

PORTRAIT OF SHEARSBY —

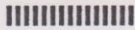
A history that lives

THE visitor to Shearsby is immediately struck by the large number of attractive old cottages which dominate the village square. It is one of the few villages in the county that can be fairly said to have retained its old world character while at the same time moving easily into the 20th century.

For although it has an unusually high proportion of ancient buildings, there has been quite a bit of modern development.

In some respects it can be likened to a living history book — its old cottages are not dead relics of the past but have been carefully preserved and adapted to 20th century living.

In the same way the village itself has stepped as easily into the 20th century and the modern development has insured its future but also been well planned so as not to physically intrude into its historic past.



But for all its appeal it is not a typically attractive village in the picture postcard sense. There is little order or uniform style to the houses — they cover a wide range of architectural designs from the Tudor age right through to modern day council housing. The village green is hardly a neatly mown affair either but it all adds up a picture of casual let-the-world-roll-by beauty.

The most impressive house is undoubtedly the old Yeoman's Cottage in Church Lane. It is hard to imagine that this was little more than a derelict shell in 1966. But the Cross family, on hearing of its imminent delapidation, snapped it up and did a magnificent restoration job.

"Everyone thought we were crackers taking it on," said Mrs. Joan Cross "But we had always wanted a period house and we never thought we would be able to buy one because they were so expensive. This house cost just over £1,000."

Five years of continuous restoration work were needed, most of it done by Mr. and Mrs.

Cross and their son, Brian. "We thought it would take two and a half years but it just went on and on," said Mrs. Cross. "We lived it, slept it, dreamed it."

The 300-year-old house was stripped to its bare shell and then from a museum drawing as it stood in the 17th century it was painstakingly reconstructed almost identically.

The original mud walls between the timber were knocked down and replaced by plaster and the roof which had not been thatched for 100 years was repaired by Market Harborough thatcher, Mr. Marcus Davis.

Authenticity was the Cross's aim and they went to enormous lengths to obtain old timber and glass to replace existing pieces.

Their efforts were certainly worth it and today apart from a few alterations such as modern kitchen and bathroom, the house bears all the characteristics of a Yeoman's farmhouse of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Every room inside has oak beamed ceilings, two large rooms have the original open inglenook fireplaces with herringbone backs and there are also centuries old oak staircases, which are of great interest to antiquarians.

The house is built in the Elizabethan style but an inscription on the front reads 1669 Wyatt J. This more than likely refers to a John Wyatt who was buried in the church graveyard around 1700, and who may have built the cottage, or lived in it.

If this is the case Mr. Wyatt would not have travelled far on his last journey for the church is just across the road from the house. Situated on a hill, St.

Mary Magdalene's looks down on the centre of the village.

One interesting feature is the stunted tower. There was in fact a small spire there but it was taken down in the 18th century when large cracks were found. Now only the octagonal base remains topped rather incongruously by a delicate weather vane.

The church has reached another crisis point today. Around £14,000 is needed to do repair work, some of it urgent.

by JANE TURNERY

Priest-in-charge Mr. Sid Cartwright, who is also responsible for Arnesby Church explained: "The timber has to be treated in various parts of the church for beetle damage. A lot of the stonework on the north side wants attention.

"The main job is the tower and to repoint this we will need £7,000."

A lot of money for a village with a population of around 200.

Another burning issue of the moment, said Mr. Cartwright, is the possible closure of Arnesby post office which also serves Shearsby. (There are hopes it may now stay open). "This is really our only link with civilisation, although there are a few buses," he said.

At one time this isolation would never have been dreamed about for the village was quite a hive of rural industry.

For instance the village pub, the Chandlers Arms, apparently housed a candlemaker's business employing 30 people to make tallow candles. The Chandlers is also one of several buildings in Shearsby constructed with hand-made bricks from the village brickworks.

Mrs. Edith Wallace has lived in

Shearsby most of her life and told me about some of the industries she could remember: "There used to be a skin-yard and they used to collect skins from the local farmers and clean them," she said.

"They dyed them in different colours and sold them on the premises as rugs. It closed down about 20 years ago and I think about 20 people were employed there.

"There also used to be a bake-house where people took their Sunday meals to cook. They would put the Yorkshire puddings in the bottom of the oven and the meat above."

