!

**THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS SUDDENLY UPON US** and the Swimwear Showroom at Elouise Lingerie, in Buckden Cambridgeshire, is buzzing with activity. Yet again the fabulous swimwear brands delight and impress with innovation to enhance fit and optimise comfort with all brands focusing on a range of cup sized products.

Anyone who questions the fashion potential of the half metre or less that goes into a swimsuit or bikini underestimates the creative capacity of the leading swimwear brands stocked at Elouise Lingerie.

Spoilt for choice this season, every collection boasts an array of accessories to compliment your swimwear ranging from the simple pareo to stunning kaftans and maxi dresses. And, to complete your beach goddess look, Elouise has a selection of glamorous sunglasses in styles to suit all.

Why not call in to their boutique and enjoy a complimentary swimwear styling session in their relaxing boudoir.



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## The Secret TO A HAPPY RETIREMENT

**THE POSITIVE DIFFERENCE** that moving to a retirement living community can make to your quality of life, might just be one of life's best kept secrets. Homeowners seeking a peaceful yet well-connected lifestyle in the Bedfordshire region can experience the best of suburban retirement living in Kempston's latest retirement community, The Newells situated on Manor Drive.



Ann and her husband Harry have been loving life since they moved to an Adlington community last year: "You don't have any worries here. When you own a house, you become a servant to it. You

have to do all these jobs to keep it sellable and up to scratch, but the days come when you don't want to have to do that sort of thing anymore. It worries you. Here it's like being on holiday every day. I can't get over it. We're having such a wonderful time."

Homeowner Margaret continues "I was thinking of the future when we bought here, but actually we're really enjoying the present. The people here are such good company. We have a great community and we all get on very well."



**Come and see for yourself... Why not get a real feel for your options? Arrange a private tour or we can book in a spot of complimentary lunch for you in the restaurant. Call 01234 988200 or visit [adlington.co.uk/BL](http://adlington.co.uk/BL) to find out more.**

## Pexhurst Sponsor East and North Hertfordshire HOSPITALS' CHARITY'S THERAPY PONIES PROGRAMME

**FOR THOSE SPENDING A SIGNIFICANT TIME IN HOSPITAL**, it can often be a challenging and stressful time. With that in mind, improving patient wellbeing is an incredibly important task, one that the East & North Hertfordshire Hospitals' Charity takes very seriously.



Pexhurst is proud to announce that it has teamed up with four local companies to form the 'Pony Club' to sponsor this highly rewarding and uplifting new patient experience programme.

As part of their sponsorship, they help to fund therapy pony visits every three weeks to Lister Hospital in Stevenage throughout 2024. Bringing real joy and putting smiles on the faces of patients and staff alike, the charity's therapy ponies programme enables patients to receive visits from three adorable therapy ponies, named Charlie, Pickles, and Romeo.

These charity-funded visits have been organised by patient experience project co-ordinator Jane Shaw, who highlighted the uplifting benefits for the patients, staff and visitors. She said: "We have had such an incredible response to having the ponies visit us. The surprise and delight on peoples' faces is so amazing.

"Visitors also enjoy the visits – for many it is a welcome opportunity to make a positive memory while their loved one is in hospital." Stuart Byles, director at Pexhurst commented: "As a business, we are always keen to raise funds for causes which we believe benefit local people in Hertfordshire. After hearing about the wonderful work the charity does and especially the benefits the ponies bring to the patients, we wanted to help in whatever way we could. Such a simple but effective way of brightening up people's days."

**If you would like to donate to the charity and help fund these thoroughly enjoyable and uplifting therapy pony visits, go to [www.enhhcharity.org.uk/ponies](http://www.enhhcharity.org.uk/ponies).**

## Brighten Your Home THIS SPRINGTIME

**THE DAYS ARE GETTING LONGER**, the sun is shining, and the birds are chirping. How are you making the most of the springtime sun this year?



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## Hertford Town Council DARK SKIES EVENT

**THE CASTLE GROUNDS IN HERTFORD** hosted a Dark Skies event. With support from many local experts, Hertford Town Council delivered a memorable event that celebrated the beauty and vastness of space. The event also generated awareness of light pollution and the negative impact it can have on both wildlife and the night sky. The inspiration for the event came from Hertford resident Simon Thorp and attempted to emulate similar successful events as publicised by The International Dark-Sky Association.

The event was kindly supported by LAPD Lighting Design, STOAN Lighting, Hertfordshire University - Bayfordbury Observatory and Hertford Astronomy Group and recognised by Dark Sky UK. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust provided information about local wildlife and the negative impact of light pollution. An Eco Hub was launched that gave visitors the opportunity to witness an air-source heat pump demonstration.

Bayfordbury Observatory provided a mobile, inflatable Planetarium experience exhibiting an immersive video of the constellations and the night sky and the Hertford Astronomy Group brought their equipment and telescopes giving the public access to highly specialist equipment and stunning images of the night sky.

The Mayor of Hertford, Councillor Vicky Smith said: "Dark Skies was an incredibly well-received new event. Despite some poor weather early on, there was plenty to keep star gazers entertained. We are very grateful to all the experts who gave up their time to provide talks and other activities. This event was the brainchild of a local resident, and we are looking forward to taking it forward and making it a regular event."

## Taylor Wimpey Donates TO ST ALBAN'S SCOUT AND GUIDE GANG SHOW

**AS PART OF ITS ONGOING COMMITMENT TO GIVING BACK** to the communities local to its developments, Taylor Wimpey North Thames has donated towards the costumes of the St Albans Scout and Guide Gang Show 2024.



The show took place from the 14th February to the 17th February at the Alban Arena and was performed by 96 members of the St Albans District Scout Association and the St Albans Division Guide Association. Taylor Wimpey North Thames, which has two developments in Codicote local to St Albans, The Heath and The Vale, donated 25 hard hats to the show which were worth £240. The hats were used in a musical number called 'Hard Hat and Hammer'.

The St Albans Scout and Guide Gang Show takes place every year in February, and is performed by scouts and guides members ages 11 to 25-years-old. The show is run by a team of dedicated volunteers who manage everything from rehearsals to backstage jobs. Hermione Drew, Producer of the St Albans Scout and Guide Gang Show, said: "We are so grateful to Taylor Wimpey for supporting the St Albans Gang Show 2024. We have 96 cast members in the show, all needing up to eight costumes each and we are on a tight budget, so local support like this really makes a difference to the scouts and guides in our show and the volunteers running it."

# Berkhamsted

A Jewel in Hertfordshire's Crown

Kings, princes, a castle, a canal, a school founded by Dean Incent – of St Paul's Cathedral – and famous writers have all played their part in adding to the town's fascinating heritage.

by  
Peter Etteridge

**T**he historic town of Berkhamsted lies in a valley of the Chiltern Hills, where the River Bulbourne, which is inextricably linked with the Grand Union Canal, wends its way. It is an historic town with a busy high street and the remains of a once steadfast castle.

The Saxon baron's submission to William the Conqueror, kings, princes, a castle, a canal, a school founded by Dean Incent - of St Paul's Cathedral - and famous writers have all played their part in adding to the town's fascinating heritage. It is also where one of the most important events in English history took place. In 1066, Saxon barons and bishops met with William the Conqueror and swore

allegiance to him, all agreeing that he should become king of England and, at Westminster a few days later, this became reality.

William granted the Manor of Berkhamsted to his half-brother, Robert, the Count of Mortain, who built a motte and bailey castle, which had a unique double moat. The castle was to remain a royal residence for many centuries, and the Black Prince spent some years at the castle, even spending his honeymoon there following his marriage to Joan, 'The Fair Maid of Kent'. Prisoners taken at the battle of Crecy were also held at the castle, as was King John of France, after his capture at Poitiers.

The town continued to flourish around the outskirts of the castle, even after the death of Cicely, the Duchess of York,

when the castle was abandoned by the Court and fell into disrepair. Despite this, the town continued to evolve and grow and, with the arrival of the canal in 1798, and the railway in 1837, Berkhamsted's place in the history books was secured, as was its future prosperity.

Nowadays, Berkhamsted's high street presents a variety of interesting architectural features, together with a range of shops, cafes and restaurants. The Sayers Almshouses, which

date from 1684, are a row of single-storey, red-brick houses with the arms of John Sayer mounted on their front. John Sayer, chief cook to King Charles II, left a gift of £1,000 for the construction of almshouses to provide habitation for six poor widows and the relief of the poor of the town. His tomb can be seen in St Peter's Church.

