

Country Pie

Tony Boardman

SPRING 2001 WILL GO DOWN in history as being devoid of too many happy memories for, apart from the extremely indifferent weather that has depressed us from the onset, a countrywide catastrophe of enormous proportions far outweighed the trivial concerns of a miserable climate. I refer of course to the Foot and Mouth Disease. Where did it come from? One thing that became evident was that as the weeks progressed nobody in authority seemed to know what was the right course to take. To vaccinate or not to vaccinate!

How many thousands of cattle, sheep and pigs were slaughtered in the culling fields of Britain? How many times did we learn that the disease was under control, only to discover that it wasn't? I have to own up to being a carnivore, but the daily exposure on TV and in the newspapers sickened me so much I had to switch channels or turn the page when pictures of pathetic animal corpses were being shown on their way to huge pits, later to be their funeral pyres.

If it was affecting me, what must it have been like for the farmers who had to surrender their prize stock to the slaughter men? Overnight they lost all that they had worked for, seven days a week. How can you not have sympathy for them? Whatever compensation they receive cannot be enough. Farming in this country is in the doldrums as it is. What encouragement is there for them to start again from scratch?

As I put these thoughts down, appropriately on St George's Day

(April 23rd), I wonder if maybe the Patron Saint will become symbolic of the demise of the Disease Dragon? The signs are there.

Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Northants have been declared clear. By the time you read this I hope and pray that Foot and Mouth will have been eradicated, normal access to the countryside will be resumed and sheep (and other cloven hoofed animals) may safely graze once again.

I believe it's time that the politicians and the experts got their act together, for it's long overdue. For one thing they could plough some money into coming to terms with what is the cause of these awful diseases and into putting an end to them instead of into some of the more harebrained projects like cloning and space exploration. Let's get it right down here on earth first of all. Heaven knows we have enough problems.

Let's try and get some of them sorted.

There, I feel much better now!

We saw our first swallow on April 21st, the cuckoo, however, if he is here is keeping extremely quiet. With this weather who could really blame him? A lady phoned me querying the fact that she had a black cap visiting her garden. I reassured her that it was highly possible because, although this delightful little bird is a summer visitor to our shores, as our winters seem to be getting warmer, the male birds in particular, frequently remain behind and consequently they visit our gardens where they know they can find regular food.

This is the time to study them because as leafy summer arrives they are lured away to the woodlands where they tend to keep out of sight, content with the abounding local insect life. They are slim, smart little birds with longish wings and tail, a dove grey breast and with almost a feeling of metallic blue around the throat. The wings and tail are brown. The cock bird has, of course, the black cap that gives us the name. The female is distinguishable by its brown, almost rusty, cap. Being members of the warbler family they are excellent songsters and some people reckon that they even rival the nightingale. They are very fond of honeysuckle nectar, so if your garden has some of these, who knows, you may have summer blackcaps.

Can anybody tell me why people who make confectionery wrap their goodies in noisy, crinkly paper?

I found myself attending a funeral in the company of my sister-in-law, Jane, who is an inveterate giggler. Sue had picked up one of the many viruses that are going the rounds and thought it best to remain at home. Jane gave me a couple of sweets in case I started to cough – which I frequently do when wrestling with the higher notes of the hymns. In order to keep a modicum of decorum once inside the church we methodically unwrapped our sweeties on the way down the path. And isn't it the same in the Cinema? The film is poised at some crucial moment that demands your full attention and the people sitting in front decide to unwrap their humbugs!

Rastus, our senior border terrier can be as deaf as a post when being called in from outside, engrossed as

dogs can be with interesting garden scents, but once inside he can hear me quietly and surreptitiously unveil a chocolate bar without any problem at all and there he is looking up at me with those brown appealing eyes.

Time for an "Out of the mouths of" gem which I believe is Australian in origin and kindly donated by Marian and Phil Wakefield from an E-mail. Incidentally, Marian very kindly types all my scribble for "The Wychwood" for which I am most grateful.

Rosalind: "Mummy, I wish Gen could come to my kindergarten." Mummy: "Why?" Rosalind: "Because we could play with each other and look after each other"..... (then, after thought) "Genevieve, what would you do if I fell over and hurt my leg?" Genevieve: (Also after thought) "I'd have to find someone else to play with!" Wonderful, wonderful. It brings to mind something Tom O'Connor (the Liverpuddlian comedian who was formerly a teacher) overheard from one of the mothers of his infants. "If you fall off that wall and break your legs don't come running to me for sympathy!"

Frequently, it's not what you say, it's the way you say it. Don't forget if you have anything similar to share with us, enlighten me (01993-831332) – preferably evenings or weekends.

STOP PRESS:

One of our swallows arrived on April 27th and checked out the garage. This gave us great pleasure as you can imagine. Four or five birds have since turned up so we will be awaiting developments to see if they will return to breed once more. We heard the cuckoo on the 29th.