LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTION



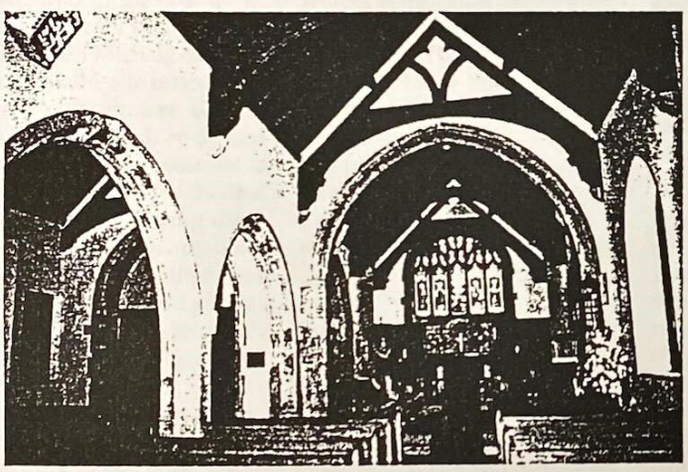
by Noel McCourt

# Newbold Verdon

WHEN the Rev. Hugh Legge was offered the living of Newbold Verdon in 1917, he knew only that is was 'a mining village in Leicestershire'. It's hard to see it in those terms now though the closure of the last local pit took place only a short time ago.

The most recent chapter in the history of the village began only a few years after the Rev. Legge's death in 1944. Three hundred council houses were built and these were soon followed by a major private development which raised the population from some 1,200 to the present 3,700 level.

In broad terms it has been a success story which has brought many benefits: shopping facilities; replacement of out-dated Victorian properties by more spacious modern houses; a larger primary school and good public transport. Michael Preston, a former Mayor of Hinckley and chairman of the Parish Council, who has lived in the village for 60 years, says that it all amounts to a complete revitalisation of local lifestyle in an area which might well have become run down following the demise of the coal industry, once its life blood.

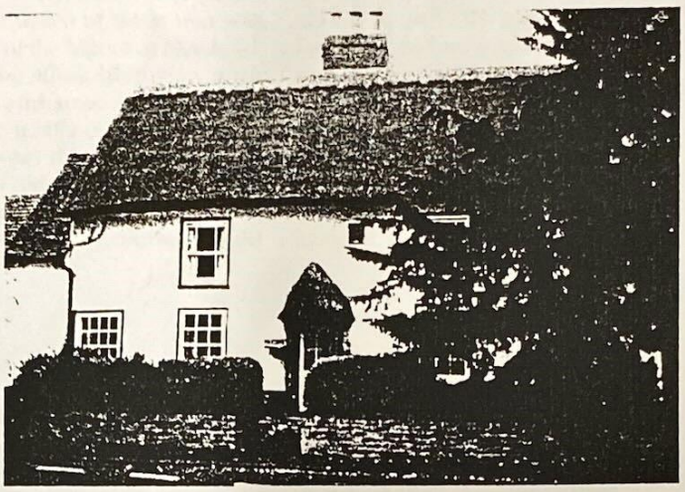


*Interior of the Church of St. James.*

But how much remains of the old village? On Main Street, just where it swings round towards the church, stands 'Cob Cottage'. It dates from 1650 and is one of two remaining thatched properties, Jim Daly and his wife have lived here for 30 years and, although there are no ghosts, there is 'atmosphere' all around.

The massive oak beams run lengthwise across the ceilings. How, one wonders, were they ever manoeuvred into place. Manpower, like horsepower, must have had quite a different meaning in times gone by. Mr Daly also showed me a window which is now blocked up. Its frame is pierced by holes in which were inserted pegs to hold the glass. So, if you were moving house and wanted to take your glass with you, no problem.

Michael Preston's house dates from the 1700's. As we poured over his assortment of old documents spread out on the billiard table, he explained how it had all begun when his mother bought a 'job lot' of items in a basket. Amongst these were found a number of discarded rent books. From then onwards, the collection has grown steadily. Many items were clearly destined for the fire and it has only been by chance they have fallen into his hands. One day, he says, they will go to the Leicester Records Office.



*Cob Cottage, a relic of Old Newbold.*

Here too, in the old part of the village stands 'The Swan', clearly an important centre of village activity throughout the years. Next door is the Old School, now a church hall. They must have made an oddly assorted couple in the days when the school functioned as such. But the arrangement suited at least one headmaster. He was Mr Gulliver.

Michael showed me an entry in an old school record book. It notes that in 1926 on May 4, Mr Gulliver was seen to enter the Swan yard from the school at 10 o' clock. In the afternoon, soon after school started, he was seen following the same path. Just how often Mr Gulliver went on his travels in this way is not recorded.

Amongst the memorable meetings to which The Swan played host, there were the unofficial gatherings in the 1920's and 30's presided over by the Rector, Rev. Hugh Legge. In a beautifully handwritten account of her brother's life, Margaret Legge recalls that before coming to Newbold, they were warned that the parishioners were 'a rough lot', unlikely to respond readily to the kind of preaching indulged in by some pastors of the day.

The parishioners need not have worried though they could scarcely have been prepared for the approach of their new minister. He not only kept 'open door' at the Rectory, but set out to create 'a companionable atmosphere' by going in amongst the men who gathered in The Swan and initiating discussions on any subject from politics to philosophy. He encouraged people to talk and above all to think for themselves. Soon the men were being accompanied



*Ivy Cottage, another delightful survivor from times past*



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