Thomas Bourne, another benefactor of the town, built the Bourne School. The building, on



Image: A relaxed way of life and delightful spot on the Grand Union Canal.

Photo: copyright 2018 Peter Etteridge.

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the High Street, has three coats of arms fixed above the doorway. These are the coats of arms of Berkhamsted, Thomas Bourne, and John Finch. Thomas Bourne bequeathed £8,000 for the charity school to aid twenty boys and ten girls. When opened in 1737, it was the first school to have been built in the town for nearly 200 years and, in 1853, an extension was funded by a donation from General John Finch. Records confirm the attendance of one pupil, Clementine Hozier, who famously became Lady Churchill, wife of Sir Winston Churchill.

The Town Hall is a listed building dating from 1859. Not only has it a distinctive design but a clock was installed there in 1897 to the memory of Thomas Reed, who was described as the 'most remarkable man in Berkhamsted'.

Another ancient building, the Kings Arms, is a large coaching inn, which dates from the reign of Queen Anne. It is her arms, rather than the Kings, which are displayed on the inn sign. King Louis XVIII of France, while living in exile near Aylesbury, was a frequent visitor, courting Polly Page, the landlord's daughter.

Graham Greene, author, was born in 1904 at St John's, a school boarding house situated along Chesham Road. His father was housemaster there and later became headmaster of the school.

Dean Incent's house dates from 1500 and is one of the oldest domestic buildings in the High Street. It is a marvellous, half-timbered building, with an



overhanging upper storey, and was once home to John Incent, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral from 1540 to 1545, and who founded Berkhamsted School. His arms, as Dean, are seen outside the house.

Clementine Hozier's house is a stylish terrace building where Clementine lived with her mother and sister. The Rex cinema, built in 1938, stands next to the site of Egerton, an Elizabethan mansion, and the children who once lived here provided J M Barrie with inspiration for his famous character, Peter Pan.

On the opposite side of the High Street stands the

magnificent church of St Peter, and this is also where the attractive, half-timbered Court House stands back from the road. One of the oldest surviving buildings in the town, it has a projecting upper storey and dates from the Tudor period. It was used as a court for more than 200 years, and the Town Corporation met here after receiving its charter from James I in 1618. It has subsequently been a school and these days is a church hall.

St Peter's Church stands right on the edge of the High Street. One of the largest in the county, it is a cruciform building dating from the 13th century. Inside, it has brasses to



**Image main:** The richly decorated gateway to Berkhamsted School.

**Images top:** Berkhamsted's pretty High Street.

**Image centre:** An interesting sign, on a building along the High Street, is reminiscent of a, nowadays, less used method of advertising.

**Image above:** The Court is one of the oldest surviving buildings in the town. Dating from Tudor times it was used by courts for over 200 years, and subsequently as a school and now a Church Hall.

Photos: copyright 2018 Peter Etteridge.

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Robert and Katherine, the parents of Dean Incent, and to John Raven, Squire to the Black Prince. Glass commemorates the poet William Cowper, who was born and raised at the rectory, where he described his time as “blissful”. There is also a memorial to the townsmen who fell in the Boer War. The tomb of Henry of Berkhamsted, in the Lady Chapel, has stone carvings of a knight in armour, and the screen behind the altar has magnificent painted figures of saints.

The original part of Berkhamsted School, with Tudor brickwork and Gothic windows, faces the churchyard and looks unchanged from when it was first founded in 1544.

Castle Street leads to the



Image top: Sayer Almshouses date from 1684.

Image above: Dean Incent's House. John Incent lived here and was Dean of St Paul's Cathedral from 1540 to 1545, and founded Berkhamsted School.

Image opposite page: A Totem Pole, on the banks of the canal, looks down of the activities of those afloat.

Photo: copyright 2018 Peter Etteridge.

remains of the castle and the Grand Union Canal where a magnificent brightly painted totem pole has been erected. Standing 26 feet tall, it was commissioned by the timber importing firm of J. Alsford Ltd, and was carved by a Kwakiutl Indian from Vancouver, British Columbia.

The railway closely follows the route of the canal and, at the time of construction, was the world's first intercity railway. Built in 1887, under the supervision of Robert Stephenson - son of the famous railway pioneer George Stephenson - the station was positioned close to the canal and once had a private waiting room on its north side, for the benefit of Lord Browning, wealthy owner of nearby Ashridge House.

A short distance north of the canal and railway, the massive earthworks of the castle can be visited. Geoffrey Chaucer was Clerk of Works here, and Thomas Becket Constable of the castle; later becoming Archbishop of Canterbury. For centuries, the castle was owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, whose coat of arms is incorporated with those of the town, but it is now under the care of English Heritage.

After exploring Berkhamsted, the location of the canal provides a pleasant resting place to reflect on the people and events that are firmly rooted in the town's history and heritage. It is a peaceful place, where visitors and locals can enjoy the sight of narrowboats slowly passing by as they navigate their leisurely journey through the locks towards the Chiltern Hills.

Article first published in County Life-Hertfordshire, issue 21, Summer 2018





# A Street Through Time

by  
Derek French



**F**ive years ago, I downsized to an apartment in Harpenden's Avenue St. Nicholas, in the town's conservation area. Built in 1912, it was obvious that the house had history, so, captivated by David Olusoga's *A House Through Time* television series and his book of the same name, I set to work. Although much more recent than David's featured houses, my research soon revealed some interesting stories identified with the evolution of this thriving, and attractive, Hertfordshire town from its beginnings as a small agricultural village.

So, why stop there? Some of the houses in the Avenue were older, and soon I was embarked on a satisfying journey of discovery to see how it all hinged together. Seen today, the Avenue, connecting the historically named Rothamsted Avenue and the original Amenbury Lane, which today leads to the modern leisure centre and Eric Morecambe theatre, the west side in particular

would still be recognizable from how it looked in the early part of the last century when life was so different.

In fact, the Avenue is a microcosm of Harpenden's post railway development; the main line came in 1868. The connections with Luton were stronger than today, including links with the Gurney family, who featured in Luton's heritage industry, of which a reminder can still be seen in Walter Gurney's factory at 64 Bute Street in the conserved 'Hat District', and with Laportes' and Whitbread's executive management.

Today, Harpenden reflects modern living standards absent in so many of the decades in between. Live-in servants were common but the supply dried up and large cold Edwardian houses went out of fashion. However, with modern comforts such character houses resumed popularity and some previously divided houses returned to single family use. The east side has experienced more recent changes.

Every house is different, and those 'locally

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listed' provide examples of different rooflines, angled and two-storey bay windows, wooden, white painted porches, gable timber patterning, featured chimneys with terra cotta adornment, pebble-dashing and shallow angled buttresses.

Research has disclosed the importance of Methodist George Phillips and numerous links with the Anscombe family, founders of Harpenden's traditional department store of that name, which operated from 1848 to 1982, on the present Waitrose site in Leyton Road, and housed one of the last working examples of an overhead cash railway linking counter assistants to a central cash office. The previous Methodist (Wesleyan) Church was also in Leyton Road but is now located in the High Street, which runs parallel to Leyton Road. For ten years, No.10 was the Methodist Manse.

During the early 1900s, George Phillips, master builder, built in stages most of the west side and lived at No. 5 for 41 years until his death in 1947. George was chairman of the former Harpenden Urban District Council for three terms between 1905 and 1926, a JP from 1932 and later the town's only county councillor. A prominent Methodist trustee, he was able to influence the purchase, by the church, of its prominent High Street site and then, as secretary of the New Church Committee, oversaw the technical design and construction of the landmark building we know today.



No. 5 is particularly distinguishable by the replica Dutch gable found on earlier Queen Anne revival-style houses, but still built during the Edwardian period, and especially relevant to Harpenden because many of these gables are prevalent on the Jacobean Rothamsted Manor, reflecting the Wittewronge family's Flanders heritage.

\*Image main: Street view West Side.

\*\*Image above: High Street Methodist Church opening Day 17 September 1930. Procession from old church in Leyton Road. George Phillips (Front Row, left); Rev. Leslie Keeble, Minister (Second Row, left).

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Stephen Hearn

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# All Roads Lead To Rome.

