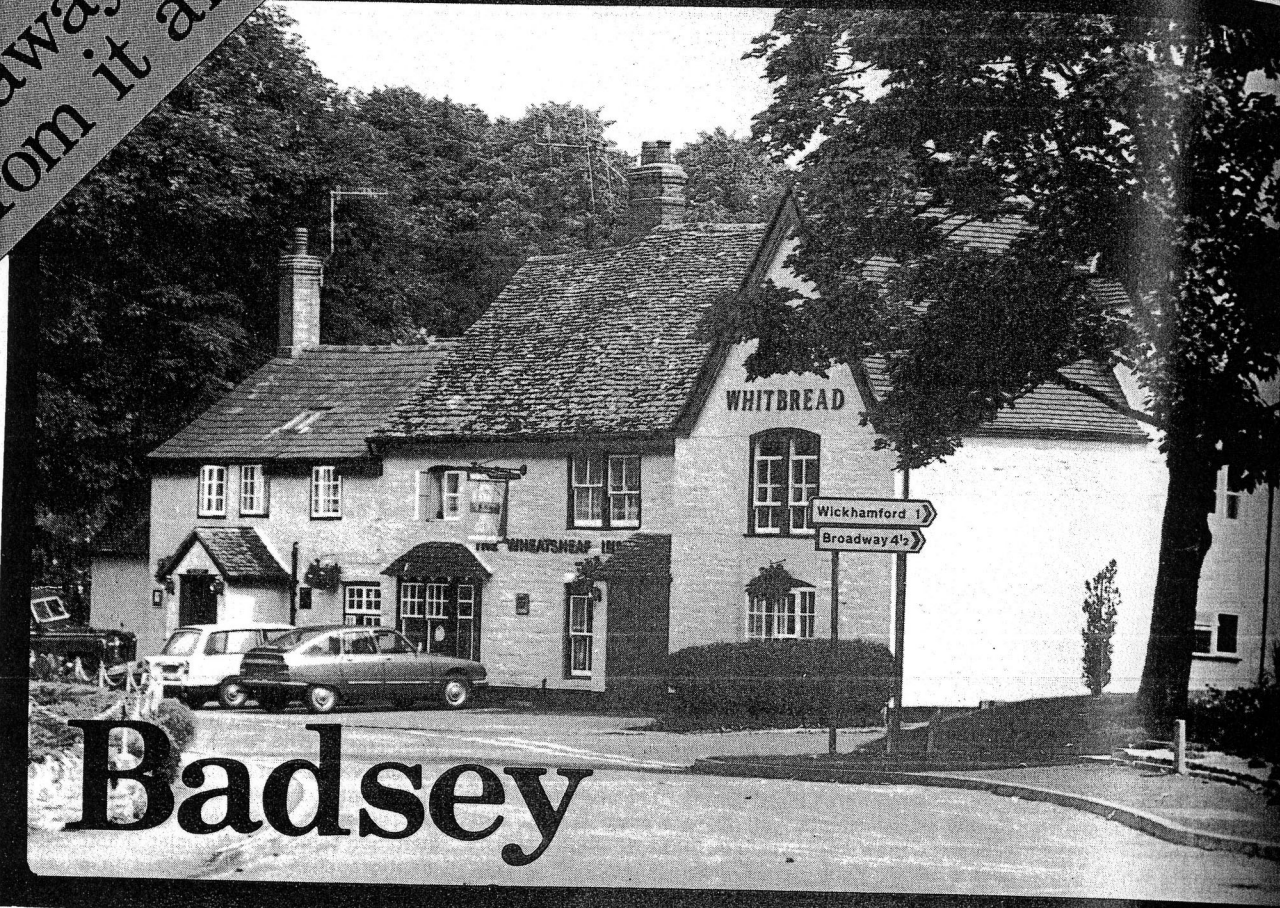


away from it all.



Badsey

No-one would count Badsey among the picture-book villages of Worcestershire. It doesn't pretend to be.

But that's not an implied criticism. A village can possess an attractiveness and an intrinsic charm and character without having appeared on the lid of a chocolate box.

Although the tourists who veer off the well-worn routes of the Cotswolds to see Evesham and its Vale, may occasionally include Badsey on their itinerary, it has no aspirations to be in the same league as nearby Broadway for instance. It's not that sort of place.

Badsey is very much a workaday community, an integral part of the fertile market gardening country in which its historic roots are planted – and it is this from which it derives much of its character.

Inevitably, over the years, successive new houses have sprung up, so that today, the ancient heart of the village is surrounded by a whole variety of architectural styles, ranging from the familiar red-brick Victorian terraces, to the smart "desirable residences" of the 'sixties and 'seventies. Even now, the process continues, and the developers can be seen at work adding a further facet to Badsey's architectural appearance.

But fortunately, many of the splendid old buildings of the past survive as well, which is why this is a place of unusual interest. Symbolically at the centre of the village is the old parish church of St. James, its Norman origins still much in evidence. Later generations of builders have made their mark, of course, and not surprisingly the Victorians carried out a sweeping restoration scheme. Today, standing in its neat churchyard, the building is a handsome centre-piece for the village; and from its pinnacled tower its chimes proclaim the hour for the surrounding community.

Round about stand other fine reminders of Badsey's past: Seward House from the

1 One of Badsey's two pubs, the picturesque Wheatsheaf Inn. The other, at the opposite end of the village, is called the Round of Gras – meaning a bunch of asparagus, a traditional local product.

