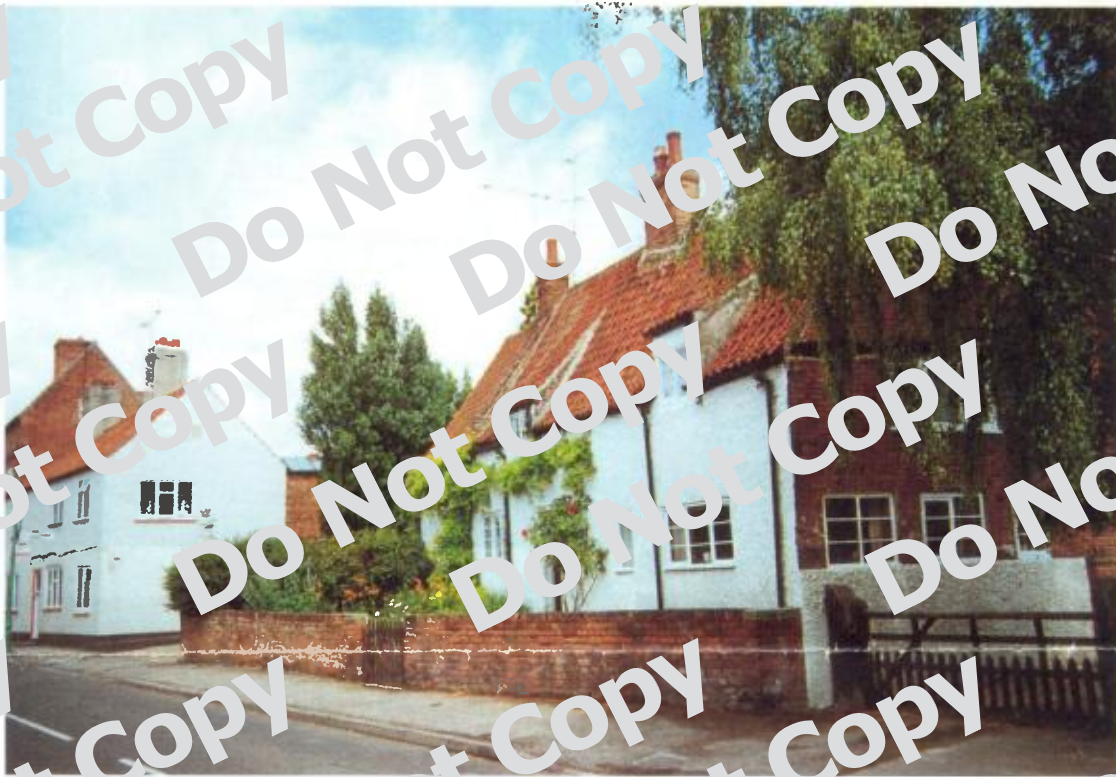


Sunny Lambley

the bright village



Words and pictures by Nigel McCourt

I need no excuse to visit any of my favourite parts of the county; the pleasant tangle of ridges and valleys that stretches northwards from Burton Joyce to Woodborough and beyond are reason enough. In the middle of it all, at Sunny Lambley, the little Beck flows east, its waters eventually mingling with those of the Trent.

At least that is usually what happens, but on my recent visit I found the stream listless and sluggish, lost and bewildered in a series of brown muddles of Severn-Trent Water would find no comfort here, peering down into the deep wooded gully which locals call The Dumble.

It's a valley within a valley, the upper part slopes down through pastures that are home to strong inquisitive cattle that eye you minutely as you pass. Then whoops, the land suddenly plunges down into a deep dark ravine with tangled foliage. You stand and stare, like the cows, fearful of what might so easily tumble into The Dumble.

Something such as this, it's not surprising that the Beck remains a secretive ribbon of water, rarely hidden from prying eyes. But as it flows through Lambley it flows a little bolder, emerging into the light of day to become part of the village landscape.

Along Main Street opposite the Robin Hood Inn, a stone bridge spans the Beck. A notice draws attention to the famous spring, long revered as the source of sweet-tasting water once used throughout the area for domestic purposes despite the availability of alternative sources. It is recorded, for example, that once considerate household drew 28 bucketfuls every Sunday in preparation for his wife's Monday wash. Only during the terrible Black Death was the spring temporarily

abandoned because of a rumour that infected corpses had been buried near its source.

And yet even to this day, no-one knows where or what the source of this mysterious spring is. Nevertheless, it continued to be widely used until superseded by piped water in the 1930s. And even after that the pilgrims on their way to the shrine each day would stop and fill their flasks from this ever-reliable oasis.

The little bridge spanning the Beck leads into a six-acre field known as The Pingle, an unusual sight in the heart of the village. Too large for a village green, The Pingle may have been the site of a former Manor house long since vanished, but faint traces of earthworks.

But if the geography of Lambley's past fails us, history is more explicit in leaving us records of long-dead Lords of the Manor, especially those of late medieval days. For it was then that the Cromwells had extensive holdings in this and other parts of the county, taking the family name from the village of Cromwell near Newark.

The most famous of the Cromwells became Lord High Treasurer of England around 1500. It was he who financed an extensive reconstruction of the church at Lambley, leaving behind instructions for this in his will. The work was completed after his death and the church re-dedicated to the Holy Trinity in April 1496. As a result, what we see today is essentially a 15th-century building in perpendicular style, apart from the tower and certain other features.

