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GREAT CHISHILL

By ERIC RAYNER

ON 22nd February 1798, at about two in the afternoon, 'a sad and teryble fire at Great Chales, brok out in a short spas of time burnt down almost the hol tund. In about three ours time poarr pepel had no ware to hid thar hades . . .' And all because the lad in the vestry house of the Congregational church had gone for a can of beer for workmen building a new house for the minister, and left a fire of burning shavings unattended. No wonder a minute in the Congregational Record Book mentions the 'dangerous, destructive nature of beer.' However, as the un-



The Heydon Road with the Plough at the far end.



grammatical but succinct chronicles disclose, 'luckey no lives was lost' apart from three misfortunate hogs.

The Congregational church standing then, built in 1694, and a successor to a barn in May Street, has been replaced since, in 1894, by the present church which, with its gallery, can hold 300 persons.

The windmill on the high point of the Barley Road has likewise gone, its materials re-used in 1819 for the one there now. Standing near the road, its sails are said to have so frightened a horse that it bolted, killing a man. But they never frightened the he or she who stole miller Pegrum's horse and cart one night; despite the fact that the policeman's cottage was only a few yards away.

The parish church of St. Swithin did not go unscathed through the 'fier' for the roof and the belfry floor went alight, and one of the bells was

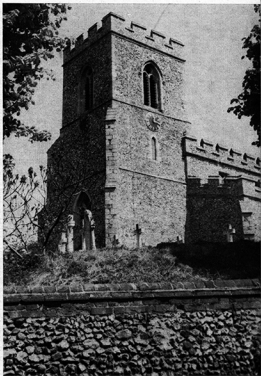
cracked. And so, too, must have been the tower, for twice during the next century it partly collapsed. Apart from those structural disasters, Cromwell's troops had, 150 years before, knocked out pretty well every bit of stained glass, and decapitated the angels on the pillars of the arcades.

The old south porch not only still has a holy water stoup but also the remains of a stairway to a priest's chamber. Inside, half hidden by the Communion table, is a tablet recalling John Cooke, who died in the January of 1701. A J.P., deputy-Lieutenant, and sheriff of Essex by special appointment of William III, his wife and seven children put up a further monument on the north wall of the chancel which they modestly describe as 'too mean and unworthy of him.'

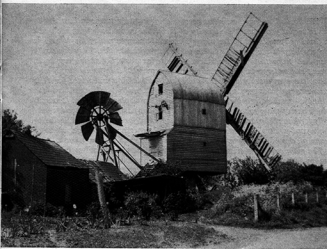
The Rev. Thomas Henry Griffinhoofe likewise has two memorials: a brass plate here recording his 26 years as vicar, and not far from the church a bus shelter. That was put up by his daughter in his memory, about seven years ago. Apart from having no time-table in it, it seems an evening rendezvous for the teen-age youth of the village, and is not kept as clean as it might be.

The Rev. Griffinhoofe, a thin, diabetic little man, always wore hob-nailed boots so that his entry into the church, over tiled flooring, never went unnoticed. As for his Sunday services, they seldom finished under an hour and half.

The organ, with its five stops and pull-out keyboard, is said to have come from a 'gentleman's drawing room' which it may well have done for it is ancient enough. But of more importance is the fact that it is a 'G' organ instead of a 'C'; somewhat disconcerting to a stand-in organist. However, since St. Swithin's has had the same organist for



St. Swithin's perched above the road on a knoll.



This post mill, built in 1819 from materials of a previous mill, was fitted with a new oak post in the 70's.

the past 20 years, few stand-in organists have been required.

Like many another village, Great Chishill's bells—five in number—seldom ring a peal: whereas once their chimes used to float across a dark countryside 6 a.m. every Christmas morning. And as the old year died, they tolled it out; and then rang in the new one with all its high hopes and resolutions.

And there are no more glee parties, or concerts in the school, where the head-mistress, Miss Jessie Tranter, and young Miss Smith used to open the proceedings with a piano duet. As for Jessie, she, with her sister, Mary, taught and disciplined 100 boys and girls through standards one to seven. And no-one threatened to take her to court for using the cane or keeping their offspring in after hours, labouriously writing out 'I must not talk in school'.

May Street seems rather the home of memories for down here stood the vicarage with, beyond its garden wall, the Quaker burial ground in which some of the Hagger family were buried. They, in the village for two centuries, at one time ran the village store and post office.

Also finished is Gunnells' bakery, and the *White Horse* opposite, but drinking men need not go thirsty for the *Plough* is still open. Once thatched at the back, with wattle and daub walls, a chimney running through the centre of the house, and some beaming here and there, it has been so altered, rebuilt, and changed about that it is almost impossible to discover its original plan of building. One thing standing where it always was is the tarred, heavily buttressed barn where clients used to park their horse and trap. These times motorists park in the small forecourt before going on their way to Saffron Walden.

There are plenty of thatched cottages in the

village, but some years ago five did go to the making of Deepwell House. And at the same time the well which had supplied the whole village with water was covered in. One or two private wells are still scattered about but tap water, if not so sweet, is still easier to come by.

At the south extremity of the village are some council houses with largish gardens in front, and across the road a huge cricket field, where a team has been playing for at least 50 years. Then, beyond that, at a V-junction, is Great Chishill Hall, a brick and flint house with a large tree-shaded lawn in front and a miscellany of farm buildings at the back, and a vast view of rolling fields, hills and copses, so neat from a distance, that look as though they have been cultivated by a very painstaking gardener.

Actually, all Great Chishill is set somewhere about the 450 feet contour mark, so one is getting surprisingly farflung views all the time; especially after a shower of summer rain when the air is clear.

A works bus comes in twice a day, there are a few extra buses on Fridays and Saturdays; and apart from a greengrocery van, a butcher's van calls in once a week or so with ordered meat. Otherwise, apart from a few cars and lorries, these lanes are quiet.

And except for John de Chishull who, born here, became bishop of Winchester in the April of 1274, and ended up opposite the choir of old St. Paul's, none of Chishill's citizens have figured largely in the nation's history. Perhaps the most momentous event, apart from the fire, was in 1895, when the village was transferred from Essex to Cambridgeshire. The postal address, however, remains, Royston, Hertfordshire. That could only happen in England.

The East Anglian Countryside—Oct.

By George Jessup

THE hooded, or grey, crow has become comparatively scarce in East Anglia in recent years and the majority of them that come down from the north in October spend most of the winter in coastal areas patrolling the water line for anything in the way of carrion washed up with the tide. They are easily identified from their close relation, the carrion crow, by their grey back, breast and underparts. Otherwise they much resemble it in habits but, if anything, are even more wary and cunning and certainly more detested for their ravages among the eggs and young of other birds.

I have occasionally come across a large tree (scotch pine being most favoured) which one of these robbers has used as a look-out post, from whence it would sally forth to raid practically every other bird's nest for a mile around, including farm yard poultry. Under such a tree I have seen thousands of egg shells of many species of birds from the domestic turkey down to the song thrush.

The main exodus of these birds takes place about the second week in April but an odd one or two sometimes linger on into the early summer. Very occasionally in the past a pair has been reported breeding in Norfolk; but Riviere, in his *Birds of Norfolk* 1930, says: 'The fact remains that an authentic nest of this bird has yet to be discovered in Norfolk.' I watched a pair start to build a nest at Little Cressingham some 12 years ago but they must have been overcome by the migratory urge, as they left the area before the nest was completed.