Other crafts Mrs. Wallace remembered were a flour mill, a farrier, a butcher, a slaughterhouse at the White House, and a shop in the square run by a Mrs. Higgs who had eight children and was widowed twice.

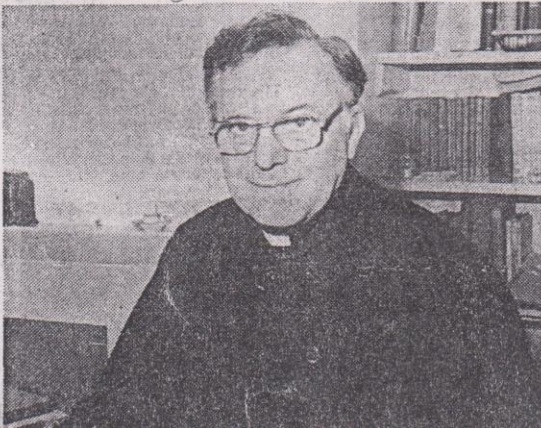
Her father-in-law, Mr. William Wallace, also played an important role — that of village carrier. He had two horses (which he loaned to the army during the first world war) and would travel between Mowsley and Leicester picking up passengers and parcels.

Later he turned from four-legged transport to four-wheel transport. "He was the first person to start a bus service from Shearsby to Leicester," said Mrs. Wallace. He used to take people to work in the morning and bring them back and he also took people to the TB sanatorium at Mowsley, visiting."

Mr. Wallace was forced to abandon his bus service when he was undercut by the Midland Red company. Undaunted he then started a lorry business.

Another person who played a vital role many years ago was Miss Ivy Gaddesby. The daughter of a farmer, she delivered the daily pinta to the villagers for 35 years until 1961 and also delivered the newspapers for 51 years.

"I carried the milk up from the field with a yoke and two buckets and then I would go round with a bucket and measure. We charged 2d. a pint



Mrs. Edith Wallace has lived in

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when we had plenty in the 1930's."

When bottling became compulsory Miss Gaddesby's milk round stopped.

But one thing that she started is still going strong — Arnesby and Shearsby W.I. and she is the only surviving founder member.

The W.I. has between 30 and 40 members and Miss Gaddesby is still very much involved — she has just won the competition cup for the third year running for getting the most points in the monthly competitions.

Another man who plays an active role is Mr. Tony Brook of New Inn Farm, who is chairman of the parish meeting. He describes Shearsby as a very small and friendly place, the population divided equally between commuters and members of the farming community.



"Not many work on the farms but the village is based around farming," he said. "The commuters blend in very well though they have always been a great asset bringing new ideas and enthusiasm into the village.

"For the size it is quite a thriving place socially. Life is divided around the church, the two pubs, the W.I. and the community association. Shearsby Conservative Association is quite active as well.

"We have had the community association for about 15 years. It has done a lot of good work for the village and raises money for the old people and youngsters and social events."

Mr. Brook said the village was made a conservation area a few years ago and was unlikely to grow in the future.

However it was envisaged many years ago that it could grow to become a much visited and even famous resort. This was because just outside the village there used to be a salt spring renowned for its health-giving and curative powers.



Hard to believe but Yeoman's Cottage was almost a ruin in 1966. Then the Cross family bought it for next to nothing and rebuilt it to an almost exact replica of when it was originally put up.

The spring was 12 yards in circumference and between five and six feet deep. The water was said to have been "saline brackish and without any acidity".

General Pearson, owner of the 1866 Derby winner, Lord Lyon, sent a carriage and pair ten miles daily from Stoke Albany to Shearsby to get the spring water to cure his favourite horse's rheumatism — and it worked.

The spa was said to cure anything from gout to mild catarrh and officially it was sufferers from indigestion, rheumatism, nervous and bilious disorders that benefited the most from drinking or bathing in its soothing waters.

There were separate baths for men and women and visitors could be accommodated in the Bath Hotel for a mere 4s. 8d. a day. Baths were 2s. 6d. each or a course of nine for one guinea.

The Bath Hotel still stands today, an isolated building, and a popular haven for rugby players — landlord Mr. Brian Hecks used to play rugby for South Leicestershire.

Its patrons today obviously prefer the restorative qualities of a pint to a mugful of saline and brackish water — who wouldn't?



Miss Ivy Gaddesby, of Mill Lane, Shearsby, has lived in the village since she was 17 and used to do the milk and newspaper rounds.