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ARTICLE
ON
BURY HOUSE

&
COTTINGHAM





Life Visits

COTTINGHAM

BY

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Four miles or so from the Northamptonshire steel-town of Corby lies Cottingham, a village of the past that yet comprises much of the present — and in the nicest possible way.

The main road from Corby swerves abruptly away from the village and the unwary driver, by keeping straight on, is likely to find himself entangled in

among the steep and winding Cottingham streets and in the midst of Cottingham's close-packed cottages. Unless he is in a hurry he will not be sorry. Cottingham is well worth a visit, however inadvertently. And yet it remains little known — which is, perhaps, just as well, for who would wish to disturb its peacefulness by the

incursion of over-many tourists?

Not that Cottingham lacks visitors, or dislikes them, for it is as hospitable and charming as any outsider could wish it to be. Unfortunately, from time to time it attracts the wrong kind of visitor. Which is why the church door is kept locked. The vandals from Corby have accomplished that much — God's house must be especially opened for those who wish to commune with God. Damage and destruction might otherwise result, as the Rector and his churchwardens have discovered the hard way.

"Who knows what satisfaction they get out of it?" wryly commented the Rector, the Reverend G. F. Adams. "The original Vandals destroyed to conquer; those of today simply destroy."

It must be heart-breaking to him, for he thinks much of his church.

"You won't find a better church anywhere in the country," he remarked challengingly as he handed me the keys. "And you won't find a better village," he added unexpectedly, "not even in the Cotswolds."

His words brought home at once the resemblance I had not seen for myself. Cottingham — Cotswolds, Cotswolds — Cottingham. There must be a



"You won't find a better church anywhere in the country" says the Rector of Cottingham church, the Reverend G. F. Adams. Unfortunately it has been visited by vandals and now the door is kept locked.

relationship. Cottingham would not look in the least out of place in Worcestershire.

"That's because of the Oolites," the Rector explained. "The stone in both places is much of a muchness."

It is indeed. The Jurassic limestone bedding of the Cotswolds spreads out as far as Cottingham. It makes good material for those "working in stone and such".

The church of St. Mary Magdalene stands half-way up the steepest hill in Cottingham. For some seven hundred years it has stood in the midst of this village of hills. Thirty steps lead up to its door, one for every day of the lunar month, one for the first step into life and one for the last step out of it. In the quiet of the churchyard the headstones lean yearly more whichway amid the shrubs and the wild flowers and the long grasses. It is a place of rest where in spring the blackbird sings strongly and the voice of the wood pigeon is seductive.

Within, the church is newly carpeted, newly chaired, newly has-socked and newly floored. But — an ancient stone coffin lid forms part of the ringing-chamber wall and a splendid sixteenth century chest stands in the vestry. The light-oak chairs, the red carpets, the parquet floors are in surprising contrast to the thirteenth century sanctuary arch, to the fragments of medieval glass, to the fifteenth-century pillars with their

strangely decorated capitals of dwarf and beast, two ladies lying head to head, and uniquely, figures believed to represent Mary Magdalene, the Abbot of Peterborough and the lords of Cottingham and the neighbouring village of Middleton. These latter are thought to symbolise the combined authority of the church, the parish and the manor.

But manorial authority is evidenced in practical fashion for from the foot of the hill on which the church is built a spring gushes from an iron pipe into an iron drinking fountain. Here the villagers still come to fill their kettles and jugs with clean, cool water such as town-dwellers can never enjoy. "It's got body in it," Cottingham declares — and the graveyard joke seldom fails to disconcert the stranger.

It was the copyholders who organized the piping and to this day the stream that runs through it is called copyhold water. It is a strange term. In feudal times copyholders were villeins who were granted plots of land by their lord in exchange for regular cash payments made in lieu of obligatory personal service. Thus did the system of rents begin, but copyholding as such, although greatly modified, existed even after the Second World War. The copyhold water of Cottingham was obtainable by any villager for an annual payment of five shillings and the ancient manorial custom, suitably adapted, proved a

godsend to a community which, even twenty years ago, would otherwise have had to depend on the village pump. The copyholders wrought well for the good of the community.

