

OUR VILLAGE—No. 1

For the first of his series of articles dealing with local villages and hamlets Ken Powell, our chief reporter, visits

COSSINGTON

“The most compact village in Somerset”

THE musical sound of a circular saw cutting its way through timber; a black and white cat playing with fallen leaves in the Wintry sunshine; cows meandering homewards for milking—yet not a sign of human life.

These were my first impressions of Cossington as I strolled through what has often been described as “the most compact village in Somerset.”

Spelt “Cosintona” in Domesday Book, this enchanting little village, dating back to the Roman occupation, remains unspoiled by the ravages of time. True, there have been changes during the passing years — changes which are inevitable with the progress of civilisation, but, generally speaking, Cossington is a perfect example of a typical English village.

Cossington derives its name from the moors, according to Collinson. “Cors in British language signifying marsh or moorish ground and Ton in Saxon meaning a small town or enclosure.”

In his History of Somerset, Collinson refers to Cossington as “This compact village mostly of houses standing near the church and 30 in number. The poor are chiefly employed in cutting turf in the moor for sale.”

Steady progress

It is doubtful whether real poverty exists now in Cossington. From an agricultural point of view, farmers are of the opinion that steady progress has been made during the past half a century and that vast improvements have resulted from mechanisation.

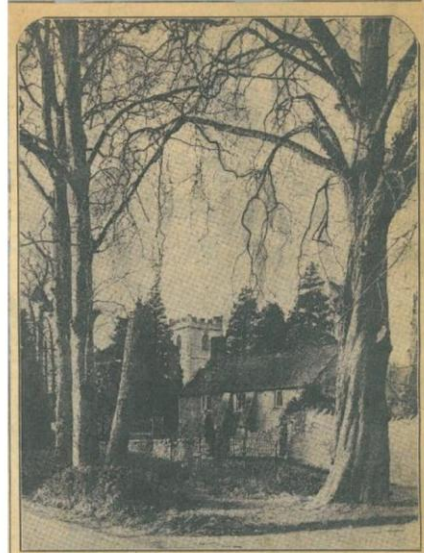
Few villages of Cossington's size can boast of such good services as a plentiful water supply, electric light, an adequate bus service to Bridgewater and Glastonbury, and last, but by no means least, a railway station.

Opinions may vary over the train service operating from the station, but nevertheless Cossington has a station.

As I paused to admire the magnificent yew tree in the centre of the village — known as the preaching tree because John Wesley is reputed to have delivered his sermons beneath its spreading branches—a school-boy volunteered the information that the notorious Judge Jeffreys hanged his victims from the sturdy boughs.

Subsequent inquiries failed to confirm the views of my youthful informer, however, so whether the local miscreants ever dangled from this noble tree must be left to the imagination.

A more peaceful and delightful setting than the 13th century church standing in the grounds of the Manor House, would be difficult to imagine. Old records reveal that in the time of Henry I the Manor was in the possession of one Gilbert, Marshall of England. In 1254 it passed to Robert de Brent “to be held of him and his heirs by the service of a fee.”



“OUR VILLAGE.”—The musical sound of a circular saw . . . a cat playing with fallen leaves . . . cows meandering homewards for milking. These were things which our chief reporter, Ken Powell, noted when he visited Cossington (a corner of which is pictured above) last week.

In the chancel floor of the church there is a brass plate bearing the effigy of John Brent who died in 1524 and also of his wife, Maud, and on the nearby wall there is another inscription to their son.

Outside the church door an old sundial records the time of day, while those who served Cossington in bygone years sleep peacefully within the precincts of the church and Manor House.

21 years as rector

For the past 21 years the spiritual welfare of the parish has been in the capable hands of the **Rev. G. H. Prickard**, who is ably assisted in his parochial duties by Mrs. Prickard, a county magistrate.

“During our long sojourn at Cossington, my wife and I have found life very pleasant,” the rector told me. “We have a good Hall Committee in the village and the social life is undoubtedly very encouraging.”

In pre-war years the substantial sum of £800 was raised to enable the bells to be re-hung and now Cossington can boast of a fine peal. On New Year's Eve the ringers rang a muffled peal with the dying of 1948.