Milestones are remnants of a period when life moved more slowly; advising the voyager of the distance ahead and behind. How very different from the road signs that we use today!

by  
Susannah George



Image: Courtesy of and copyright Susannah George

**T**he milestones that remain thesedays seem forgotten and overlooked and often deemed a nuisance with regard to highway improvements. I have to admit that it was my godmother who first drew my attention to these icons. They are an aspect of road history that could be forgotten from the landscape and also from our memory. They may seem insignificant to us now but I marvel at seeing them, and treasure the importance that they once had and the need to preserve this part of our heritage.

The Romans first came to Britain in 55 BC and later settled in AD 43. Although notable routes across England already existed during the Iron

Age, the Romans wanted a better linkage of roads. To think that Julius Caesar himself would have used prehistoric track routes, for example, the Icknield Way, is truly fascinating. The first recorded milestones were put in place by the Romans, who defined the centre of Imperial Rome with the 'Golden Milestone'. This monument, probably of gilded bronze, was erected by the Emperor Caesar Augustus near the temple of Saturn in the central Forum of Ancient Rome. All roads were considered to begin from this monument and all distances in the Roman Empire were measured relative to that point. Hence the proverb 'All roads lead to Rome', which is a reference to the Milliarium Aureum as the specific point to which all roads were said to lead.

The Romans measured distance in order to aid timing and efficiency. They laid good metalled roads to move soldiers, supplies and couriers quickly across their empire. They measured distance to aid timing, marking every thousandth double-step with a large cylindrical stone. The Latin for thousand was 'mille' and the distance was 1,618 yards. However, the eventual British Standard Mile was 1,760 yards.

After the Roman military roads of the first century AD, highways developed to meet local community needs and, in 1555, an Act of Parliament made the townships responsible for the upkeep of local roads.

Apart from letting travellers know where they were and how far they had to go, the milestones were used to time mail coaches and walking races. Milestones were paid for by turnpike trusts, public subscription, landed gentry and local authorities. They acted as advertisements for iron foundries, and status symbols for the estate owner, also doubling as boundary markers, memorials and mounting blocks.

Road travel was slow and difficult and it could take up to 16 days to cover the 400 miles from London to Edinburgh. So, groups of local worthies formed 'turnpike trusts' by Acts of Parliament, raising money to improve stretches of road and then charging users tolls to pay for them at the toll gate or bar. From 1767, mileposts were compulsory on all turnpikes, to inform travellers of direction and distances, to help coaches keep to schedule and for charging for changes of horses at the coaching inns. The distances were also used to calculate postal charges before the uniform postal rate was introduced in 1840.

Turnpike roads were superseded by the railways from the 1840s and many trusts were wound up. In 1888, the new county councils were given responsibility for main roads, while minor ones remained the responsibility of the local councils, which had succeeded the townships. The councils also produced their

own designs because many of the stones were illegible. Metal markers became more usual and were often angled to improve visibility. An example of this can be seen in the picture (page 20) of the milestone in Kennett on the Cambridgeshire/Suffolk border on the B1506.

Fractions with Roman digits could be confusing. For example, II ½ could be construed as eleven and a half instead of two and a half. The picture opposite comes from a series of milestones in, which includes the Roman numeral VIII for the number nine.

Wood was an early material used for milestones. Records in East Sussex show that, in 1672, the Flimwell and Hastings Trust commissioned a series of wooden mileposts at 12 shillings each. However, stone was more durable, plentiful and, despite carving costs, reasonably economical.

There used to be little interest in the heritage value of milestones but that appears to have changed. The Milestone Society exists today to identify, record and conserve surviving examples through its regional groups. There have, however, been some misguided attempts at maintaining milestones. A Norfolk resident was keen to care for a county stone near his house and painted it yellow! Another well-meaning attempt at conservation was in Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire, which had its text painted the same colour as a nearby pub's exterior metalwork.

An unusual memorial stone at Newbold-on-Stour, Warwickshire, on the old road from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon, includes this verse:

"6 Miles/To Shakspeare's Town whose Name  
Is known throughout the Earth  
To Shipstone 4 whose lesser Fame  
Boasts no such Poet's Birth".

At the base of the upper stage are Latin lines referring to transience and immortality; testament to the inherent interest in British milestones.

Article first published in Cambridgeshire County Life, issue 76, Spring 2017

# WHY WE SAY

## What We Say

Have you ever wondered about the origins of 'old sayings'? Well, the small selection below might perhaps serve as an introduction and whet your appetite. Whoever suggested social history was boring?

by  
Russell Sole

### “IT’S RAINING CATS AND DOGS.”

When most houses had thatched roofs, it was common practice, during colder months, to allow non-domestic animals to shelter under the thatch to keep warm. So, smaller domestic pets - cats and dogs - and other small animals lived in the roof space. When rain fell, this space became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, “It’s raining cats and dogs.”

### “PEASE PORRIDGE HOT, PEASE PORRIDGE COLD ...”

In the old days, when everything was cooked in a large pot over the kitchen range, every day an extra ingredient would be added to the pot. A family diet consisted mostly of vegetables and, on very rare occasions, perhaps a slice of meat. The family would eat the stew for dinner, with any leftovers remaining in the pot overnight. The next day, the process would start over again. Sometimes, the stewpot would have remnants of food that had been in the pot for quite a while. Hence the rhyme: “Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot nine days old.”

### “MY EARS ARE BURNING.”

This is taken to mean that somebody is talking about you. The Romans believed that a tingling in the ear was a signal. The left ear suggested evil intent and the right signified words of praise.

### “TO BRING HOME THE BACON AND CHEW THE FAT.”

At one time, bacon would traditionally be put on show to impress any visitors as a mark of status because it was a sign of wealth that a man could bring home the bacon. The man of the house would emphasize his status by cutting off a little to share with his guests, who would all sit together and chew the fat.

### “THE THRESHOLD.”

Although the wealthy had slate floors, these would become slippery during the winter months, and so thresh (straw) was put down to help maintain a steady footing. As the thresh became less absorbent, more thresh was put down until, when the door was opened, the freshly laid thresh would fall through the doorway. The solution was to place a length of wood in the doorway to retain it. Hence, the ‘threshold’.

### ‘UPPER CRUST.’

Bread was once divided according to status. Workers would receive the bottom (burnt) part of the loaf, and the family of the house enjoyed the middle part. But the best part was reserved for their guests – the upper crust.

### “DIRT POOR.”

When the floor under our feet used to be made of dirt and only the wealthy had something clean to walk on, the saying “Dirt poor” was adopted.



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# The Ghosts of Clare College

Clare College founded in 1326, is the second oldest Cambridge college (after Peterhouse). Originally University Hall, in 1338 it was renamed when Lady Elizabeth de Clare presented generous gifts of land and money. Old Court, laid out in the fourteenth century, was rebuilt on the original foundations between 1638 and 1715.

by  
Robert Halliday

**L**ady Elizabeth De Clare's portrait hangs in the College Hall. In an article entitled 'A Clare ghost', in the *Cambridge Daily News* of 26 September 1930 Dr Godfrey Wilson, the master of the college, was quoted as saying that Lady Elizabeth's ghost was rumoured to haunt the college. However, her portrait, painted long after her death, is probably an imaginary likeness. I am uncertain if there is any record of her appearance, so, if her ghost was seen, how she would be recognised?

A fifteenth-century chronicle written at Ely Cathedral, describes the sighting of a ghost near the college. In 1462, just after Easter, an eleven year old boy was in the street in front of Clare College, when an old man with a long beard, wearing torn clothes, appeared before him. The old man told the boy 'come to see me tomorrow night, and I will tell you something'. The next night the old man appeared and repeated the request. Next night the old man said, 'go now and tell everybody that within these two years there will be such a pestilence and famine and killing of men as no one living has seen before', and then disappeared, never to be seen again.

News of this attracted some attention, and the boy was carefully examined by Dr William Millington, a fellow of Clare (who had been vice-chancellor of the university in 1457 and helped to set up King's and Queen's Colleges). Dr Millington and his colleagues seem to have been impressed by the boy, whose account was not dismissed out of hand.

In 1462 Easter Sunday fell on 18 April, so the boy saw the ghost in the second half of April, or perhaps early in May. This story is unusual in that the ghost spoke, and gave a coherent message: while many people have claimed to see ghosts, conversations are uncommon. The street in front of Clare College was a busy public highway, so it seems strange that only one eleven year old boy saw or heard the ghost. Possibly he experienced what might now be termed a manifestation, only visible or audible to himself. It is hard to imagine that such considerations did not enter Dr Millington's mind on hearing the boy's story, so if Dr Millington believed the boy, the youth must have given an impressive account of the experience.

