

Country Pie

Tony Boardman

HERE I AM with just a week left of October beginning to put my observations down on paper for another Christmastide issue of The Wychwood. Where does the time go? Christmas, the time of good will to all men, family reunions and, I suppose, peace. Unfortunately it all rings a little hollow this year of 2001. The aftermath of that horrendous day on September 11th in the United States has altered our lives even here in this familiar, sleepy countryside.

During that sunny afternoon I turned in to our neighbour's drive, which we use to access the allotment, and Reggie Ray came out to acquaint me with the news that was unfolding on his TV. At first he believed he was watching a film, it was so unreal. I watched some of the emerging early pictures before going across to pick runner beans in the warm sunshine. I picked those beans like a robot, numbed by the horrific thoughts of what had happened.

Osama bin Laden has called for a Jihad (Holy War) against the Infidels (that's us folks) and has urged all "good" Moslems to rally to the cause wherever they may be. How amazing that this devil's disciple can conveniently latch on to religion when it suits his aims.

The real Moslems, like Christians the world over, abhor violence. This "devotee" of Allah, whose achievements are wholesale drug dealing and organised terrorism, has appealed to the easily led lunatic fringe to rise up and support the Taliban.

Whilst the majority of rational Moslems agree with the west after September 11th, they are nervously protective over the loss of innocent Afghans caught up in the bombing; something that we all share, for our fight is not with them.

However, it is easy to forget that whereas the Taliban had weeks of warning, no such consideration was given to the victims of the twin towers and the Pentagon.

We have to see what the future has in store for all of us as this tragic era of our lives continues to unfold.

One would hope that eventually, with the removal of the archaic Taliban rule, a moderate, educated government would be brought in to offer a gradual but alternative lifestyle for the long suffering people of Afghanistan. We have to take a positive viewpoint that good must conquer evil, no matter how long it may take, but let us be mindful that in war nobody wins, for there is always a cost.

There are everlasting memorials of this stark fact in every city, town and even the smallest village in our beautiful country to remind us of those who died in two world wars in the last century. Wouldn't it be nice to have an ideal world? But then pigs might fly!

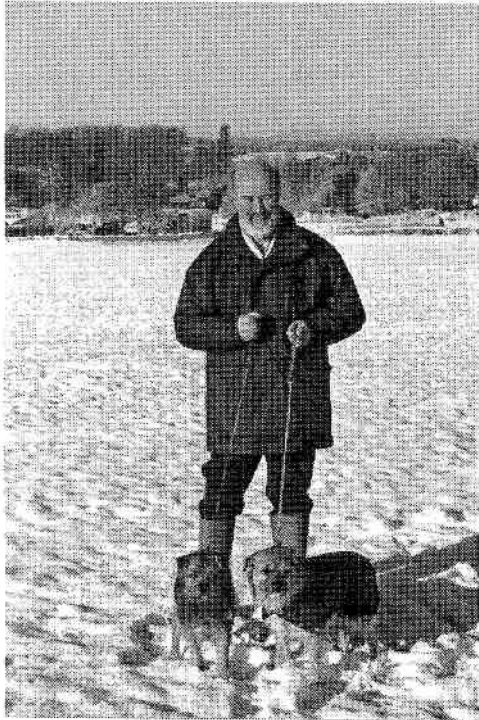
What about the countryside, I hear you saying in my mind. Yes, I know I have been banging on about world affairs, so please excuse me.

The weeks at the end of October and the beginning of November were particularly pleasant with plenty of clear skies and autumn sunshine, and the colours in the woodlands and hedgerows have been stunning.

As you are aware I do enjoy trudging up the Swinbrook Road with the dogs to take in the magnificent views looking back across the village with the Rissingtons, Churchill, Kingham and, sometimes, even Stow in view as you follow with your eyes the road towards "Chippy".

Sue and I were very pleased to discover that the golden plovers have returned from the north to frequent the identical hollow in the field on the left hand side as you ascend the hill.

Hopefully they will be here for the winter, so if you fancy having a look for yourselves, search for them near the first hedgerow on the way up. There's another one further up the road.



Tony and his dogs last winter.

Usually there is a group of around 50 birds who call to each other with a haunting "kleep". When seen in flight they are really spectacular as the sunlight picks out their white underparts and pale yellow spangled backs.

Like formation swimmers they turn in unison on fast, narrow wings and swirl about in bands before alighting in their favourite chosen area.

There has been an abundance of berries this autumn which is excellent news for members of the thrush family. I have already noticed a blackbird feasting off a standard holly outside our sitting room window.

The wild bryony with its round red berries hang like strings of necklaces in the hedgerow at present and make a pleasing contrast to the drab surroundings. Be warned, however, whilst they look quite enticing they are very poisonous, but then many berries are. The maxim is, if in doubt do nowt. Now blackberries, that's a different story!

I do hope that your Christmastide will be a happy family time whether you be at home or spending it away. Above all I sincerely hope it will be a peaceful one and that we shall all meet again in the New Year. Sue and the border terriers join me in sending you our best wishes.

And finally to send you away with a smile.

An English teacher announced to his new class, "There are two words I do not allow in my class. One is "gross" and the other is "cool"."

From the back of the classroom a voice called out, "Well, Sir, what are the two words?"

When I was at school they meant "144" and "chilly", but then I'm now past my sell-by date. Thank you Marian and Phil and the amusing David Say once again.

Samaritans - not just for the suicidal but a chance to talk.

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