Now the rector has ambitions for another bell, and future social events are being planned for this cause. The proceeds of a fete last Summer went a long way to defraying expenses for repairs to the church roof.

Talk to any of Cossington's villagers and they will tell you how bitterly they regret the passing of the last lord of the manor, Mr. J. C. Macro Wilson, who died while on holiday in Ireland last year.

His death has spelt "finis" to the Manor House in its true sense, for this lovely old mansion now stands deserted.

Thus ends a link with the past—a symbol of the changing times in which we are now living.

Longest resident

Longest, but probably not the oldest, resident of Cossington, is **Mrs. Kate Mogg**, who told me

that practically all her 75 years have been spent in the village. Her husband, who died three years ago, was employed at the Manor, and his father before him worked there for 50 years. Recalling the days when the

Manor gave employment for nearly 20 villagers she wistfully remarked, "Yes, Cossington has changed during my time. But has it changed for the better? I wonder."

In rural life there are quite a few village stalwarts—and Cossington is no exception. I trust I shall be forgiven for not mentioning them all by name, but there are three I cannot overlook. Sam Cross, Sam Stradling and Ivor Bell—true sons of the soil who make their small but valued contribution to the nation's larder.

Accepting **Mr. Cross's** offer of tea—to say nothing of a generous slice of Mrs. Cross's excellent Christmas cake—I learned much of village activities as I sat in the vast kitchen of Great Tree Farm.

"Proud of our village"

"You would be surprised at our social life," Mr. Cross told me. "Take last night, for instance, when the Hall Committee and the Ex-Servicemen's Club gave their annual Christmas party to the children. What a party! And you should have seen the look of delight on the

kiddies' faces when they were each presented with 2s. 6d. There were more smiles when the rector distributed his Sunday School prizes—really valuable gifts given personally by him. And a Father Christmas, too! Oh, yes. We are proud of our village!"

Mr. Cross also laid emphasis on the fine work which is being carried out by the Cossington Youth Club which gives an excellent training and is run on strict rules.

A staunch Methodist, **Mr. Bell** is Chairman of the Parish Council and the Hall Committee. A farmer of many years standing, he is known over a wide area in agricultural circles, and is always ready to help his fellow parishioners.

Mr. Stradling, another farmer, is Parish Clerk, secretary of the Hall Committee, churchman and general factotum.

"No more London . . ."

In the village I also met **Mrs. Partiger**, a Londoner by birth, who settled in Cossington during the war years. "Do I ever wish to leave Cossington?—I should think not," she replied in answer to my query. "Give me village life from now on. No more London for me, thank you."

Hub of the community

Before closing I must not forget to mention **Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Pryor**, who took over the village post office and general store ten weeks ago. Although strangers to the district they are being "accepted" by Cossington, and that counts for much in

village life.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that **Mr. Pryor** has recently given up journalism in preference to the life of a village store, which can always be counted upon as the hub of rural community, the centre where the women discuss their domestic troubles while waiting to be served with the rations, and above all the very place where that personal touch is guaranteed.

"My wife and I could not have been better received had we been natives of Somerset," said **Mr. Pryor**, who hails from Cornwall. "Cossington villagers are acutely aware of community of life and it is indeed a great village."

Good-luck, **Mr. Pryor**, in your new venture. I admire your pluck in tackling anything to do with rationing or the Post Office!

At the "local"

And lastly, a word about the village pub, the Cossington Inn, now in its final stages of restoration, where Mine Host, **Geoffrey Brook**, another newcomer, has won the esteem and affection of his many customers.

Mr. Brook—Geoff to Cossington—has entered whole-heartedly into the social life of the village and is ever willing to lend a hand when called upon. Like **Mr. Pryor**, he is no native of Somerset, but the good folk of Cossington have taken him to their hearts and have extended the hand of friendship of their village.

(Next Week: **NETHER STOWEY**)



KEN POWELL, "Bridgwater Mercury" chief reporter, who takes you to Cossington this week to hear what the residents think about their village