Perhaps the boy's experiences were believable at the time. In 1453 the 'Hundred Years War'

between England and France had just ended, with the English being humiliatingly driven from France. Since 1455 the 'Wars of the Roses' had been fought between supporters of Henry VI (Lancastrians) and the Dukes of York (Yorkists), and this conflict would continue, intermittently, for another thirty years. At the same time there was a severe economic depression, causing a downturn in living conditions. Thus warnings of pestilence, famine and death would have seemed plausible. However, on many occasions people have claimed to receive warnings from spiritual entities predicting that catastrophes will befall humanity. (An obvious example would be the prophecies in the Old Testament of the Bible.) These sometimes include admonitions that the coming calamity will be a punishment for the sinfulness of humankind, and could be averted if people change their ways. Such predictions are often vague and open to different interpretations.

Written in Latin, the chronicle in which this story appears is now kept in the library of the Archbishop of Canterbury's London residence at Lambeth Palace (*Chronicle And Memoranda Of Ely*, MS 448) and was published in 1880 in a (somewhat erudite) book with the title 'Brief Notes Of Occurrences Under Henry VI and Edward IV' in *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, edited by James Gairdner, (Camden Society, second series, 28).

One of the most amusing ghost stories told about any Cambridge college is the tale of Dr Robert Greene, who was probably the least modest person ever to become a fellow of Clare College. Mansfield Forbes' *History Of Clare College* (1930) and Owen Seaman's collection of college anecdotes, *Paulopostprandials, Only Some Little Stories After Hall* (1883), describe how Dr Greene regarded himself as the most intelligent and accomplished member of the university (above even Isaac Newton, then a fellow of Trinity College). His *Principles Of Natural Philosophy* sought to replace all current scientific ideas with his own beliefs. Although this was subjected to merciless ridicule, he remained convinced of his all-encompassing wisdom. He

devoted fifteen years to preparing a 1,000-page *Principles Of The Philosophy Of The Expansive And Contractive Forces, Or An Enquiry Into The Principles Of The Modern Philosophy*. While he claimed that his *Greenian Philosophy* was superior to all previous intellectual systems, nearly everybody who read the book laughed at its poor quality.

In 1730 Dr Greene's will, (a superlative example of literary bombast, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in August 1783) asked for his skeleton to be displayed in Clare College Library. In return he left Clare College £200 (possibly equivalent to £40,000 in 2020) and property in his hometown of Tamworth in Staffordshire. Dr Greene's relatives cannot have been happy when they heard of this, because they rushed into Clare College, seized his body and hurriedly organised a conventional funeral and burial. The college staff and students (perhaps unsurprisingly) did nothing to stop them. Nevertheless, the college authorities found Dr Greene's offer of £200 and property in Tamworth rather tempting. After (very) great indecision, they finally decided to accept this in 1742. By then nobody knew what had happened to Dr Greene's remains (or was too anxious to find out). As a substitute, another skeleton was displayed in the library. Few people liked seeing it, so it was moved to a cupboard by the Hall Staircase. It disappears from the college records in the nineteenth century. One story holds that departing students took bones as souvenirs of Clare College until nothing was left. Another possibility is that it was destroyed when a fire broke out in the staircase. Whatever happened, it appears that the college authorities made no great effort to preserve it.

Legend says that Dr Greene, upset by the loss of his skeleton, haunts Clare College, hoping to find it. Every Christmas Eve his ghost roams the buildings and grounds, trying to re-gather his bones. Considering their dispersal, this must be a thankless task!

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- page 27 • Serendipity - Inspirational gifts.
- page 30 • Under The Hammer - Poole Pottery.
- page 34 • Grand Days Out - RHS Chelsea Flower Show.
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- page 40 • A Very British Tradition - Chips & Fish.
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# SERENDIPITY

Serendipity *noun.* the occurrence of an unexpected surprise by chance

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# The Luxury look For Less



**We all crave a touch of luxury in our homes, that element that sets it apart from the ordinary. Yet, transforming your home with high-end features can often come with a hefty price tag. But what if you could achieve an exquisite aesthetic without breaking your budget?**

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silver grey, anthracite grey, agate grey, red, blue, Chartwell green, burgundy and black, and a range of eye-catching foil colour options.

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# A brief introduction to... The History of Poole Pottery

by  
W&H Peacock



**A** renowned British pottery company with a rich history dating back to the late 19th century. The story of Poole Pottery involves a combination of artistic innovation, economic challenges, and changes in ownership. Today, Poole Pottery remains a cherished name in the world of ceramics, known for its heritage and unique designs. Collectors often seek out vintage pieces from different periods of the company's existence.

## Founding Years

The origins of Poole Pottery can be traced back to 1873 when Jesse Carter founded a small pottery on Poole Quay, near to local deposits of Dorset clay. Initially, the pottery produced mostly functional items such as tiles and architectural ceramics. In 1895, Carter's son, Owen Carter, took over the business and began experimenting with more decorative and artistic pottery.

## Carter, Stabler & Adams

In 1910, Owen Carter joined forces with Harold Stabler and Phoebe Stabler, forming the company "Carter, Stabler & Adams." The company gained recognition for its innovative designs, especially during the Art Deco period. The company produced much of the ceramic tiling used on London Underground stations built in the 1930s.

## Post-War Evolution

After World War II, Poole Pottery experienced continued success and became known for its distinctive "Delphis" range conceived by designers Guy Sydenham and Robert Jefferson and later developed by Jefferson and Tony Morris. Every piece is pretty much unique, with designs created by the decorators themselves.

Characterized by psychedelic, vibrant, abstract patterns with designs inspired by artists such as Mondrian, Warhol, Matisse and Pollock.



## The Present

Subsequent ownership changes occurred in the following decades, leading to variations in the pottery's production and style. In the 1990s, Poole Pottery went through various ownership changes, facing financial difficulties at times. The brand underwent a revival in the early 21st century, with a renewed focus on craftsmanship and quality. Poole Pottery continues to produce both traditional and contemporary designs, appealing to collectors and enthusiasts.



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# A modern twist to a 16th century timber-framed home

Advertiser's Announcement

**N**estled in a quiet Suffolk village, this incredible timber-framed home has been given a modern twist with the addition of a stunning open-plan kitchen extension.

The main part of the house was originally constructed in the mid-16th Century and sits in large gardens and its own meadow. Over the years the house has been sympathetically altered and extended many times and as such it is one of the few properties of its type not to be listed.

The owners of the house had made tweaks and changes to the garden and house over the years but were keen to add their own mark to the house and create an open plan kitchen and living space that was filled full of natural light.

“Over the past 450 years everyone who has owned the house has made changes to suit their way of living and how they needed the house to be for them and this was our chance to do the same. There is so much history within these walls that we knew whatever we did had to work with the existing structure and complement it.”

The homeowners worked with Leiston based Brooks Architects to come up with a range of options that would allow them to create the open plan space to enlarge the kitchen whilst breaking down the boundaries between inside and out.

“There was no real connection between the house and the garden and we love being outside and using it as a space for entertaining. We wanted that ability to completely open up sliding doors and step outside or

to sit outside and feel like we had almost created another room in the house.”

The most striking element of the design is the large glazed gable with ultra-slim aluminium sliding doors below and the clients opted for IDSystems to supply and install the glazing based on their experience on similar style projects.

“We had full confidence that it was going to work but being able to see examples of period style homes with these types of doors really made the difference. It was hard to visualise the doors when they were installed in really contemporary style builds so it was a huge help that IDSystems were able to show us similar styles of houses with their doors installed in them.”

The finished extension, built by Kerslake Construction, features a number of details that tie the extension back to the design of the house; the pitch of the roof is angled to mirror the main structure whilst the use of timber cladding on the underside of the extension roof is a nod to the internal timber beams.



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Britain's gardening charity, the Royal Horticultural Society, has a long and interesting history dating from 1804. Founded under the title 'the Horticultural Society of London', by Sir Joseph Banks and John Wedgwood, its aim was to collect plant information and encourage the improvement of horticultural practice. The prototype of the Society's popular flower shows began in the late 1820s, with a series of floral fetes held at the Duke of Devonshire's estate in Chiswick. The rest, as they say, is history.

