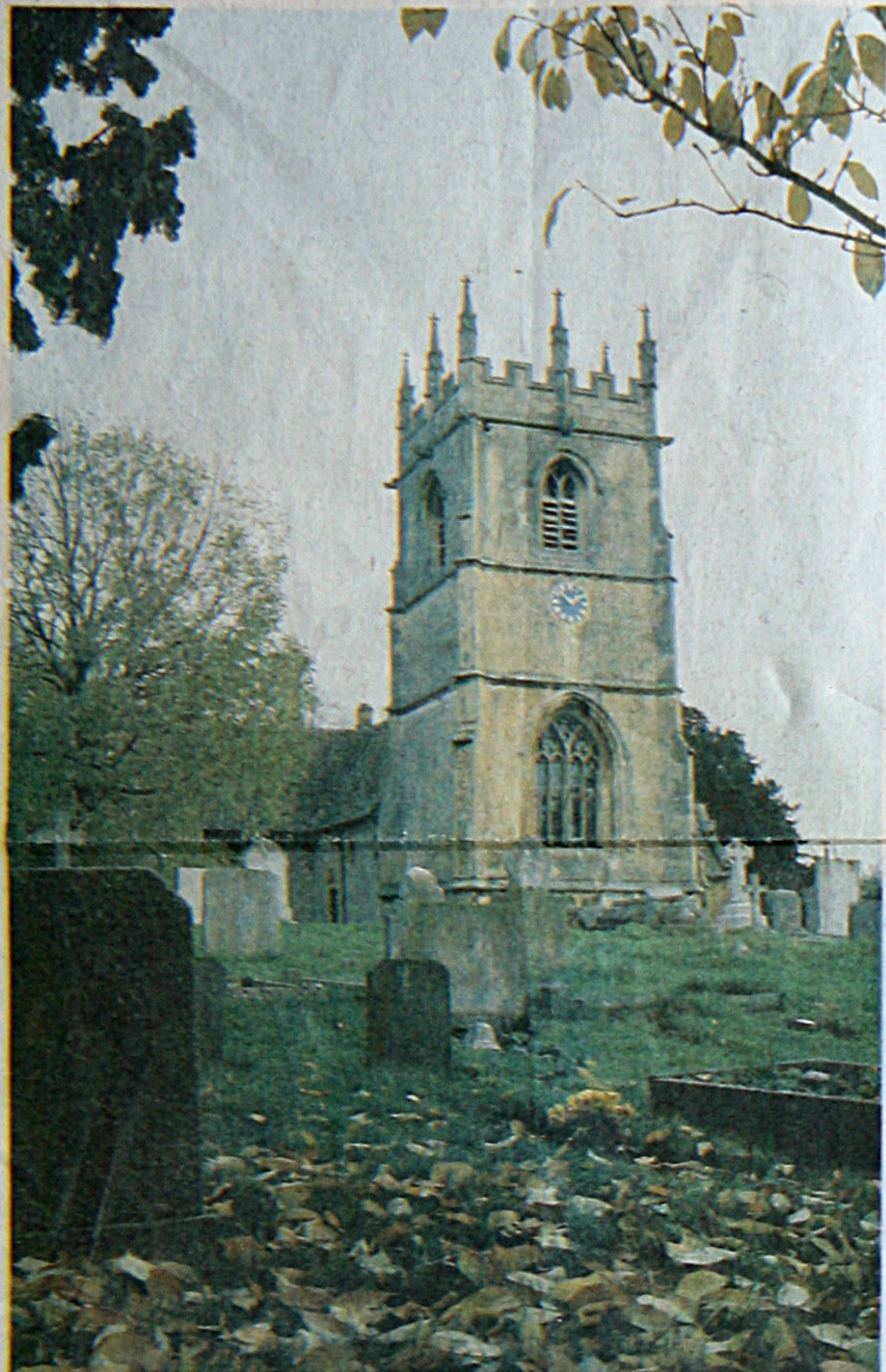


Villages of
THE VALE

Badsey



The churchyard and tower of St James's, where the lantern stands, made by the village blacksmiths, are shaped like shepherds' crooks.



Workman Lyndon Bowley renovating the roof of the Vicarage Cottage in High Street.



Seyn House, also called the Manor House, home of the Ealeys and the village vet.

Community put out to gras...

"Is our asparagus the best in the world?" repeated Buster Mustoe. "Well, put it this way, we sold three-quarters of a ton in six weeks this year." Badsey is almost a town. For a hundred years — since the advent of market gardening — it has been growing steadily. Now, new estates and rows of pre-war council houses closet a few old buildings, throw-backs to the days when a handful of rich land-owners lived beside no more than 500 poverty-stricken villagers. Market gardening, and the immense hard work it entails, changed all that. Badsey is one of the biggest villages in the Vale, an expanding community with young families moving in.