Others also have worked in Cottingham for the benefit of Cottingham. There was, for instance, Richard Bancroft, once its rector, whom James I created Archbishop of Canterbury. He would have nothing to do with Puritanism and believed wholeheartedly that episcopacy was of Divine origin. Yet he was compassionate and understanding towards those of inferior condition and many a Cottingham villager had cause to bless his kindly, scholarly father in God for the help he gave when cares multiplied and trouble overwhelmed. Today in Cottingham there is a Bancroft Road. The Archbishop is not forgotten.

Headmaster's Wife was a descendant of "Victory's" first Lieutenant at Trafalgar

Nor, strangely enough, is Lord Nelson. But then the Admiral's life and times are the passionate concern of Mr. Allston Kisby, the Cottingham headmaster. His books on Nelson form probably one of the best private collections in Northamptonshire. This is not altogether surprising when it is known that his wife is a descendant of Captain John Quilliam, R.N., the Manxman who was "Victory's" First Lieutenant at Trafalgar. When her wheel was shot away the ship was steered from the quarterdeck, "the First Lieutenant, John Quilliam and Master, Thomas Atkinson, relieving each other at this duty." Nearly one hundred and forty years later H.M.S. Quilliam, a destroyer, saw considerable service.

The sea surges through Mr. Kisby's extensive library. The complete works of Smollett, sometime a surgeon's mate in the Navy, stand arrayed with those of W. W. Jacobs, who spent his boyhood among the Thames shipping and on the riverside wharves. There are books on the 1914-1918 War, when sea-power meant victory and books about the American Civil War, when the naval strength of the North proved decisive. In addition (and in contrast) Mr. Kisby has a specialist's collection of Clare, the Northamptonshire poet who died in a madhouse, and all the Folio Society publications, which in themselves form a classical library.

It was only after a general discussion on books that Mr. Kisby modestly revealed that he is himself a

writer: one novel, "Indifferent Children" and many short stories published in national newspapers and magazines.

From the hill on which stands Mr. Kisby's house there is a splendid view across the Welland valley, where the river works its placid way eastward to the Wash. The hills of Leicestershire rise blue and gold in the distance, and shimmer in the summer heat. In the village itself the little roads dip and turn and twist among grey stone houses that cluster cosily in between sloping fields where Friesian cows move slowly and sheep graze and wander. All is placid contentment and rural quiet and peace.

Clothing factory employs fifty women

It comes, therefore, as something of a shock to discover that a real clothing factory employing some fifty women and girls has operated for years within the village. Leigh Hunt would probably never have associated these fifty with the two divinest things the world has got — but only because a factory was the last thing he would have thought of in connection with a rural sport.

And yet the three storey red-brick building occupied by Willis & Linnell, Clothing Manufacturers, is by no means incongruous. Indeed, for all its up-to-date methods, in essence it belongs to the village tradition of

"The spinsters and the knitters in the sun

And the free maids that weave their threads with bones."

The free maids of today follow in the footsteps of their mothers who in their time were employed in the same building and used basically the same processes.

The contented domesticity of Cottingham is almost unbelievable in these herd-rush times, yet somehow the village contrives to be modern without trendiness in its acceptance of contemporary houses and bungalows that are in no way disastrously ultra-contemporary.

Maybe it's the way the gardens are laid out, or the siting, or the use of local stone for local houses. Whatever the reason, Cottingham has successfully absorbed planned development that might easily have destroyed it. Commuters daily come and go but as they take little interest in the true life of the village, the village takes little interest in them. For Cottingham chooses always to remain true Cottingham, a place of charm, graciousness and dignity.



Bury House, Cottingham, one of the finest houses not only of the village but also of the County.



The old water pump used by villagers not so long ago, still stands where it has always stood. Now used only to quench the thirst of dogs on hot dry days.



Cottingham's main street from which it is not difficult to appreciate the contented domesticity which surrounds the village.