Image © RHS/Matt Pereira



Image © RHS/Oliver Dixon



Image © RHS/Oliver Dixon

**World-renowned, glamorous and quintessentially British, RHS Chelsea is a truly unique and unforgettable day out and, this year, the world's greatest flower show is bursting with horticultural inspiration in a year which promises to be the most sustainable yet!**

All the main garden categories are returning in 2024 and include the Show Gardens along Main Avenue, while the Sanctuary and Feature Gardens explore themes through horticulture and the All About Plants area in the Floral Marquee focuses on planting.

For smaller spaces, the Balcony and Container Gardens provide lots of inspiration for renters and urban gardeners. For plant-lovers there's the opportunity to get lost in the Floral Marquee for the day, picking the brains of expert growers and admiring the incredible creations of the floral artists and the Great Pavilion will be overflowing with scent and colour.

Trying to reduce the environmental impact of the RHS Shows has been a priority for many years, and this year's show will see the investment in time and expertise begin to pay off, as garden builds and relocations are focused on green goals. Show manager Gemma Lake explains, "This year we are working closely with all our garden designers to bring the most sustainable gardens we can to the show. They are using eco-techniques, low carbon materials and processes that are not only reducing their impact on the environment, but also reducing our waste at the end of the show. "Every garden has a final relocation post-show where communities around the country will gain from having a beautifully designed space. We are proving

that great design and sustainability go hand in hand and I can't wait to see all the gardens at the show."

For the first time in the history of the world-famous show, a garden will feature at RHS Chelsea 2024 which is made by children. The resulting RHS No Adults Allowed Garden is a joyful journey through a fantastical landscape where children can explore the magic of lush woodland, bountiful meadows and a wetland with heightened colour and oversized bog plants.

Their adventure culminates at the final destination - a natural den, set within a pool of water. Sliding down into the water, this sunken, children-only space, is a sanctuary where they can play, learn, and explore the natural world around them.

Highlighting the importance of access to nature for children, the garden is an immersive experience where they can scramble over boulders, splash around in the natural stream, and dive into jubilant planting.

RHS Director General, Clare Matterson CBE, says; "Children gardening and growing plants is both joyous and good for learning, development, and health and wellbeing. Like our Children's RHS Chelsea Picnic, which will continue in 2024, I hope this garden will be a special experience for all the children involved, which ignites an interest in gardening that will be with them throughout their life. Of course, we're going to have to do some serious negotiating to see if we can get a special pass for adults to be allowed on the garden at the Show!"

The RHS stages an unrivalled series of flower shows throughout the summer, which are a must-see in the gardening calendar. Each with its distinct character,

RHS Flower Shows are known for bringing together new and established talent and for creating sensational displays and gardens. Every show has something for everyone, whatever their gardening level or experience and the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is no exception. For many visitors it is an opportunity to relax and enjoy the surroundings with friends and a chilled glass of fizz. There are lots of bespoke options available to enhance your experience, from luxury dining to hotel packages, for those who want to make a weekend of it. So give yourself or a loved one something to look forward to, with a ticket to RHS Chelsea 2024 and be part of the greatest show in earth.

**Photo story.**

Top left © RHS/Oliver Dixon: Chelsea Pensioner Billy Knowles lends a hand to transform the grounds of the Royal Hospital 2023.

Main © RHS/Matt Pereira: Vibrant colours, performers and entertainers at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023.

Above right © RHS/Oliver Dixon: The 'Bush Boys' at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023.

**RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2024 21 - 25 MAY**

**Show times:**

RHS Members' Days  
Tuesday - Wednesday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Thursday - Friday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Friday Chelsea Late Event:  
5.30 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Saturday 8 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.  
(sell off of display begins at 4 p.m.)

**Venue: London Gate  
Royal Hospital Road,  
Royal Hospital, Chelsea,  
London, SW3 4SL**

# Symonds Yat

**Symonds Yat, in the Forest of Dean, is a place of natural beauty. It has visitor attractions including a maze, built in 1977, to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and the wonderful Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo.**

by  
Alan Humphreys

**S**traddling the River Wye Symonds Yat is a popular tourist destination in the Forest of Dean a few miles of the Welsh border. The name is said to come from Robert Symonds, a 17th century sheriff of Herefordshire and “yat” as an old word for a gate or pass.

Divided by the two counties of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire you will discover Symonds Yat East on the Gloucestershire side of the river. A footpath, which leads from the village, ascends to Symonds Yat Rock where a scenic viewpoint, towering 394 feet above the River Wye, casts a watchful eye on the river which twists and wends its way through a large horseshoe bend some five miles long and amongst a deeply wooded gorge in the Carboniferous Limestone which exposes impressive cliff faces.

At nearby ‘King Arthur’s cave’, on the Great Doward, there have been important archaeological discoveries including the remains of a hyena family and sabre-toothed cat bones.

Symonds Yat West, on the Herefordshire side, has visitor attractions which include a maze built in 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. There is also the Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo.

The only connection between the two banks, Symonds Yat East and Symonds Yat West, are two ancient hand pull ferries operated by the ferryman who,

for a small fee, pull people across the river using an overhead rope. The only connection by road is upstream, over Huntsham bridge, but this is a five mile trip. A suspension bridge was built over the river in 1957 by the Forestry Commission yet, despite recent refurbishment it, is only capable of supporting no more than six people at a time

Symonds Yat is especially attractive in the spring and autumn seasons when the tints of the foliage are at their best. However, in the winter months, with the trees capped in snow and the surface of the river frozen, the area provides a unique vista which has to be seen to be appreciated.

The Yat Gorge was once mined for iron ore and the remains of a smelting works are located down stream of the Symonds Yat Rapids, which is a popular location for canoeists. The ironworks at New Weir date from the 1590s and were run by a local family.

Not too far from Symonds Yat, the village of Dymock, in the County of Gloucestershire, has an association with Rupert Brooke who, having spent much some time in the village, joined the literary group known as the ‘Dymock Poets’.

Nell Gwyn, King Charles II’s mistress, also hailed from nearby Hereford but, although Oxford and London may lay claim to her, Nell’s connection with King Charles II also connects her with the county of Suffolk.

Article first published in County Life magazines, Winter 2018

Image: The magnificent splendour of the River Wye, as it cuts a divide between Symonds Yat East and Symonds Yat West - breathtaking views whatever the season. Image copyright 2010 Alan Humphreys



# Spring's New Growth

by  
Peter Dean



**S**pring has come early again this year. There are masses of crocus and daffodils already in the garden, which started to bloom in mid-February and indoor hyacinths, having freshened up the winter living room with their fragrant perfume, have now given their best and soon it will be the turn of forsythia to show its vivid yellow petals.

Spring is a fickle time with warm days and some frosty nights. It is the warm days, with rain, that encourages the bulbs and flowers to bloom. But, beware, the possibility of cold nights can easily kill off the flowers and it is this aspect that is especially troublesome for fruit trees as the Autumn fruit crop depends on the set of the pollen on the flowers' female reproductive parts during the spring. Bees too are less active in cool temperatures and, if there is a frost in the morning, they tend not to take pollen from tree to tree. So, we have a double whammy!

On the vegetable plot, come April, the soil will have warmed a little so seeds can be sown directly in rows.

Carrots, parsnips, swede and turnips benefit from spring sowing to give the roots plenty of time to grow.

Early potatoes can also be planted in furrows, to a depth of about 10 inches / 25cms, and then covered.

I raise broad beans under cover using old polystyrene fish boxes filled with compost to press the bean seeds in to a depth of an inch / 2cms. Water and keep warm and they will be up within a fortnight and ready for transplanting outside, before the month of April is out.

Tomato plants can be raised under cover too. These should have several true leaves before transplanting to their final growing positions in the greenhouse. Cucumbers and aubergines require long growing periods, until late summer. And the hotter the better!

If you have a lawn, now is the time to give it a cut and apply weed and feed. This will stimulate growth and kill the moss and grass weeds, like dandelions and daisies. Of course, you don't have to apply selective herbicide if you want the grass weed flowers to grow for the bees.

