



LOWER SYNDERFORD.

THE LIVING WOODLAND.

Mr Colin Varndell, the well known nature photographer from Netherbury, talked to a good audience in the Community Room on Wednesday 16 January. He showed brilliant and beautiful slides, taking his hearers on a moving progress through the seasons in primeval woodland. Mr Varndell passed on masses of information about flora and fauna, explaining for example that honey bees not only 'dance' for their fellows the distance and direction of nectar sources, but their various scouts do this also for several alternative nesting sites at swarming time. Then there is a kind of 'democratic choice' of a best new site, depending on which scout's dance is imitated most. Dozens of other species were illustrated and explained, from aphids through thick-legged flower beetles, hornets (the most docile wasps!), snakes, spiders, fungi and rodents to fox and deer. Along the way Mr Varndell dealt with the history of woodland since the last Ice Age, the feeding processes of trees, and the loss since the beginning of this century of half the primeval woodland then in being. He reminded us that we need to act together to stop the decline; we could for example join the Woodland Trust. Mr Varndell's talk, and his full replies to questions afterwards, showed us graphically what we risk losing.

* * * * *

DID YOU SEE.....?

The sight of a male blackcap looking for food in our garden on the 29 November was a reminder that global warming has led over many years to changes in our native insect life which now permit the survival here of birds which formally had to emigrate southwards for the winter months. Apart from insects, the blackcap is also partial to fruit and has even been known to visit bird tables. At one time, the sprightly dartford warbler was the sole warbler to over-winter in Britain; now the blackcap, the chaffinch and cettis also do so and we in the south west are particularly fortunate that all four species may be found within 50 miles of Thorncombe.

* * * * *

NATIONAL RIVERS AUTHORITY.

At our 14 March bi-monthly meeting, a speaker will come from the National Rivers Authority. He will firstly talk about the NRA and its work in general and secondly will discuss Thorncombe's problems in particular. Do remember that the bi-monthly meetings are now held on **THURSDAYS**.

Our cottage and probably all the four or five in the same group originally belonged to Sodborrow Settled Estates prior to 1923. When we bought our cottage in 1937 we were advised we were entitled to a 30-year title; but that a 'search' would be expensive in relation to the freehold price - £300! and as the Sodborrow title was well known locally we could forgo it.

Before 1935 it was lived in by a Mrs Potter, whose husband came from a farming family. She died in the cottage which was inherited by her daughter, Mrs Sibley wife of the thatcher of Saddle Street.

About 1935 it was sold to McIlwain, a developer in a small way who made some small alterations, such as false ceilings over the old oak beams, new internal joists, and a small south window in the parlour, which was the handiwork of Ernie Henson, from next door. McIlwain sold the cottage to a woman relative of Monica Browning (late of Upper Synderford Farm), who kept dogs there. Later she sold to a family from Australia who were only there a short time, and from whom we bought - through Lawrence in Crewkerne, then newly established. There was a well with pump in the kitchen; outdoor Elsan closet; iron kitchen range and courtier stove, oil lamps and oil cooker when we came. Thatched roof too; so was Madge Henson's in 1937. The chronology of our improvements might interest.

The local builder, Mr Hickford, reinforced the upstairs bedroom walls for sound-proofing. There were three small rooms up a very narrow winding stair, and the thatch was repaired by Sibley in the first few years. In 1948 the kitchen floor was dug out and lowered by 4 inches and tiled. New windows were drawn upstairs to the south-east, and in the kitchen to the north. In 1951 electricity was connected, and in 1955 an extension to the west was built with bathroom and W.C. and a septic tank dug in the garden. We had a small Sadia water heater, but all the water had to be hand-pumped into the cistern upstairs (two hundred pumps twice daily!) until 1968 when water was laid on direct and the hand pump removed. In 1963 we removed the ceilings to uncover original oak beams, in good condition in the parlour, but rather oddly awry in the kitchen - they still are! In 1964 we regretfully removed the thatched roof which was in poor condition; we had found it - at that time - impossible to find a thatcher to work for us. Our son, Hugh, took careful photos from various angles of the old roof and of the new. Old tiles were put on by Woodland of Taunton. In 1969 we had nightstore electric heaters installed. The parlour floor was resurfaced in 1969, and another window drawn to the south-west in the 'spare' bedroom upstairs, meaning 4 new windows drawn since 1935. About 1973 we installed a telephone, which at first was on a party line due to shortage of equipment in those days! In 1974 fitted wooden sink and cupboard units were built into the kitchen under the south window; carpet tiles laid in the lobby and bathroom; in 1978 a Jotul Scandinavian wood burning stove put in the parlour; in 1982 the cottage was completely rewired.

Of course improvements like snowcemming and wire-cladding of outside walls, some Rentokil work and normal interior decoration has gone on alongside all this, and I have actually kept a record of every penny spent since we came.

In the ironic light of present inflated house prices, the combined total cost of all that we have spent on improvements and maintenance has only amounted to just under £20,000 to date!

Better not tell this in Gath!

Services used to be three, then two, then no pubs in the village; two bakers, and a general store. A bus service ran from Winsham to Lyme Regis once a week, picking up at the Squirrel, I think; and there was a return service in the evening. The village also ran a bus for shopping to Bridport and Chard once a week. There was a butcher in Winsham. A van with fish and vegetables called once a week from Crewkerne, also a salesman with brushes and kitchen gadgets several times a year. And of course, the Warrens sold milk into our own tin can first from their farm at Glebe Farm (now Glebe Cottage). At one time I bought farm butter at Southcombe, and nearly all farms sold vegetables etc from time to time. We could manage quite well without a car, walking field paths from Chard Station.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

FUTURE EVENTS.

In the early summer (Saturday 1st June is provisionally booked) we plan to visit Lower Kingcombe again on a village outing. We also hope to have a Coffee Morning in May. See the April newsletter for details.