

Despite the changing years

East Meon retains its ancient charm

APPROACHING East Meon either from Petersfield or neighbouring West Meon on a Friday evening in spring one is likely to be greeted by the sound of a peal of bells and a "host of golden daffodils", for it is the parish church of All Saints that makes its first impact upon the visitor.

The heyday of the village coincided with the first flowering of English architecture, when East Meon was an important administrative centre, bequeathing not only its beautiful Norman church, but an imposing Court House, built at the same period, and used by the bishops of Winchester for ecclesiastical courts.

Today stone corbels of bygone bishops gaze down on rituals of a different kind when plays are presented annually in the great hall, and the "Medieval Banquet" staged in Jubilee Year, might have been an echo of some distant precursor. Even the church this year was the scene of a latter day Morality Play "The Lord's Lieutenant", by the village's well-known local playwright William Douglas-Home.

But turning down Church Street and into the High Street, the visitor comes upon the heart of the village where the river Meon flows beneath stone bridges and parallel to the road.

No bigger and a great deal shallower than Venice's lesser canals, it has still been known to flood in the days before straightening and deepening the river had made living by its banks an occupational hazard.

A variety of thatched cottages, and brick, flint and colour-washed houses line its two banks, and interspersed with these are those two centres of village activity the "George" and the recently re-named "Isaac Walton" pubs. Here, too, is one of the three village shops, "The Country Stores", presided over in recent times by Mr. and Mrs. Les Sims, who are from urban Staines and already very much part of the village scene.

But if the visitor should get the impression that this is some sort of rural Maida Vale or artists' "colony", he has failed to see the village that lives and breathes beneath the picture-book facade. East Meon is as much alive and thriving today as in the days when the monks carved their vineyard out of the steep hillside beside the church, or kept their supplies of Friday fish well stocked in what is still called "Fishponds" at the hamlet of nearby Oxenbourne.

Inevitably set in some of Hampshire's most fertile acres, the village is ringed with farms, and still provides if not the life blood, at least the identity and characteristics of the village — the Butlers at "White Wool", the Jones's at "Hillhampton", and more particularly the Berry's at Oxenbourne, all names which go back generations — although early in the century a new breed of farmer drove his flocks from the north of England to graze the succulent pastures.

Soon these newcomers settled and intermarried with existing farming families, and with the passing years a new breed of rangers have become a

familiar phenomenon — those who live in the village, but whose work takes them to the surrounding towns and cities.

But perhaps after more than 20 years of residence one can safely assume citizenship. Such a couple are Geoff and Eileen Brook, who now live in "retirement" if such a term can be used to describe such active members of the community.

The family bought the grocery store in 1951, when Geoff retired from teaching at the Treloar School at Alton, and a career in the Royal Navy.

THE GREAT FLOOD

Their first winter saw the great "flood", their cellar awash, and a dismayed firm of brewers re-stocking bottles whose labels had long since floated away down stream as the water subsided.

In addition to the busy life of a village grocer, Geoff has just completed 26 years of service on the parish council, 11 of which have been as representative for the rural district council. He retired this year, but still intends to keep up tie the Horticultural Society, art classes, and an arranger of sideshows for the local gymkhana. Meanwhile Eileen is chairman of the local branch of the Women's Section of the Royal British Legion, organiser of the village fete, and administrator to the Court Players.

Even longer service on the parish council can be boasted by chairman Herbie Goddard, who first came to the village in 1915. He joined the council, in 1946, and has watched the village change and develop over the years. There have been new allotments, main drains, and improvements to the river. Herbie's life has centered around the working garage he bought from Cyril Coles of the Manning Coles crime writer partnership, in 1956. The garage is now run by his son David and his son-in-law Chris, and Herbie and his wife, who have three married sisters living in the village, enjoy a much earned retirement.

HAPPY MEMORIES

Spry 74-year-old Fred Gibbs had many happy memories of the village. He was born in nearby Warnford, and apart from a spell in the war, has lived 59 years in the village, mainly in the same house.

He has done a variety of jobs from railway worker, cowman and soldier to factory worker, and now enjoys gardening and "beating" in the season.

"It is still a farming community", he says, "but years ago we made our own amusements with the village band, in the pub, and processions along the High Street, and everyone joining in — it was all very friendly."

"There are many new houses in the village, and a very nice village hall to replace the old one. There is only one thing we

lack", he ventured. "some public loos!"

Perhaps these are to come. There have always been improvements and innovations, some of the most effective being done back in 1931 when the local well-known architect Sir Morley Holder restored the council-owned thatched cottages in Workhouse Lane, the work being carried out by local builder Clifford Kille, and when Brook cottages were similarly restored in the High Street the oldest family in the village, the family of wheelwrights, the Aburrows, who can trace their ancestry in the village to the Domesday Book, got the job. Today two married grand-daughters of the family remain, and the bearers of the ancient name have emigrated to Australia.

The old school is a private house, and the forge no longer shoes horses, but the village retains its character.

When you see a line of cars in Church Street, it usually means one of three things — Parochial Church Council at the vicarage, bell-ringing practice at the church, or the Folk Club having a session in the upstairs room at the "George". Life in the village remains much unchanged.

By Mary

More Gordon



The vicar of East Meon, the Rev. Rodney Smith, with a view of the Norman church in the background.



A view of the picturesque restored council owned thatched cottages in Workhouse Lane.



Mr. Herbie Goddard, chairman of the parish council, who first came to live in the village in 1915.

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A scene which typifies the old world charm of the village centre.

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ONE of the best places around where good food can be enjoyed in relaxed comfort is the "Jolly Farmer" at Laurie and Sue Richardson — dating from early this century. The service is attentive but unobtrusive and Len Ash, who came with the Richardsons 18 months ago — and their wife moved in from the Eagle at Abbots Ann, near Andover, told the Herald.

Mr. Richardson — a prosperous farming household that feel the start and finish of an acceptably-priced meal. "We are just as important as the main course", Mr. Richardson said.

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 Derek Horne, at present
 assistant district planning
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 Council in East Sussex.
 Mr. Horne, who starts
 working for Guildford Council
 next month, replaces Mr. Brian
 Bageot who left the authority in
 April following his ap-
 pointment as a senior planning
 inspector with the Environ-
 ment and Transport Depart-
 ments.