Annual flower seeds can now be sown under cover in seed trays. The warmth inside a greenhouse or on a

sunny windowsill will soon make the tiny seeds germinate. Prick out the seedlings into individual cells, with roots, when they are a decent size - but remember not to handle the delicate stems and roots. Always hold the seed or true leaves and transplant gently. Hardy annuals can be planted outside in flower beds and pots when they have several true leaves. Half Hardy annuals are best planted outside in mid-May, when the risk of frost has gone. Water and treat them to some liquid feed and you will enjoy a blaze of colour in your beds by summer. Shrub roses should have been pruned by March. Herbaceous perennials, having been cut back over winter, will now show new growth. Leafy plants like hardy Geraniums can be cut back around mid May to encourage new and later flowering. This is called the 'Chelsea chop' as it is done around the time of the Chelsea Flower Show.

Spring is a busy time for the gardener, but think of the reward. Perhaps try some new varieties as there are so many to choose from every year? Then sit back with a cup of tea and watch them grow.

Follow Peter in every edition of *County Life* and plan ahead for each new season!

# Surprise in the Spinney

When I acquired it, it was cow-pasture, but I planted a mixture of silver birch, alder, wild cherry, oak and hornbeam. Now, some 40 years later, it is a small spinney, the oak and hornbeam mere infants, the alder and wild cherry nearing maturity, but the silver birch ancient, decrepit and in some cases not merely diseased, but deceased. As a whole, it's a great mixture for wildlife, from fungi to invertebrates, birds and mammals.

By  
Tim Sharrock

**T**he typical butterfly in summer is the Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*, thriving in the mottled mixture of shade and sunny spots for which it is well camouflaged. In autumn and winter, this little wood's birch and alder support flocks of seed-eating Goldfinches, Siskins and Redpolls. These were to be expected, but one find at noon on a July day was not.

Black-and-yellow, but too big to be merely a wasp, I assumed that the large insect was a Hornet *Vespa crabro*, the largest of the wasps. But, hang on! It's flying relatively slowly, is not buzzing, and just does not 'look right' to be a Hornet. Luckily, it settled and I could observe it closely. It seemed to have no wings... yet I had seen it flying. It was at least as large as a Hornet and perhaps even larger. It had a yellow head and two prominent yellow spots on the thorax, then black and yellow bands on the abdomen. No wings? Close examination revealed that the wings were not held vertically like most butterflies or spread out horizontally like most moths, but were held tightly close to the body, so almost invisible. Adding to the illusion, the wings were transparent.

Long almost-forgotten memories of a book illustration in *Butterflies and Moths of the Wayside and Woodland*, given to me by my 'Auntie Nan' in

Christmas 1946, suggested to me that it must be a Hornet Moth *Sesia apiformis*, a species that I had never seen. Reference back home to the *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland* confirmed this, the yellow head and two yellow 'shoulder' spots distinguishing it from the very similar Lunar Hornet Moth *S. bembeciformis*.

The Hornet Moth is designated as 'Resident nationally scarce. Locally fairly frequent in the Midlands and southern England, from Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Northamptonshire eastwards and through East Anglia.' Strange, therefore, that I had never come across one in the 77 years since Auntie Nan's gift, so I consulted two moth-obsessed friends and discovered that they had each only ever seen one.

The Hornet Moth and the Lunar Hornet Moth are both members of a rather strange group of moths, the Clearwings or Sesiidae, many of which are wasp-lookalikes, presumably conveying to them some protection from avian and mammalian predators. This benefit is similarly obtained by the Hornet Beetle *Leptura aurulenta* and Hornet Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria*.

The Hornet Moth's caterpillars burrow into and feed on the wood of poplars, which have spread through the spinney now that it is no longer grazed by a herd of cows. This intriguing moth felt like a justified reward to me for the establishment of the wildlife habitat which it had occupied. It certainly made my day.

SPRING 2024 - WILDLIFE PUZZLE: **Question:** Sort these 20 names into five groups of four to complete the names of 20 British birds in five families: Barn, Barred, Blue, Coal, Garden, Great, Green, Little, Marsh, Meadow, Reed, Rock, Sedge, Snowy, Spotted, Tawny, Tree, Water, Willow, Wood. There is only one unique solution.

**Answer:** Barn, Little, Snowy & Tawny OWLS, Meadow, Rock, Tree & Water PIPITS, Green, Marsh, Spotted & Wood SANDPIPERS, Blue, Coal, Great & Willow TITS, Barred, Garden, Reed & Sedge WARBLERS



# Chips & Fish

**F**ish and chips first appeared in the UK during the 1860s, and the earliest known shops were opened during this period in London by Joseph Malin. The popularity of fish and chips and its prominence in British culture was established by the late 19th century. In the book, *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1883, Charles Dickens even referred to a 'fried fish warehouse'.

By 1910, there were more than 25,000 fish and chip shops across the UK, and, by the 1930s, this rose to more than 35,000. As a young lad, Alfred Hitchcock once lived above his family's fish and chip shop in London.

Such was the popularity of this dish, the British government safeguarded the supply of fish and chips during World War I and World War II to such an extent that it was one of the few foods in the UK not subject to wartime rationing.

In 1928, Harry Ramsden opened his first fish and chip shop. According to the Guinness Book of Records, his shop in Guisley, West Yorkshire, served up 10,000 portions of fish and chips on one day in 1952!

Fish and chips became a standard meal among the working classes in England, and the popular dish was originally served, wrapped up, in old newspapers. Those who can remember still claim that fish and chips tasted better served in newsprint!



# Spring Is Bursting Out All Over!

by  
RSPB

**A**t last, spring is here and with it comes renewed hope. Winter gradually gives way to warmer and brighter spring weather, and nature reserves become busier than ever with new life and growth.

At Hoddesdon's RSPB Rye Meads in Hertfordshire, birds really start giving their singing voices some welly as the breeding season ramps up, and Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler and Wren compete for the noisiest bird on the reserve from April. Reedbeds become a symphony of singing warblers at this time of year - a real treat to the ears and definitely a spring highlight for visitors to enjoy.

Over at Sandy in Bedfordshire, RSPB The Lodge nature reserve offers a spring spectacle. From mid-April the woodland floor turns into a sea of brilliant Bluebells - their sweet scent attracts bees and hoverflies. Listen to Great-spotted Woodpeckers drumming on tree trunks to attract a mate and stake their territory, and woodland songbirds and warblers arrive for the breeding season.

Move across to Cambridgeshire and you are spoilt for choice for places to visit. Choose from five different nature reserves all offering something a bit special in springtime.

Spring arrives at RSPB Fowlmere in south Cambridgeshire as Blackthorn blossoms in March, Marsh Harriers build nests in April and Grass Snakes emerge to bask in the sunshine in May.

Move north past RSPB Fen Drayton Lakes in the Ouse Valley where if lucky, in April you can watch flocks of Swifts, Swallows and House Martins feeding over the lakes.

Then up to RSPB Ouse Fen near Earith where the spring brings booming Bitterns and nesting terns and gulls on specially created islands.

RSPB Ouse Washes is a great place to observe breeding Snipe, Lapwing, Avocet and Redshank alongside enormous Great White Egrets that make it their home.

The endangered Black-tailed Godwit can be seen displaying as part of its courtship to find a mate during the spring at RSPB Nene Washes near Whittlesey, and several pairs of the UK's tallest bird, the Crane, take up territories at this time of year. Even though fairly elusive, it is worth a trip to RSPB Nene Washes just for the chance of spotting this spectacular bird.

So 'put a spring in your step' and take some time out to experience the wonder of wildlife in spring at our nature reserves.

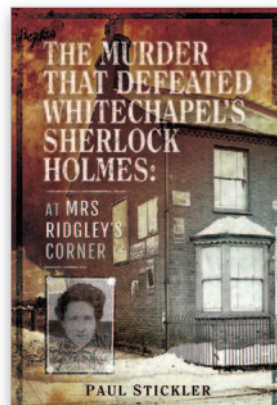
**Find your nearest: [rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves](https://rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves)**

Image: Common bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, carpeting woodland floor, RSPB The Lodge Nature Reserve, Bedfordshire, May  
Credit: Ben Andrew (RSPB-Images.com)

# THE BOOK REVIEW PAGES

Recommended Reading

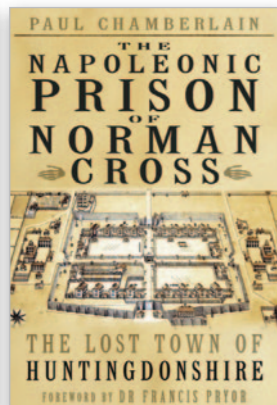
A regular appraisal of interesting books, some by local authors, with a county connection of just a jolly good read.



