

FARMER WITH WHOM HUDSON STAYED IDENTIFIES "CALEB BAWCOMBE"

READERS' VIEWS: ONE CHAMPIONS CLAIM OF ORCHESTON ST. MARY

Which village in South Wilts is the "Winterbourne" Bishop described by the late W. H. Hudson in his book, "A Shepherd's Life"?

It is held by many that Martin answers to Hudson's description. One correspondent this week suggests the scene of the author's references is Orchard St. Mary.

Some light is thrown on the question by Mr. William Easter, of Martin, with whom Hudson stayed a fortnight each year for several years about 1908.

Now a widower, Mr. Easter lives alone in a cottage at the foot of the hill, but, however, at the time Hudson stayed with them occupied Harris' Farm, which is situated in the parish of Martin. A picture of the farm as it now appears is given on this page.

When 30 years of age, Mr. Easter, who is now 65, first met Hudson in the main street of Martin. "He asked me," states Mr. Easter in an interview with a Journal representative, "whether he could get some lodgings. I said, 'I can't tell you any other place, except you see my messuage.' We were then the only people who took anybody in. It was in the summer-time, and he saw my wife, who was a wonderful cook, and he stopped a fortnight. His chief food was mutton chops and rice puddings, and he paid us a guinea a week. He stayed with us for a fortnight in the summer for several years afterwards.

"He was a tall, thin, dark man, and I suppose he must have been in his late fifties. He wore no hat, and used to go out round the countryside on his bicycle, and he spent a lot of time on the Downs. He had two rooms to himself, a bedroom and a sitting-room. After his breakfast at 8 a.m. he would usually go off on his bicycle for the whole day and come back to a cooked meal in the evening. Very often, though, he would spend the afternoon writing in his sitting-room. His chief pastime, I believe, was walking the Downs and talking with the shepherds."

"CALEB BAWCOMBE" IDENTIFIED

Hudson never discussed his writings with Mr. Easter, and at no time hinted that his "Winterbourne Bishop" was Martin. But Mr. Easter claims that "Caleb Bawcombe," the shepherd of whom Hudson wrote, and whose home was stated by him to be "Winterbourne Bishop," was a Martin shepherd named Lawes.

Of this character Hudson wrote: "It is now several years since I first met Caleb Bawcombe, a shepherd of the South Wilts Downs, but already old and infirm and not far from a distance from his native village, and it was only after I had known him a long time and had spent many afternoons and evenings in his company, listening to his anecdotes of his shepherding days, that I went to see his own old home for myself—the village of 'Winterbourne Bishop' already described—to find it a place after my own heart. Mr. Lawes, says Mr. Easter, was crippled in one foot, and he rode to his fold in a donkey cart. He was used to go along behind his sheep. He could be seen on the Downs between Martin and Pentridge."

That Lawes and Bawcombe are the same person is illustrated by Hudson, who wrote of his shepherd character: "Easy in life," caught a chill through long exposure to wet and cold in winter; this brought on rheumatic fever and a malady of the high which finally affected the whole limb and made him lame for life."

THE TRAPPIST MONASTERY

Mr. Easter advanced a further claim that Martin is the village of "Winterbourne Bishop." He recalled that an article appeared in the Salisbury and Winchester Journal within the last two years on the subject of a monastery which was formerly at Martin, and he pointed out that, of Hudson's chapter on "Bird Life on the Downs" there is this passage, following a reference to the great bustard: "There is a Trappist monastery in a village on the southernmost border of the county, which was once called, and is still known to old men as, 'Bustard Farm.' All that Caleb Bawcombe knew of this grandest bird is what his father had told him."

Hudson's description of "Winterbourne Bishop," Mr. Easter thinks, corresponds exactly to Martin. The village, he maintains, was not more than two years ago, when it was taken over by Hampshire under the revision of county districts, and there are few other villages which can "boast" of its main and only street becoming a rushing river in the wet seasons. Hampshire County Council are at the moment laying a drainage system throughout the length of the village street to prevent this flooding.

Hudson described "Winterbourne Bishop" as follows: "The village, as it is now, is a wide, unwooded valley or depression hidden away among the lonely Downs in the large blank spaces between the river, the one of the best in Winterbourne Bishop. . . . Placed high itself on a wide, unwooded valley or depression with the low, sloping Downs at some distance away, the village is about as cold a place to pass a winter in as one could find in this district. And it may be added, the most convenient to live in at any time, the nearest town, or the easiest to get to, being Salisbury, 12 miles distant by a hilly road."

"ONE WIDE-BRANCHING YEW"

The one long, rather winding street of the village, wrote Hudson, had a green bank five or six feet high, on either side, on which stood the cottages, mostly facing the road. In the middle of the village the church stood in its green churchyard, where one became refreshed beneath the ancient beeches and its "one wide-branching yew."

The bed of the stream lies by the bank on one side of the village street, and when the autumn and early winter rains have fallen abundantly, the hidden reservoirs within the chalk hills are filled to overflowing; then the water finds its way out and fills the dry old channel, and sometimes turns the whole street into a rushing river, to the immense joy of the village children.

THE VICAR'S LETTER

The Rev. H. Skilbeck Smith, the present vicar of Martin, writes: "I think the best evidence here is the fact that many of the older inhabitants of Martin remember Hudson quite well. My late parish clerk, a man of now 83 years of age, recalls him well, as does the man with whom Hudson used to lodge. That seems to me to be conclusive evidence."

