

From the Salisbury and Winchester Journal August 28<sup>th</sup> 1936

## **Monks at Martin**

Soon after the beginning of the present century, it was rumoured in the village that Colonel Bentick had sold Bustard Farm – which he recently pulled down and rebuilt – to some foreign monks. Rumour was speedily confirmed, and before long monks living somewhere in France were proprietors of one of the best farms in Martin. The exchange, however, was hardly noticeable. Mr William Marlow, who had managed the farm for Colonel Bentick, continued to do so for the monks, and the same men were employed.

### ANTI-CLERICAL CAMPAIGN

The time was one of unrest in France. The Anti-Clerical Campaign in France was meeting with success, and M. Emile Combes, leader of the Anti-Clericalists, had become Premier. No doubt it was the uncertainty of their position in their native land which prompted the monks to secure a safe retreat in a foreign country.

There were five monks and three lay brothers in the party. I have seen a photograph of them, earnest, clean-shaven fathers in light coloured frocks, and dark-robed, whiskered brothers of an obviously foreign appearance. The villagers still remember the names of most of them – the Father Superior, Father Jarrett, Father Norman, Father Ansell, Brother Joseph and Brother Alteau.

One of their first acts was to transform two of the four cottages attached to the farm into a temporary church, providing accommodation in the village for the labourers who had occupied the cottages. No sooner were they properly settled, however, than they began to build a new church, which they finished in a comparatively short time.

### GOOD FARMERS

For the next ten or twelve years they lived peacefully in the village of their adoption, endearing themselves to the villagers. They proved good

farmers, cultivating their land intensively and well, a thing which always recommends a newcomer to the village to his employees and neighbours. Apparently they had plenty of money, for they did not spare expense. They reaped good crops, and 'the Monastery sheep' were known and praised at fairs for miles around. An orchard of six hundred trees which they planted is still largely intact.

They were, above all, very neighbourly and very courteous. No case of want in the village came to their notice without their immediately offering relief. An old farmer related to me that a neighbour of his once went to the monastery to borrow a wagon in the middle of harvest. The foreman was dubious about lending it, as he thought his own men might be requiring it. So he asked one of the monks, who happened to be passing.

'Oh, let the men have the wagon, let the men have the wagon,' said the monk at once. 'We can use the Scotch cart.'

On Good Friday, which in those days was not a general holiday, the monks always gave their men a holiday on full pay, provided they went to church in the morning. They were also always very pleased to see the villagers in their Sunday services, and often on Sunday afternoons the little church was packed.

The war was responsible for the uprooting of this little community. During and immediately after it they ventured, at various times, back to France, from which country they did not return. Soon after the war they sold their farm.

### CHURCH DEMOLISHED

The church was demolished and re-erected in some growing village to the north of the Plain. The row of cottages which the monks had made into one building was divided into four once more. Now everything is as it was before the coming of the monks, and future generations will not suspect that Bustard Farm was ever Bustard Monastery. Although they may wonder how the large Monkey Puzzle tree came to be planted they will not guess, unless they have heard, that the monks planted it as a sapling in their churchyard.

As for the monks themselves, they are all dead. Mr Marlow tells me that they wrote to him fairly regularly after their return to France and that their letters informed him of the deaths of members of the community one by one. He heard from the last survivor, Father Jarett, at Christmas, 1934, but later learnt that he, too, had died.

So another episode has been played out in a village of the Plain, and in a short time, compared with the history of these villages, will be forgotten.