The Murder That Defeated Whitechapel's Sherlock Holmes

In 1919, when a shopkeeper and her dog were found dead in Hitchin, Hertfordshire with brutal head injuries, there followed an extraordinary catalogue of events and a local police investigation which concluded that both had died as a result of a tragic accident. A second investigation by Scotland Yard led to the arrest of an Irish war veteran, but the outcome was far from conclusive. Written from the perspective of the main characters involved and drawing on original and newly-discovered material, this book exposes the frailties of county policing just after the First World War and how it led to fundamental changes in methods of murder investigations. Offering a unique balance of story-telling and analysis, the book raises a number of unanswered questions. These are dealt with in the final chapter by the author's commentary drawing upon his expertise.

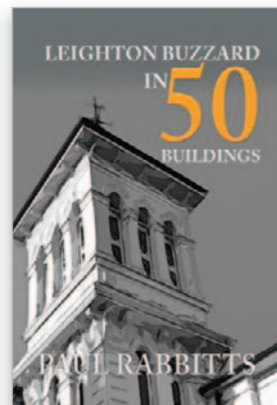
- The Murder That Defeated Whitechapel's Sherlock Holmes
- By Paul Stickler
- Hardback £14.99
- isbn 978-1526733856



The Napoleonic Prison of Norman Cross

Norman Cross was the site of the world's first purpose-built prisoner-of-war camp constructed during the Napoleonic Wars. Opened in 1797, it was more than just a prison: it was a town in itself, with houses, offices, butchers, bakers, a hospital, a school, a market and a banking system. It was an important prison and military establishment in the east of England with a lively community of some 7,000 French inmates. Alongside a comprehensive examination of the prison itself, this detailed and informative book, compiled by a leading expert on the Napoleonic era, explores what life was like for inmates and turnkeys alike - the clothing, food, health, education, punishment and, ultimately, the closure of the depot in 1814.

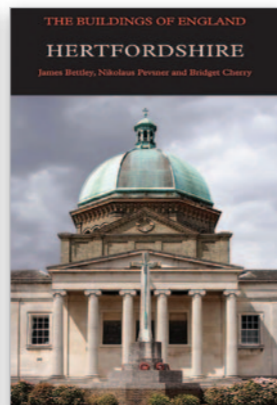
- The Napoleonic Prison of Norman Cross
- By Paul Chamberlain
- Hardback £14.99
- isbn 978-0750990462



Leighton Buzzard in 50 Buildings

Close to the Chiltern Hills lies the Bedfordshire market town of Leighton Buzzard. Dominating the town is the 190-foot spire of the thirteenth-century All Saints' Church, which has been described as 'the cathedral of South Bedfordshire'. The coming of the Grand Union Canal and railway in the early 1800s established the town further and led to an increase in its population, industry and commerce. Today, Leighton Buzzard is linked to the town of Linslade by a bridge over the River Ouzel. The two communities were unified as a civil parish in 1965 and referred to as Leighton-Linslade. This book explores fifty of the town's most interesting, important and intriguing buildings and structures, from inns to churches and schools to houses. The town boasts many old buildings, each with their own story to tell that, together, make up the fascinating history of Leighton Buzzard.

- Leighton Buzzard in 50 Buildings
- By Paul Rabbitts
- Paperback £14.99
- isbn 978-1445690858



The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire

This fully revised and up-to-date guide to the architecture of Hertfordshire is an eye-opening introduction to the wealth of fine buildings that can be found right on London's doorstep. Hertfordshire is one of the smallest English counties, largely rural in character. Its buildings range from remains of the Roman city of Verulamium to the medieval abbey at St. Albans and the 17th-century Hatfield House. Numerous timber-framed buildings and Georgian houses are found in the small towns whose preservation was aided by the early 20th-century creation of the Garden Cities at Letchworth and Welwyn, as well as Stevenage New Town, built after the Second World War. With expanded entries and new color photography, this is an essential work of reference for visitors and residents alike.

- The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire
- By Dr James Bettley
- Hardback £35.00
- isbn 978-0300223903



Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh

Have you ever stood in an endless queue in a coffee shop, waiting for your lukewarm cup of decorated froth and asked yourself why? Have you ever wandered through the aisles of a home and design store asking yourself why? Why do they want me to decorate my house like a beach hut or Parisian Boudoir; or want me to put up plaques of house rules or toilet rules? Ever been inspired to bake an inevitably awful cake after watching one of the many cooking-made-easy TV shows...and failed horribly? This book is a journey through the maze of modern life, told by someone trying to answer life's great questions including: what can Mindfulness do for me, and what exactly is the attraction of a Chai Latte? To be honest, it's all Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh!

- Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh
- By John Dixon
- Paperback £7.99
- isbn 978-1788484220



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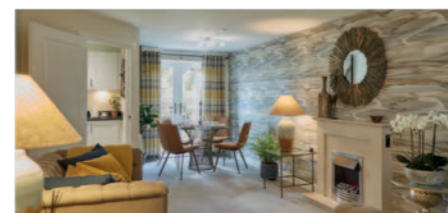
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**H**arleston is regularly voted as Norfolk's town of the year and is an outstanding town in the Waveney Valley, with an attractive selection of local shops, historic buildings and restaurants.

Launching this spring, Briarswood in Harleston is expected to be a popular development due to its enviable location for visiting the Norfolk Broads, seaside and the city of Norwich, not to mention

the miles of countryside surrounding it. The energy efficient development will offer a varied collection of brand new two-, three- and four-bedroom houses and two- and three- bedroom bungalows, with 203 for open market sale and 151 affordable housing, plus three show homes and two view homes, so that visitors can really get a feel for the quality of the homes and gain inspiration for life at Briarswood.

The charming Georgian market town of Holt needs no introduction, surrounded by beautiful parks and countryside, boasting independent shops and renowned eateries, and its proximity to the coast. Set to launch this summer, but with interest being registered now, Park View offers a varied collection of brand new two-, three- and four-

bedroom energy efficient, high spec homes featuring underfloor heating. The total number of new homes will be 108, and the development is located by Holt Country Park - a 100 acre, Green Flag winning paradise of dog friendly woodland walks.

Lovell also has homes available at Bowlers Green in Hopton-on-Sea, which is just a few minutes' walk from the beautiful beach. An area where it's said that the sun in England rises first at the UK's most easterly point, Hopton-on-Sea is located on the coastline border of Norfolk and Suffolk, and is the perfect location for those who want to live by the sea. Bowlers Green has a range of two-, three- and four-bedroom homes, and two- and three-bedroom bungalows.



Other new Lovell developments in 2024 include at Hunstanton, for seaside living, and King's Lynn.

Energy efficiency, good Wi-Fi connectivity and a 10 year warranty all come as standard with Lovell, and Lovell can assist with a variety of home moving schemes.

For further information, visit [lovell.co.uk](http://lovell.co.uk)



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Miles of unspoilt beaches and coast, and acres of green open spaces are just two of the elements which make Norfolk and Suffolk two of the most popular, high value, destinations to make home.

It's not all rural living in these two counties, however. Beautiful villages and market towns thrive, within easy reach of the counties' larger towns and cities. And each village benefits from their own buzzing communities. What's more, there are excellent transport links throughout the region, and easy access to London for those who commute or have friends and family in the area.

With four brand new developments opening this year at: Briarswood in **Harleston**, Park View in **Holt**, Lavender Chase in **Hunstanton** and Florence Fields in **King's Lynn**, there will be a choice of stunning new homes being released from Spring 2024.

If you're thinking of making your next move, or finding your forever home, register your interest now for exclusive sales releases and information.

“ The whole experience of buying from Lovell has been first class. The house build and quality is phenomenal and the attention from each Lovell colleague has been superb! Highly recommended!”

Keith, William's Park, December 2023



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# The Unexpected Visitor

by  
Jess Perrin

**I was playing out front by the five-bar gate when I noticed the old man plodding along St Agnes Road. At first I couldn't be certain that he was old or even that the figure was a man, for between us was a cornfield and the walker was silhouetted against the rising spring sun, beyond needing a key.**

My interest in the old man increased when instead of continuing along the road, he turned without pausing or lifting his head into the long cart road that led up to our house, as though familiar with the route.

Visitors to the Old Mill House were rare. It stood on a square plot of about an acre in the middle of a large, flat cornfield and was bounded by a thick hedge to its sides and rear. The house of plain grey bricks and blue slated roof had large adjoining barns extending its frontage. An archway had been formed in the barns to allow the cart road to continue direct into the back garden, where the mill had once stood.

