

A FAREWELL TO ASCOTT

One stormy morning in the winter, as I was driving to catch the train to London, the sun showed briefly beneath the clouds as it rose over Charlbury church. The valley to my left was dim and misty, with wide leaden pools along the course of the river, but above it the hillside was suddenly flooded with golden light. Stone buildings glowed briefly among dark trees, before the clouds crept back and all was grey-green again. That's another thing we shall miss.

We're going to the Far East in July. To Norfolk, in fact. It's a pretty county, with small villages dotted among farmland, and the taste of the sea on an easterly wind. The people seem friendly, and the beer's good; but it's not the Wychwoods.

Leaving Ascott will be hard. In the seven years since we moved here from Bristol, we have come to love the rolling hills and the enchanting light of the wide Evenlode Valley. We shall miss the Wychwood Singers, Ascott Cricket Club, and the games of crib at The Swan. The welcome we found here; the warmth of the village community; music and the laughter of friends; I'm sure they have such blessings in Norfolk too, but here in Ascott we have found them in abundance.

One winter's day, we came home to find water pouring from under the front door. A pipe had burst in the loft. The disaster is a fading memory, but we shall never forget how the Kirk family leaped into their gumboots to bail us out. We rolled carpets and drank tea as tears turned to smiles. Do they have neighbours like that over in the east?

Who is Norfolk's Den Jackson, storyteller, pot-filler turned potter? Have they a Tony Collins? If not, how do they get people to buy runner beans for charity? I

hope there isn't another Bill Godfrey, but if there is, let him live near Norwich; a chap needs insulting from time to time. Where are the Norfolk Barneses, a tribe of true sportsmen?

The laughing Lewises, pop hwyl to them; the scholarly Calvey of that ilk; Gripper the Fountain of Knowledge; Sid the Horseman and Bet, with her needle wit; sage Hardy Moss. A county with all these characters is rich indeed. Without them, Norfolk must be bereft, as we shall be when we drag ourselves hence in July.

Ascott-under-Wychwood, third of three, the forgotten Wychwood, the one on the road to nowhere; from the train, a level crossing and what used to be a pub; from the hill above, a stunted line of headless limes beside the church, which we shall never see recover. That's a long enough sentence without a main verb. What should the main verb be? 'Love' is soppy, 'appreciate' is too cool, 'delight in', 'relish', 'rejoice', in our all too short stay? 'Remember', that's it, with gladness coupled with regret for leaving.

We hope it might be 'return', one day. One day.

Malcolm and Mary Penny.



Furrin Parts