

Country Pie

Tony Boardman

NOT A LOT OF CONTENT from me in the last edition of our favourite local magazine, you will agree. Regular readers would realise that I usually scribble a bit more than that.

Gremlins; I blame them for the hatchet job. There I was waffling away in my normal manner and the last you heard of me I was sipping tea in the garden! Never mind. To borrow one of my dear wife's favourite expressions – we battle on.

Although we have reached the longest day, summer hasn't really arrived as yet. There have been a few very hot days it cannot be denied, but generally the weather has been rather disappointing. Hopefully, by the time you read this we SHALL be able to nibble those elegant cucumber sandwiches and sip tea (china cups of course) outside, picnicking in our gardens or out in the countryside.

The rains of April and May produced some magnificent wild flowers that seemed to last longer this year to give us extended pleasure and, at the same time, the fields have remained incredibly verdant.

The boundaries of some of these fields show tomato red from a distance as wild poppies emblazon the ground and the lavender blue haze of linum or flax adds a contrasting colour. The taller barley delightfully shimmers silvery green when a gentle zephyr ruffles their whiskery ears.

We have noticed beechnuts are in profusion and the brambles are full of

flowers which indicate the possibility of a good harvest. The yeoman farmers of yesteryear were very wise when they forecast "April wet, good wheat, a cold April brings us bread and wine". They were rarely wrong.

If there is a detraction to the beauty that is around us at present it is these drab, dull orange, set-aside fields where the existing vegetation has been poisoned, presumably so that they become of no value to foraging birds, or anything else for that matter. Would this be an EEC directive I wonder?

Sue and I have been delighted that a pair of swallows have elected to build their nest in our garage this year. Never mind the mess. If they can rear some youngsters we shall be ecstatic. We will have lived in Shipton nine years in August and this is the first time that they have chosen us.

Could it be that the little fledgling we rescued off the ground last year and launched to join its parents from the very same garage, has remembered us? A romantic thought perhaps, but who knows?

Happily the martins appear to be nesting in their little cup nests at neighbour Reg Ray's house, once again after a lapse of a few years, and this has pleased him too.

Add the fact that the swifts are back again nesting at May Wright's old cottage and we have three of our principal summer visitors in production.

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When I was cleaning out the bantams' pen recently I heard an intermittent clink, chink noise. Rather baffled, I peered through the foliage to watch a song thrush using a stone as an anvil to remove a snail from its shell. As we shun poisons in the garden he could enjoy his snack without ill effect.

I fancy that the song thrushes are gradually increasing, in our neck of the woods at least, which is an encouraging sign as their song at morning and evening is so beautiful and, of course, they keep a check on your slugs and snails. There have been enough of them this year too.

I obviously don't know about you, but I have only to see a dog and immediately I am in a happy mood. OK – I draw the line at the slavering, bared fangs variety which I avoid as hastily as I can but, generally, they are of such a friendly disposition you just know that they would love you to fondle their ears – a pleasant, therapeutic task.

Jessie, the apple of her mother's eye, and dear old Rastus, a lovable rogue, our two border terriers, are so much part of our lives, they are our constant companions and the source of immense pleasure. You might believe that we are somewhat smitten with the border terrier as our son, Lars, and his young lady have two, my sister-in-law has two and my brother-in-law has Rastus's sister. You might say that I can thoroughly recommend them as a great little housedog.

But then we are a nation of animal lovers, aren't we? Sadly, this is not always the case as can be seen

in the papers only too often when appalling photographs are shown of their suffering at the hands of their lords and masters. I believe that fair minded people have nothing but contempt for the perpetrators of the mindless cruelty that a minority of human beings mete out to animals, whether it be in the wild, such as badger baiting, or to pets, either their own or often other peoples'.

To call them "animals" is an insult to the genuine article in my mind. Whether it be a budgie or a bulldog, give them respect and the reward is yours.

Finally, to a little story that was meant to have been in the last issue and was told me by Anne Matthews's sister. A relative, so I believe, was telling someone that he and his wife were shortly to take a holiday in Venice. Eager to impress with their geographic knowledge, they replied "Oh, how lovely. I'll imagine you cruising down the canals in one of those pagodas"!

There was a lovely little howler I came across in the Oxford Mail, Items for Sale, column the other evening. Someone offered the following:- Set of ten Dennis Weekly books, nice condition and quality, gold and maroon dark covers £20. Tut!! Just as well Dennis Wheatley is no longer with us as I'm sure there would be the devil to pay over that clanger.

Please remember that if you have any amusing little anecdotes to share with us, give me a call, evenings preferably, on 01993-831332. Children provide us with some wonderful little chuckles. Can you think of some recent funny instances?