

"Woe is me, for I am unhinged".**The Sod Jobber**

THE SURGERY was almost deserted. One old man sat looking with little interest at his magazine. Behind the glass screens nothing moved. Even the dispensary was silent. A call from afar summoned the old man down the corridor and into the bowels of destiny. I was alone. My turn would come.

Through the glass a finger beckoned me. The moment of truth. Sitting beside his desk the doctor exchanged courtesies but my mind was elsewhere. Why was everywhere so quiet? Only 5.30 but already the birds seemed to have turned in for the night.

Switching his gaze to my concern, the medicine man's brow became furrowed. Was 1995 to be my annus horribilis? Was I about to become an object of curiosity for men in little white coats, a focus for medical prods and averted eyes? Courage, mon brave, your will is safely locked up in the solicitor's office.

Finally his head lifted. Those steely eyes, guarded yet piercing, prepared me for the worst. He cleared his throat, a scrape of impending doom. "It's the tendon, Mr. Jobber".

With those three swift words this ex-athlete's coffin was nailed firmly shut. Just three words signalling the likely end of a ready source of fun for Shipton's youth, their gleeful calls of "Runner Bean" or "Mr. Bean" silenced at a stroke. From Runner Bean to Has Been in three words.

Thanking the doctor with a heavy heart I replaced my sock, dispensed an hour's pay on a bottle of tablets and headed off into the sunset.

Trouble is, at my age injuries linger. No longer a few days of exercise, treatments with a heat lamp and dowsing with enough Sloane's Liment to quell the aroma made by fifty-seven rugby administrators. The end, if not nigh, crept naggingly closer. My dejection prevents me telling you, dear reader, of the time twenty-five years ago when this keen and youthful athlete decided to treat a groin strain with said liniment; suffice to say that Arthur Brown's whacky song "Great balls of fire" was strangely relevant.

How ironic that the diagnosis coincided with early May's heat wave. Over the years I've enjoyed everything from blizzards to thunderstorms but a heatwave is my idea of running bliss. Clad in little more than a groin pelmet and off-the-shoulder vest, there's nothing better than steaming past Cotswold hedges, haring down beside the Evenlode or clumping contentedly down the hill into Ascott.

But injury to an athlete is akin to capitation for A.N.Other. Visions of flabbiness float before my eyes. Bathroom scales are carefully avoided. Next door's mog eyes my toecaps suspiciously. And the pile of trainers on the back doormat gathers dust.

Fortunately, there are compensations. Heaving my heart up from my boots I put on my semi-running gear,

oil the chain, brush the cobwebs off the handlebars and pedal off up the hill out of the village. Running comes first, but cycling's a good second in fair weather, and the illusion of speed, somewhat difficult to obtain nowadays in the former, is still attainable in the latter. There can be few things so exhilarating as gliding down from the main road towards Chadlington, basking in the warmth of late afternoon sunshine. Or snaking around the hidden villages of Wescote, Icomb and Oddington, interrupting Bledington's V.E. Day street party, or drifting through the time-warp that is called Idbury.

I quickly lose count of my blessings.

Back home and out of the shower, I return to my desk with ailing foot resting on a hot-water bottle. The pills have nearly all gone now, although such fluorescent gob-stoppers took some swallowing.

So what of tomorrow? Will it be further recuperation and consolation on the bike? Or will the rest, the treatment and the memories of past glories drive me to blow the dust off those trainers?

Only time, that great healer, will tell.

THE WYCHWOODS LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

At its March meeting Anthea Jones talk was called "What is a Wold?" In this Anthea explained the early derivation from the word "wald" - a forest or wooded area, with particular reference to the wooded upland above Stanway at the time owned by Cod. As trees were cut down to create space for grazing sheep so the word "wold" changed its meaning to treeless open upland. Since Anglo Saxon times there have been further changes of land usage and the name Cotswold has spread to an ever increasing area.

In April Carl Boardman, County Archivist, spoke on the material available in the County Archives, originally the County Record Office. The archive includes material deposited by local civil and church authorities as well as those from private individuals. From his research of some of these records, some of which go back to the 12th century, Carl told of some of the weird and wonderful stories which can emerge from the archive which is open for public inspection.

At this season's last meeting, the venue was Ascott's new Tiddy Hall for a talk on "Wychwood Forest, Past, Present and Future". This was given by Alan Spicer who detailed the documentary and botanical evidence for the forest, whose extent varied according to the demands of hunting and grazing and arable farming. Research continues on the past history and there are present day projects to maintain, conserve and extend the forest.