



The monks of Martin, 1903-21.

an obligation of the parish instead of the erring father, the mother became most eligible as a wife-to-be, receiving, as she did, a sovereign for the 'lying-in' whilst the infant received alimony of 2/- per month. Even in the early part of the present century it would seem that the local village men 'looked after their own'. One of the older residents remembers well the time when village youths from the Broadchalke Valley came to Martin in search of female companionship only to be physically ejected with their tails between their legs.

With a background of sheepfarming, Martin Down has always assumed great importance in the life of the village. At present it is used as an area for raising sheep and exercising dogs and horses but it has an interesting history. The remains of Neolithic long barrows still bear mute testimony to a pre-historic settlement. Most of the Bronze Age round barrows which once dotted the area have come under the plough and little can now be seen of their remains. Recent evidence points to the fact that the Battle of Meretune in 871 was fought on Martin Down when King Aethelred and his brother Alfred faced the invading Danish army. Although the Danes won the day, Aethelred was able to withdraw to Wimborne Minster.

For the imaginative with a touch of the romantic, the character of Martin remains much as it has always been. The ghosts of Cromwell's men and the King's troops, which so attracted the attention of the villagers of the day, still tramp over Tidpit Down and the creaking springs of the coach which carried King George III over the toll road from Cranborne through Tidpit on his way to his summer holiday in

Weymouth can still be discerned if you have the ear to hear them.

The thatched cottages, farms and houses, built of the materials originally so close to hand with flint, timber and thatch predominating, flank the village street on either side, backing on to farmland. The traditional village green, once the communal centre of early English village life, still dominates the centre of the village with the pump which supplied nearby folk with their drinking water and the remnants of the village cross. Sadly, nothing remains of the old elm tree, the remainder of the village cross and the stocks, all of which disappeared in the last generation.

The River Allen no longer flows through the centre of the village, being now diverted underground, and the dried mud road has been replaced with a metalled surface. The Allen was a winterbourne river so that from February the village street was deep in water and postmen and delivery men frequently found themselves unable to make their calls and, it is said, the children could be seen going to school on stilts.

Martin is still the centre of a thriving and prosperous farming community. Gone, however, are the days of the one or two-horse dwellings now replaced by two or three-tractor farms covering vast acreages of rich arable land and pasture for the grazing herds of cows and sheep. One of the things that struck me when I first came to live in Martin was the absence of thrusting executives so involved with their many business enterprises and their ulcers, for here is the calm, unhurried bustle of country life, just as Constable might have seen it. You are just as likely to be knocked down by

horses as they set off for their daily exercise as you are by a modern mechanical contraption. That is not to say you don't need a motor car in Martin for with a decided lack of public transport the alternative would be to cycle or walk.

John Aubrey, the Wiltshire antiquary, writing in the latter half of the 17th century said, "I take Merten (Martin) to be the best seated for healthy airs etc. and sports of any place in the county". And so it is. Lordly pheasants strut across the road defying you not to stop, partridges rise from the grass, hares bound across the fields and the white tails of the rabbits flash in front of your eyes. As a reminder of the hunting pursuits of the long-dead Kings, deer still roam the woods and undergrowth and the pink coats of the hunt can be seen combing the downs for foxes.

In this atmosphere of healthy air, hunting, shooting and fishing, together with the village's reputation for the longevity of its residents, it is not surprising that Martin has seen a relatively recent influx of retired folk. Here they can enjoy the peace of village life combined with the sporting activities which befit the life of a country gentleman. Although belonging to a minority group of villagers who are neither retired or involved with farming, I nevertheless can appreciate to the full all that village life in Martin offers and cannot envisage many changes taking place in my lifetime.

*Note:* for those readers who wish to acquire more detailed knowledge of the history of Martin, I would recommend you read *Damerham and Martin, A study in Local History* by E. H. Lane Poole, published by Compton Russell, Tisbury.