I ran to the house to alert my mother Edie about the old man. Mother's first thought was to hide the wireless and accumulator in the stair cupboard in case it was the licence inspector. But a quick glance out of the front room window told her that this was no official.

"Go and put Floss on her chain," Mother said, not wishing the ancient visitor to be assaulted by our young Labrador with the unrestrained friendliness of her breed.

I chained the dog to her kennel post near the scullery window. She had sensed something was up and whimpered in anticipation on a redundant millstone, one of several that served as a path along the house wall.

As Mother and I arrived out front to await the visitor, my elder sister Joan was standing under the archway. "Shall we play shops?" she called out. In her hand was a basketful of fallen fruit from the orchard, which she hoped to sell for pretend money.

"No. Look! There's someone coming," I replied, pointing down the cart road.

Joan put down her basket and we all stood watching the old man. As he made his way towards us, some object caught his eye. It lay in the cornfield stubble a few feet from the track. He prodded it with his hazel stick. I knew it to be the blooded remains of a young rabbit destroyed by a harvesting machine. I had discovered it the day before. It had looked as though it was asleep but, when I lifted it up I was shocked to find it full of maggots. The old man soon let it be and continued towards us.

He had a sparse frame, transported in dust-covered hobnail boots that grew noisier as they pounded the gravel surface. His rickety, black-trousered legs disappeared under an oversized khaki trench coat tied around the waist with baling string.

"Morning," he said, as he passed through the open gate towards the archway. His coat collar and cuffs were compressed with the greasy blackness of continuous use, as were the peak and edges of his brown cap. He had a wizened, sharp featured face with white stubble. His pinched look and watery blue eyes gave an appearance of being constantly braced against the elements.

"Good morning," Mother replied.

When it became clear that he did not intend to stop, Mother called out, "Where are you going?"

The old man stopped. He pointed at the archway with his stick and said, "I'm going through 'ere, across the back way and over the stile to Hasmead." He claimed it was his right to pass through our house and garden.

To us, it felt like an invasion, but the old man's fragility and innocence of manner was disarming. Mother offered him a mug of tea, but he knew of better refreshment. "Some water from the well would be nice."

Joan went off to fetch the water as our visitor lowered himself on to a wooden crate under the archway. He leaned his ancient body as far back against the wall as its bowed frame would allow, then produced a jack knife and a brown paper bag containing a large chunk of crusty bread and a slab of cheese. When Joan returned with the water, the old man began cutting, gnawing and nibbling his meal and taking regular sips from the white enamel mug.

The scent of freshly harvested wheat was still in the air, which in stronger form accompanied the old man; a smell of the countryside that when smelled years hence would return me to fond memories of the old house.

"I don't suppose much comes through 'ere now," the old man said.

"No," Mother replied. "You're the first unexpected visitor we've had since we moved here in the spring."

The old man said, "That's bin twenty years or more since the old mill was on the go. They took it away when the steam mill started up over at Wood Farm."

"Did you work here at the mill?" Mother asked.

"Man and boy I worked in the fields 'ereabouts. Loaded up the carts with sacks of corn then delivered 'em to the mill."

The old man had few teeth, and as he ate and spoke I was drawn to looking at the randomly spaced brown stubs that were in various stages of decay. With so little to bite with, his habit of sipping water while eating was clearly an important aid to digestion.

He continued, "The mill turned on a post, and we 'ad to turn it so the sails were into the wind. When the wind changed, we'd turn it again".

As he reminisced, Mother was reminded of a photograph found in the corn loft by my father Henry when flipping through a cardboard box full of *Farmer's Weekly* magazines that had been left by previous owners.

"I have something to show you," Mother said. "I won't be long."

June went off with Mother and I was obliged to remain with our visitor, too shy to do anything other than just stand waiting, displaying grubby knees that masked the abrasions and scabs of a hundred exploits, and sock-less feet slotted into black Wellington boots that had been cut off at the ankles, serving as hot summer shoes even after ventilating holes had appeared in the worn soles. My short, home-made flannel trousers were

held in place by braces made from offcuts of the same material. On the rare occasions when we went to church, Mother's conversion of her two children into something presentable was equal to any biblical miracle claimed by the vicar in his sermon.

"What's your name boy?" the old man asked.

"Jimmy," I replied.

"Another Jim, eh. And 'ow old are yer?"

"Eight and a half," I replied, proud to add the fraction.

"My younger brother's name was Jim. 'e's long dead. Got typhoid in the Boer War."

Mother returned alone, leaving June to prepare her fruit stall. "Does this mean anything to you?" she asked, handing the visitor the small black and white photograph. It showed the old wooden post mill, standing above a brick roundhouse. Four massive sails dominated the scene. In the foreground, a woman and a girl stood side by side, posing seriously at the camera. The girl looked the image of the woman, each of them wearing a long dark skirt and a light coloured blouse.

"Well I never," the old man remarked. "That's the old mill alright. And that's Edwin Westrope's wife Alice and their daughter Violet in their Sunday best. 'e was the last miller 'ere. My Jim 'ad a fancy on the girl, but she won't interested."

"Would you like to keep the photograph?" Mother asked.

"You'd best keep it, dear. It wouldn't last long if I 'ad it," he replied.

After his refreshment, the old man said, "I'd best be off." He grasped his stick and pressed it hard on the ground to raise himself.

"Shall we see you on your way back?" Mother asked.

"I'll not be coming this way. I've a lot to see," he replied.

And with the same deliberation as before, the visitor made his way through the archway and into the back garden. He paused at the circular brick stub of the old mill, which rose up a few inches in the long grass. He turned to us with a pained smile, unable to mask the deep nostalgia he was feeling for his younger years, when the keenness for life had made a pleasure out of hard work, and the heavy weight of sacks on his shoulder had been no burden. Climbing carefully over the stile, he went on his way.

I ran over to the stile and jumped up on to its wooden step, then watched the diminishing figure as it tramped over stubble where once much surer feet had trod.

Story first published in County Life magazines, Autumn issue 2014

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# A PICTURE OF England



## Bakewell

Derbyshire is a delightful county and is blessed with such an array of interesting places. Whenever my wife and I visit, top of our list of places to visit is always the delightful town of Bakewell - home of the original Bakewell tart.

The Bakewell tart is a delicious English dessert that originated in the town of Bakewell in Derbyshire. It consists of a shortcrust pastry base, a layer of jam, an almond sponge filling, and a topping of sweet icing and almonds.

The origin of the Bakewell tart is somewhat disputed, but it is said to have been created by accident in the early 19th century. A chef at the Rutland Arms hotel in Bakewell is said to have misheard an order for a Bakewell pudding, and instead created the now-famous tart.

The tart quickly became popular in the town of Bakewell and beyond, and has since become a beloved dessert in British cuisine. The combination of sweet jam, almond-flavored sponge, and crunchy almonds makes for a delightful flavor and texture and has ensured that the humble Bakewell tart has remained a popular dessert in the UK and has even gained popularity in other countries.

In addition to its delicious taste, the Bakewell tart also holds cultural significance in the UK, representing a beloved aspect of the country's culinary heritage.

Whether enjoyed at home or in a quaint English tea shop, the Bakewell tart is a treat that is sure to delight.

Ed

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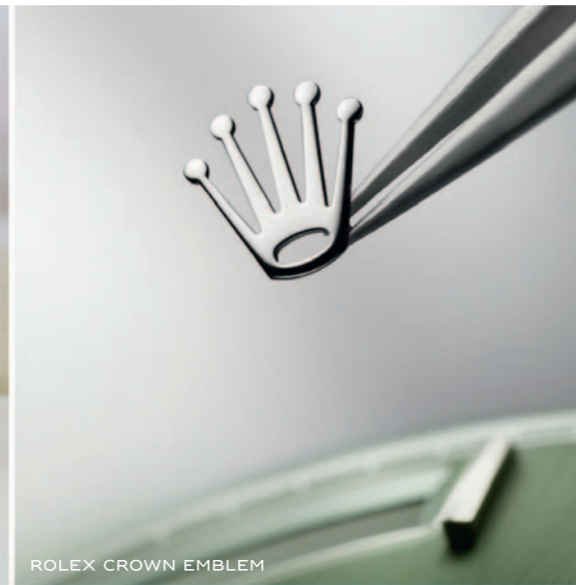
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