

Country Pie

Tony Boardman

WE HAVE AT LAST arrived at a new year, a significant one because the next one is going to be a really special one. God willing, we shall all be privileged to experience the year 2000, the millennium. I find it mind-boggling that a King called Ethelred, also known as the Unready, was on the throne at the time of the last millennium and that he was having a lot of trouble with the invading Danes who seemed to have had definite designs on these shores for some time beforehand.

William the Conqueror, the Norman, was crowned on Christmas Day in 1066 and he was really the first notable king during this early period. From the days of spears, swords and bows and arrows, we have arrived at an age of forms of destruction that are so sophisticated as to be terrifying, however it would not be correct to dwell on this because through the centuries there has been much to admire as mankind made strides to make life that much better. Put it this way, I'd rather be living in 1999 than in poor old Ethelred's days!

Thus far the weather pattern has been very mild with phases of wind, rain and bright spells alternating. Certainly some plants in the gardens seem confused as I have seen cowslips and wild violets in flower. We learn that last year was supposed to have been one of the warmest of the century, well I'm not going argue with the experts who are obviously concerned with the effects of global warming.

As I recall it was particularly wet and disappointing in Oxfordshire. However the hard winters we used to expect and experience in the past are no longer a regular occurrence and perhaps we should take these facts into consideration.

Certainly nature seems to be confused, with daffodils in flower in Somerset before Christmas, song thrushes singing in our lanes during November and December and the rooks have been congregating in preparation for their forthcoming nesting season in February and March.

A collection of rooks has been referred to as a "parliament" which appeals to me as I can visualise members of parliament behaving in the same raucous manner in the House as do the rooks when wheeling around their nest sites. A "clamour" of rooks is another term I favour which is self-explanatory.

As I have mentioned fairly often it is my custom to walk Jessie and Rastus our border terriers up to the top of the Swinbrook road and back, mainly to enjoy the view, to exercise, and watch the seasons change. Often people stop me to ask the way somewhere, like a football team recently who were playing at Kingham, and acquaintances who just stopped for a chat.

Recently a truck came alongside me and an amiable looking chap then surprised me by asking me if I was the one who wrote in "The Wychwood".

After I confirmed this to be true he said that my remarks about the pheasants in my last article were not very nice and then mentioned that he was a gamekeeper. I replied that I write what is in my mind. Before driving off he added darkly that there are two sides to every story. He is correct of course, it would be stupid of me to expect everybody to agree with what I believe in. The old expression "You cannot make an omelette without cracking a few eggs" sums this up.

When all is said and done if pheasant breeding is, as I suspect, the main area of a modern-day gamekeeper's duties then I'm pleased for our friend in the truck that his livelihood should be safe, for so many of our former country craftsmen have sadly lost theirs. Perhaps we might have his version in a future edition of "The Wychwood"! – Who knows?

Sue and I can provide the "Out of the mouths of" the tailpiece on this occasion. Just before the New Year we were invited out for an evening meal with friends at Beckford near Evesham. In the party were two children, the younger being a young lady of tender years who had been trying on mother's lipstick so much that her mouth resembled a pillar-box after a while. She was hardly what you would call a shrinking violet and took part in most of the conversation going on within her particular family. When mention was made of her marriage in the years to come someone rather unkindly said that she would probably live in sin. Quick as a flash came the reply "No I wouldn't I would rather live at home"! Have your children or grandchildren given you a laugh over the Christmas period? Do you want to share it? If so give me a call, preferably evenings on 01993 831332.

