

Country Pie.

Tony Boardman.

THE COMING OF SPRING was once described to me as likened to a tin of Sardines. Confused? So was I. Apparently if you could imagine the North African coast as the point where you rolled the key around the metal flap, as you then successfully unveiled the fishy snack, you could imagine the improving climate and natural growth covering the European south – and onwards to the Northern extremities. A strange analogy but understandable when you consider that obviously spring is bound to occur later, the further North you go. I must confess that my attempts to open a tin of sardines are usually disastrous because as soon as I try to exert any pressure on the tin the key snaps and I would then have to complete the task with a normal tin opener. Result, a ghastly mess as I hack my way through, only to discover that my toast has just gone up in smoke as well. At times like this you wish you had plumped for a salad!

As a I pen these thoughts in early March the signs of the grandeur of the coming months are beginning to show. Daffodils, recognised as the harbinger of spring, brighten our gardens and woodlands, and almost shyly, the hedgerow is gradually cladding itself in light green. The woodland floor now abounds with the young growth of the dog's mercury pushing up as if in salutation of the season. Evidence of this plant is an excellent guide to the fact that you are walking in old established woodland, for its shiny green leaves are unlikely to be seen anywhere else. Approaching Finstock the other day I glanced out of the car window to see if a herd of roe deer were feeding at the field edge, a spot

where they can frequently be seen. On this occasion the deer were missing but in their place were a couple of jack hares sparring up to one another, presumably over the attentions of the favoured doe. Hares are more active in the dark and usually rest up during the daylight hours in what is known as a "form". This is usually situated in a large field where all round vision is vitally important, for the agile hare has many enemies including illegal coursers and their speedy lurcher dogs. You may remember it was the subject I touched on in the Februaryy/March issue. The expression "as mad as a March hare" is obviously derived from the weird antics performed by this delightful animal at this particular time of year.

The end of the month will see the return of the chiff chaff, a little bird who will tentatively call his name, almost apologetically, from woodland that should now be unfurling the leaves of springtime greens and bronzes. In summer this migrant will be difficult to see as its skulks around amongst the leaf cover, so if you wish to catch sight of them, March and April are the best months. Listen out for the timid teet-teu (chiff-chaff) call and then wait for a movement in the branches above you to identify your bird. Binoculars are a good idea too.

To differentiate chiff-chaff from willow warbler is a job for the experts, but their calls are completely different. The chiff chaff builds its nest above ground whilst the willow warbler prefers a grassy ground nest usually alongside a tussock. The chiff chaff can over-winter here nowadays. One swallow doesn't make a summer, but you can look for the first arrivals as soon as April is here.

My wife Sue and I were saddened to learn of Ian Matthews's untimely death and although I personally only knew him by reputation I have spoken on occasions to his wife Anne who has very kindly submitted contributions to my "out of the mouths of" tail pieces which are always most welcome. The community of Fiddlers Hill lost two of its respected residents last month. A neighbour Edna Hamar, mentioned in the last issue of "The Wychwood" regarding the sparrow hawk you may remember, died suddenly. She and her late husband Basil were a devoted couple and always good value for the presence. Their garden in the balmy summer days always resounded with the happy sounds of family conversation and that is how I shall always remember them. Miss Wright, who lived by herself at the end Cottage, had lived all her life here. "May" as we knew her, apparently used to deliver the post locally and was, I believe, born in Fiddlers Hill. Sue once told me that she had never been to the seaside, adding that she didn't want to either! We shall miss her cheery wave as we walk the dogs past her cottage.

How are you coping with this computer age? We have had to install one at work which certainly churns out some amazing work but also can be extremely infuriating at times. Fortunately the young seem to take to them like a duck to water and we have two young ladies who competently operate the contraption. Me? - Not on your life, I'm not allowed anywhere near it. I refer you back to the sardine tin syndrome! All this dot com forward slash nonsense, and what is so special about e-mails? A P.C. when I was young was what you looked out to avoid if you had apple scrumping in mind, or of course it also meant a postcard.

Are policemen called police constables these days? Another expression "visit our web site" which suggest a cunningly veiled invitation from a resident spider to an unsuspecting fly. No, it's all gobbledegook to me. Whatever happened to "take a letter Miss Jones" when smartly dressed gent would pace about the office floor seeking inspiration to convey an answer to another smartly attired chap in another office. Miss Jones, having squiggled her note pad with what appeared to be some form of Arabic symbols which represented the first fellow's spoken word, would then neatly and expertly type out the letter for his signature. Now of course it's fax me with your answer, which is fine until the paper gets jammed or the machine runs out of ink.

Nowadays the world is full of people striding about wearing baseball caps with a mobile 'phone superglued to their ears - I think it's called the year 2000! May I leave you with the true story supplied by Anita, my wife's manageress who, like me, is from Birmingham. Trained as a florist she worked for a while at the Co-op there, and naturally she and her colleagues were called upon to produce various forms of funeral tributes. On one occasion the hearse was a trifle late, reversing up to the door and the wired frame with the word "MOM" picked out in flower heads and foliage was picked up in haste and placed in the rear window. The doors were closed and the hearse move on. The assembled florists looked on in horror as the receding vehicle set out to the cemetery with the word "WOW" in full sight of any following cars. A trifle irreverent I know, but I think that you will agree it was a disaster just waiting to happen. This time it did.