Another reader, Margaret K. S. Edwards, writing from the Forum Club, 4, Grosvenor-place, London, states: "A few years ago (I think when asking for contributions towards the repair of the church) Martin claimed to be the original of Winterbourne Bishop. I was rather surprised, but at that time quite unable to make any inquiry. Recently I have been much interested in the correspondence in a Sunday paper as to the origin of Winterbourne Bishop, which was stopped by someone mentioning the claim of Martin."

"I have just looked up a cutting from one of the long series of articles I wrote for a Wiltshire paper some years ago; it was a time when I was very often asked what village was the original of Winterbourne Bishop, and I had written, that on the last occasion that this happened, I was more ready than usual with my answer, as I had been reading Hudson's Life, from which I quoted in my article."

"To-day I have checked my paragraph by the Life. The references to which village is the origin of Winterbourne Bishop are on pp. 158 and 206 (1921 edition). I have compressed it a little as follows: 'Hudson always refused to tell anyone the real name of Winterbourne Bishop. He received many letters asking for it, and always replied that he had vowed not to reveal it. . . . A determined last set out for Salisbury and searched the country for it, and then wrote reproachfully to Hudson, saying that she had not found it, so had determined to settle for a time in the village that she liked best. When telling this story to the author of the Life, Hudson said, 'It was Winterbourne Bishop, though she didn't know it.' Did you tell her?'"

Hudson, "Certainly not. Why should I? There's a Bustard Down close to it, and the village has a Bustard House." The author says that this was probably Hudson's way of getting round his oath, as it would enable him—the author—to find it.

"I conclude that Martin village fulfils these conditions, as well as the description you quoted, which really fits the Wiltshire villages as well? I am asking only for information, not to try and discredit Martin's claim, and at the same time would like to ask if anyone has definitely discovered 'The Old Thorn?'"

CHAMPION OF ORCHESTON ST. MARY. The Hon. Richard de Grey, of Salisbury, writes: "I was rather startled to read in one of your editorial notes last week that W. H. Hudson's village of Winterbourne Bishop was generally held to be Martin. I submit that this cannot be, and, personally, I have little doubt that Winterbourne Bishop, if it is an existing village at all, is Orchard St. Mary. Consider the following facts which Hudson tells us about it: It is in Wiltshire—Martin is in Hampshire. It is on Salisbury Plain—Martin is not. It is in the large blank spaces between the river—Martin is not. It is 'high, on a wide unwooded valley'—Martin is not. It is 12 miles from Salisbury—Martin is nine. It has, or had, three small farmhouses. Does this apply to Martin?"

The church is in the middle, and has a square stone tower. Both the Martin churches have spires, and neither is in the middle, or anywhere near it. The Winterbourne flows through it, the stream in Martin is not so called. It is 2 1/2 to 3 miles from a turnpike. Martin is only a mile from the Bradford road; but if one goes (as Hudson, a cyclist, would go) along the old Devizes road, and turns off near what is now Hollystone Ballroom School, it is 2 1/2 to 3 miles to Orchard St. Mary.

"Every one of the above details related to Winterbourne Bishop is applicable to Orchard St. Mary. The only detail I cannot check is that the Rector of Winterbourne Bishop was very poor. The living of Orchard St. Mary has now been joined to Orchard St. George, and one cannot easily see how matters stood when Hudson wrote. But, anyway, I can't allow Martin to get away with it. (Will other readers please advance their views?—Ed.)"

SIR JOHN CHUBB TAKEN ILL

UNABLE TO ATTEND COURT. Because of the illness of Sir John Chubb the hearing of the charges against him and another man was adjourned until October 26th at Westminster on Monday.

Sir John Chubb (83), independent, of St. Mary Abbots-court, Kensington, was charged with inciting Frederick Beresford Johnston, Gravesend, director of the Black Drumpton-road, to steal £5000 by trick.

They were also charged with inciting Graves to conspire with them to defraud persons who might part with money to them.

Howard went into the dock, but Mr. Bernard Gillis, for Sir John Chubb, told the magistrate, Mr. K. M. Marshall, that Sir John had been taken ill with influenza over the week-end, and was in bed with a temperature. "A doctor gave evidence in support of this."

The magistrate granted an adjournment. "Sir John wishes the shortest possible adjournment," said Mr. Gillis. "He wishes to meet these charges at the earliest moment."

It has since been announced that Sir John has recovered and will appear in court on Monday.

At the meeting the dispensing of the boxes clubs of sports clubs in the city to use a central gymnasium which will be provided by the Council from a central fund. Although invitations to a private meeting were sent to more than a hundred individuals and organisations, there are some high-society circles who are not likely to be represented on the Council, they should for the name of their nominees to the university committee.

The Bishop has launched an appeal for £1000 with which to form a central diocesan fund for Church schools. "These may be rising generation by those who themselves hold it to be the foundation of character and right conduct." Under organisation schemes of local education charities, the managers of Church schools have to provide central schools for re-organising existing buildings.

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WHERE HUDSON STAYED AT MARTIN



In view of the controversy as to whether or no Martin is the "Winterbourne Bishop" mentioned by the late W. H. Hudson in his writings, this picture is of special interest. It is of Harris farm-house, Martin, where Hudson stayed when he visited Martin in pre-war days. The farmhouse was then occupied by Mr. W. Easter, an interview with whom appears on page 14.

BUS AND CAR COLLIDE

A single-decker public service vehicle, in which L. Cpl. H. Hetherington, of the 1st Battalion Royal Tank Corps, Perham Down, was taking a school party, collided with a motor car on Monday.

THE INNER WHEEL

The President (Mrs. Dimond) was in the chair at the meeting of the Salisbury Inner Wheel on Monday. She welcomed

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