



Croome Court, in its 38 acres of grounds landscaped by Capability Brown, has been sold by the Trustees of the Bedford Court and Croome Residential Special Schools to a London agent acting for the proprietors of a preparatory school. Locke and England, who handled the sale for the vendors, say the price was more than £300,000. The house was built in 1752 for Lord Coventry.

Book review

Another tale of old country life

Fred Archer, "When Adam was a Boy", Hodder and Stoughton, £5.95.

This volume, the author's eleventh with a background of customs and social life in the Vale of Evesham and nearby, is the same genre as his earlier works and will have the same appeal to his loyal readers. By drawing on his own earliest memories and supplementing them by gleanings from the generation before, the author has now built up a large stock of dialect words and, by writing in dialogue form he is able to use them, phonetic spelling and all, to advantage. The style grows on one.

It would be interesting to have a breakdown of readers according to their own place in society. I suspect that the townee, with his over-glamorised and falsely nostalgic dreams, would outnumber those with real knowledge of the place and period. Second-hand nostalgia is a popular cult today. It would, however, be wrong to dismiss Fred Archer as doing no more than catering for this particular demand. Whilst the author himself would not claim his works to be important historical documents, they must nevertheless be considered seriously in this context.

The attitude of Evesham historians to market gardening is interesting. Tindal (1794) refers to it as the "sole manufacture of the place" but says little else about it. Other writers do no better. Rudge says it is the "chief business". May, in 1845, does not question that it is the most important thing going on at Evesham but is content to dismiss it with a few disparaging remarks about those engaged in the work. To these Evesham historians, the history of Evesham is the history of Evesham Abbey.

Even agricultural historians, such as Pitt and Gaut, say little about production techniques. So, in this field, Fred Archer is alone, which is why I choose to take these works seriously.

One wonders why the name Ayshon is given to Ashton-under-Hill when all the surrounding places are given their correct name, e.g. Overbury, Beckford and Dumbleton, and even Paris and Shaw Green, both of which are in Ashton parish. There is, however, a lapse into recititude on page 90, where the name Ashton is given.

The description of techniques and practical operations is often very well done. The castration of lambs illustrates this point superbly. I question whether it has ever been described better. The reference to dressing seed wheat with vitriol could have been explained more fully. The "vitriol" was not sulphuric acid but "blue vitriol", in other words copper sulphate. This material came into use in the 19th century and with variations in techniques of application, continued until around the 1920s to the 1930s when the organo-mercury dressings took over. I do not think it was very widely used, but local chemists certainly carried stocks of copper sulphate packed specially for the purpose, with detailed instructions for use.

I should have said before this that this book covers the year 1911, which is in many ways a period of some significance in Vale horticulture. It marked the peak of "horse and hand" work. A few years later came the war and, by the end of it, mechanisation had begun. In this context the recording of sprout-planting high up on Bredon Hill was an event of greater historical significance than may be apparent at first sight. For over two centuries, Vale of Evesham market gardening suffered from lack of work during the winter. The Avonside workhouse was built specially to cater for this.

As the Brussels sprout became established, and popular demand increased slowly, the position changed. The Cotswolds became the main centre of production but the growing and picking was done almost exclusively by Evesham men. Instead of lean hungry weeks in mid-winter,

pickers often took home their biggest pay packets of the year in the weeks around Christmas. This transition took place between the wars and the 15 acres planted on Bredon Hill in 1911 (a genuine historical event) was, I believe, the first movement of the crop outside the narrower confines of the Vale. This acreage was to rise to 5,000 some 30 to 40 years later.

There are times when one suspects that editing is responsible for some spelling errors. Hedges are layed not "layered". The men who did it (and still do) were highly skilled craftsmen. Fires are douted not "doubted". One keeps in the burrow of a hedge to get out of the wind. The spelling "burra" would be justified only in dialogue. I was surprised to see Guinea fowl referred to as "glearies". The usual name would be gleanies, a corruption of galeeny which is itself one of several varia-

tions of the Latin root covering poultry in general. Perhaps this is just a typographical error.

Most serious of all in this field is the use of "ass" for "arse". If you don't like the good old English word, don't use it. Backside, buttocks and bum are all available as good alternatives. The word "ass" in this sense is a piece of modern American pseudo-euphemistic soft porn belonging to the nastier kind of strip cartoon.

On can, if one looks hard enough, find other minor errors of fact and spelling. The mis-spelling of the names of fruit varieties is an instance of this. To criticise these is perhaps being too finicky. The important thing is that, as one gets used to the author's style, one begins to live with these people and to enter into their daily lives. Nostalgia can affect reviewers as well as other readers — J.W.Y.

NOTICE OF EXHIBITION

BY ORDER OF THE MANUFACTURERS

ORDERS WILL BE TAKEN

on

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY
14th/15th December 1979
11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

750 LOUNGE SUITES IN DRALON VELVET

EACH LOUNGE SUITE CONSISTS OF ONE FULL SIZE THREE SEATER SETTEE, FITTED WITH LOOSE CUSHIONS AND DEEP BUTTONED BACK, TWO MATCHING ARMCHAIRS AND A FOOTSTOOL. ALL FULLY UPHOLSTERED IN GRADE 'A' DRALON VELVET AND MOUNTED ON CASTORS. ALL SUITES ARE FACTORY FRESH AND NOT SECONDS, AND WILL BE ALLOCATED ON A FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED BASIS.

COLOURS AVAILABLE

CALYPSO BROWN 225	MINK 100
EVERGREEN 150	SAHARA GOLD 150
DAMSON ROSE 60	PERSIAN BLUE 65

£160 (incl. VAT and footstool)

(other styles available) (prices on request)

AT THE

DIGLIS HOTEL, RIVERSIDE, WORCESTER

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN NEGOTIATED SO THAT DELIVERIES TO THE PUBLIC WILL BE AT NOMINAL RATES