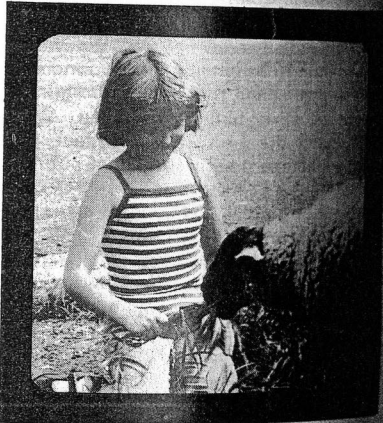
2 A young villager makes friends with the vicar's pet sheep – a familiar sight on the grass verge outside the vicarage.

seventeenth century; the magnificent Cotswold-style Stone House of the same period, now more likely to be referred to as Badsey Hall; the old Silk Mill Cottages, tastefully converted into modern dwellings but recalling an erstwhile rural industry which once flourished here; and of course the ancient Manor House, a delightful amalgam of stone and black and white timbering surviving from the sixteenth century. Originally a hospital for the sick monks of Evesham Abbey (nearby Monks' Lane is a reminder of those far-off days), it was granted in 1545 to the Hoby family, and among the notable monuments in the church is one to Richard Hoby, his wife Margaret and three children.

With the shops of Evesham a couple of miles away – and those of Broadway even further – it is not surprising that Badsey has an air of self-sufficiency. A handful of local businesses cater for most of the villagers' day-to-day needs – and there's even a branch of one of the banks and a mini police station too.

Characteristic of Badsey's long association with the land and its predominantly rural way of life, is the village smithy. "He's one of the busiest people in the village," commented one of his neighbours – although today he's as likely to be forging a repair for a tractor or a market gardener's implement, as providing shoes for horses.

Another of Badsey's assets is its village

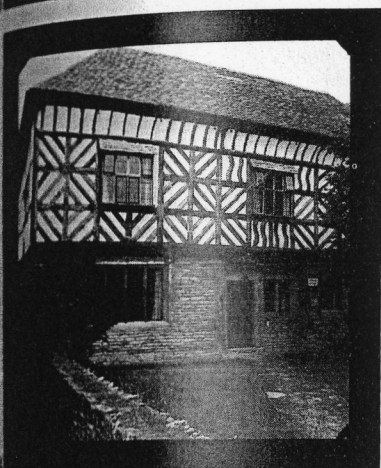
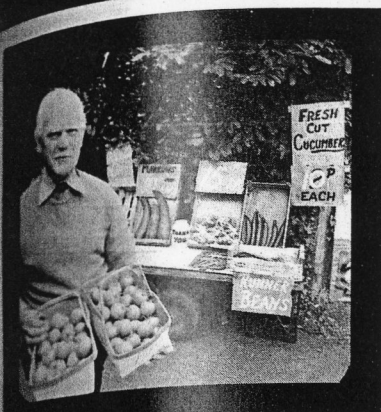


school. In an age when so many local schools have disappeared, it is refreshing to find one still flourishing and contributing a vital aspect to village life.

Some of the older inhabitants can recall the days before the present school was built when the local children received their education in a building which once stood on the site of the modern premises of the Royal British Legion Club. Today, this club plays a leading role in contributing to Badsey's noticeable community spirit. It's a spirit shared by many other organisations as well: the Women's Institute, the recreation club, Scouts and Girl Guides, and Badsey Women's Group among them.

Understandably, the village's large Remembrance Hall and recreation ground are well patronised. And there's even an enterprising owner of a tennis court who offers it for hire to the villagers, according to a notice by his front gate.

Yes, there's a healthy air of involvement in the village – which is not always the case where a community has a high proportion of newcomers grafted on to an existing



7



3 In an area noted for its market gardens, it's not surprising to find a fresh produce stall in the village's main street. Here, Edward Smith tempts the photographer with some of his home-grown tomatoes.

4 The ancient stone and timbered Manor House. Dating from the 16th century, its roots go back even further, to the days when

a convalescent home for the monks of Evesham Abbey stood here.

5 Part of the village street with the post office on the right.

6 Village blacksmith Dick Caswell (left) watches his son David shoe a horse, while a villager looks on.

7 An attractive reminder of Badsey's past: an impeccably restored half-timbered cottage.

Photographs: Christopher Wright



framework of village life. As one of those newcomers commented: "There are some really nice friendly villagers in Badsey, and they certainly make new people feel welcome."

By all accounts, one of the friendliest is the vicar, the Reverend Adrian Leak. "I like Badsey and the local people, very much indeed," he said - and he, too, remarked on the spirit of community.

Mr. Leak lives in a pleasant modern vicarage on the site of its demolished predecessor, not far from the church. "You can't miss it," said someone in the post office. "There's a sheep tethered on the grass verge outside." And indeed there is. It belongs to the vicar and is as much a part of the village scene as the fountain a little way up the road commemorating the coronation of King George V.

There are two other features of life in Badsey which contribute in no uncertain manner to the quality of local life: the two pubs. One is the Wheatsheaf, a picturesque inn of traditional "olde worlde" character in the older part of the village, and the other, on the newer main road to nearby Bretforton, bears the unusual name of The Round of Gras. The inn-sign, depicting a bunch of asparagus, supplies a pictorial translation for those not familiar with the age-old jargon of the Vale of Evesham.

And it's a reminder, too, that this is, after all, one of Britain's most fertile regions, where smallholdings and market gardens abound, and where asparagus is only one of the many prolific local crops which find their way into the nation's shops and shopping baskets.

"You could rightly call us 'busy Badsey'," said one local inhabitant. I could indeed. It's a most appropriate epithet.

JOHN NORTON

