

Country Notes for August 2016

Just recently I discovered that in the late 1930s Vita Sackville West, of Sissinghurst fame, wrote a fortnightly article called Country Notes for the New Statesman and Nation. After a bit of research I also managed to obtain an original copy of a compilation of them that she put together in a book entitled 'Country Notes' in 1939. They make fascinating reading.

Another author who I have enjoyed reading is Richard Church and his book 'Kent', first published in 1948. In it he wrote some wonderful lines about Hollingbourne and I thought that in this holiday month of August I would share them with you.

'From here we can ... retrace our steps westwards in order to look at Hollingbourne, one of the prettiest villages in England. Its main street rises abruptly into the Downs, narrow and lined with one perfect specimen after another of Early English and Tudor houses and cottages. To crown this almost theatrical effect, there stands in the middle of the village a Tudor manor house, called by the locals Colepeper Hall. The brick-work is elaborate, with ornamental facings and a bravura of chimney stacks. The Colepeper family at one time was rooted like poppies all over the county, and held high office. The owner of this house in the time of Henry VIII was a cousin of Anne Boleyn. He got himself into trouble by becoming more than a cousin to that exuberant and dangerous young woman; and Katherine Howard, one of the King's more unfortunate wives, regretted in her last words before her execution that she had not married this worthy suitor, instead of flying higher into the sun of royalty, and burning her wings.

I cannot think of a more suitable village than Hollingbourne in which to spend one's latter years. To settle there, in one of its period houses (I should choose a William and Mary piece higher up in the village), with a devoted gardener, a good cellar of claret, and rooms in the Albany so that comfortable reading could be done in London when in the mood, seems to me the height of civilised living. Merely to mention such an old-age programme shows at once how our standards have declined. So I climb the hill somewhat sadly, out of this dream village to the woods above it, turning to look back from time to time at the increasing range of the view.'

How wonderful to hear these words from the past! Let's hope that the weather enables us all to get out and enjoy all that Hollingbourne and its countryside has to offer in this month of August.

Andrew Snowdon