"It certainly is not a retirement village," said Mr Robert Seaman, a village historian. "There is a tradition of hard graft here which survives." Mr Seaman, though a newcomer, is faithful to that tradition. Since he retired in 1976 and moved to Badsey, he has absorbed himself in the village's past, and is now co-author with Mr T. C. Sparrow of a book, about to be published, which delves into Badsey history. "There is a wealth of information here," he explained, "and I'm hoping that the book will interest people. There was a strong Methodist movement here in the 18th century, for example, led by the Swards of Seward House. "The Manor House, or Seyn House to give it its proper name, also has a fascinating past."

Seyn House is now divided into two sections. The first houses the vet, Mr G. Bowler. The other is home for the Ealey family. It is an unusual building, the top of the front wall bending out to meet the roof like a solid gable. Built around 1350, it was once a home for sick monks and belonged to the Abbot of Evesham. Mrs Sonya Ealey, who lives there now, is a cheerful woman with a strong interest in the history of her home. "There is supposed to be a tunnel from here to the Abbey," she said, "but then, every Manor is supposed to have a tunnel there." Seyn House's history came to the fore in May, when James Ealey, aged 12, began digging in the garden. "There were always rumours of several wells here," said Sonya. "But a group of archaeologists who made a previous dig failed to find anything. James guessed he was on to something when he began to excavate a dip in the garden." Ignoring his father's protestations about the state of the lawn and his mother's fears that he could easily disappear down any well he found, James roped himself to a tree and kept digging. Now a covered well with ancient stones bordering the concrete dominates the garden. "When the

children are older," said Mrs Ealey, "we will uncover the well and look for that tunnel." "But that would be too dangerous at the moment," she added. "People keep falling into it." It is thought that Seyn House is the only building in Badsey older than the Vicarage Cottage, the home of a Neath man and his wife, Mr and Mrs Huw Evans. They live in unusual circumstances. The house is being rebuilt around their ears. Mr Evans said: "We are living in a couple of rooms on the ground floor, which are perfectly acceptable for living in." But the house has only half a roof, and workmen have filled the garden with rubble and building materials. "We're hoping to have it finished by next winter," said Mr Evans, a teacher. "We chose it because we like it — that's what mattered." Next door, predictably, is the Vicarage, where Peter Mitchell, Vicar of St James's, and his wife live. Parts of the church have Norman architecture, and the monument to Richard Hoby could date back to the 17th century, but a large section of the building is far more recent, erected during the restoration work of 1885. No-one in the village can remember that far back, but Loppop comes close. He is Badsey's oldest male resident, and at 88 still drives a car. "I got to Worcester and back today in an hour," said Loppop, alias Mr L.B.G. or Frank Jeffs. "Three years ago," he said with a grin, "at the age of 85, I was got for speeding in my Austin Cambridge." Mr L.B.G. stands for Mr Littleton and Badsey Growers, a nickname gained through his long association with the group. He joined them in the 1920s when they were no more than a couple of market gardeners. For 59 years he was connected with the growers, clocking up a longer service than anyone else in their history. Thirty-three years were spent on the committee. He has lived in the same house on the Evesham Road since 1919, when the

weekly rent was 7s 10d. "Now," he said, "it's about £23.50." It is safe to say Mr L.B.G. is something of a tradition around the village, and one that shows no signs of going away. Another is Buster Mustoe and his asparagus. Mr Mustoe is landlord of the Round of Gras, which takes its name from the vegetable. In season, it is an enormously popular food, probably because no asparagus tastes quite like Badsey asparagus. Buster's real names are Ernest Leslie, "but no-one here calls me that. In the police I was Ernest, and in the air force Lester, but here I'm Buster." He flew Dakotas with the RAF on National Service, soon after the war. But it was inevitable that he should eventually take over the Round of Gras. "My family have been here 84 years," he said. "I was born just along the road — I reckon I know Badsey inside out." "My grandfather, father, aunt and sister ran this pub before I took it over. But I don't intend passing it on to anyone. I'm going to be here when I drop. I've already been here 35 years." "Certainly we sell a lot of asparagus here — this season, which ran for six weeks from May 17 to the end of June, we got through three-quarters of a ton. But I wouldn't like to say it was the best in the world." Asparagus is not the village's staple diet, though. There is the Badsey Banger, a sausage sold by the Badsey butchers in the High Street. The shop, owned by David Hart, sells the famous banger with pride. "We use 90 per cent pork," said Mr Hart, "and there is a secret blend of spices in it which is supplied to us by Collins and Grindle. "Good meat is important of course, but I think it is those special spices which make the Badsey Banger unique." Bangers and gras, please, waiter.

C. J. Stevens