The Rector, Rev Nigel Peyton, showed me around, the Church like so many others these days normally being kept locked. Even from the outside you can see the essential simplicity of the design. A plain



Lambley's modern rectory. Built in 1974 it replaced a grand Victorian mansion which was then demolished to make way for a housing development.

Above: One of Lambley's three pubs

Right: The school in its pleasant garden setting

Below: Looking across 'The Pingle' towards the parish church the notice explains the history of Lambley Spring



parapet tops the body of the building, only the tower, of earlier date, being battlemented. High on the wall above the east window are two carved panels containing the emblem of Ralph de Cromwell, the High Treasurer. These take the form of a purple symbolising his position as chief financial officer of the state.

Light and brightness are one's first impression of the interior. Everything can be seen at a glance. Tall windows sweep upwards in characteristic perpendicular style. Absent are those side aisles and the familiar forest of pillars and arches of earlier date. The whole scene is a testimony to changing tastes and times.

Some might say that this is less interesting and it is true that there are fewer features to ponder over and admire. Yet the clear impression of light and space and the unity of detail are the main rewards and indeed that other superb example of similar design, King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

A fine Norman tower arch dominates the west end of the church, contrasting strongly with all those other features of later date. After the Reformation it was sealed up and plastered over till uncovered in a modern restoration.

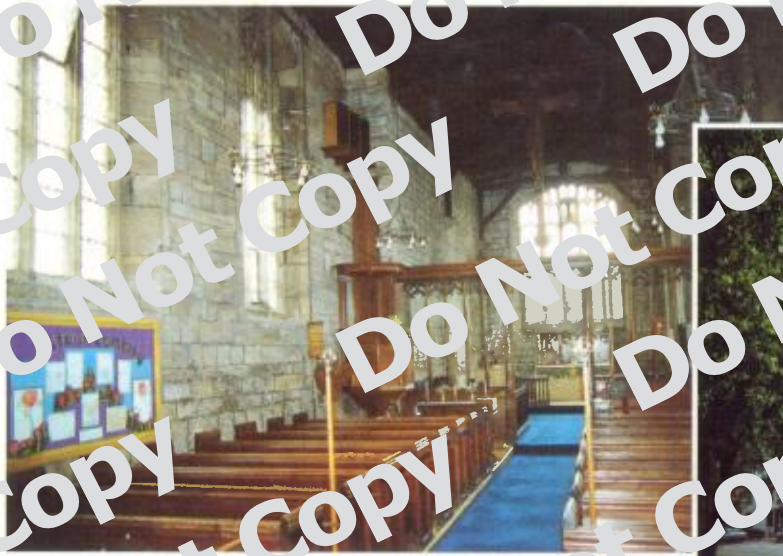
Other interesting features from early times include the wood screen, which dates from the 1370s, and the pre-Reformation altar stone which has lain buried beneath the sanctuary throughout times. More remarkable, however, are the considerable fragments of medieval glass that have survived. Most notable of these is the chalice glass in the east window and the figures in a panel above it which includes the Virgin and Child.

In strong contrast with these ancient relics Mr Peyton proudly



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showed me the splendid new electronic organ which was installed some three years ago. Bought at a fraction of the cost of a conventional pipe organ, it makes a wonderful sound, judging from his demonstration, and has been well received by members of the congregation who had not previously had such a sonorous



Top Left: Lambley's 15th century parish church. The small panel of coloured glass in the east window dates from medieval times.

Above: A view of the main street including the Methodist church.

Left: This terrace of houses on the main street was built to accommodate the employees of Morley's Stocking Factory in the 1850s. The factory building is on the left.

accompanied to their singing.

Now the road from the Church to Lambley's modern rectory. Built in 1974 it replaced a grand Victorian mansion which was demolished to make way for housing development. The history of the rectory is obscure and must be pieced together with the aid of documents, the site having been much altered over the years. As far back as 1440 the bailiff accounts for the year and record the fact that a pound of pepper was received as annual rent from the rectory. The Victorian rectory referred to was built shortly before 1844.

Near the church is the old schoolhouse, now used as a playgroup centre. Lambley School has long ago transferred to its present site on Cafford Lane at its junction with Main Street. Yet, though no-one remembers all having attended classes there, the old school still symbolises all those forgotten years of struggle, sacrifice and noble success that went into establishing the schools of today.

Formal schooling in Lambley began in the middle years of the last century, prior to the Education Act of 1870. It was established in a universal way. Like other schools of its kind it was run under the auspices of a Christian society and so retained its voluntary status into the present century.

One of the early obstacles facing such schools was the need to instil a concept of education such as we now take for granted. Villagers didn't at once see the value of such a school and what it was trying to offer. They were, however, only too aware of the value of children as potential labourers in households where poverty was never far away. Consequently, many of the Lambley school records deal with discipline and poor attendance, both of which have a strikingly modern ring. Add to these the inadequate teaching conditions, limited materials, and the large number of untrained teachers and one gets a vague idea of a few of the problems that had to be faced. If history can be believed, perhaps modern educationalists should be counting their blessings.

And what were the tasks that kept children away from school on those days? Harvest-time, when all hands were needed, clearly took its toll. Fruit and vegetable gathering were also labour intensive as was

the picking in October. Indeed, there can have been few times in the year when the cheap and ready labour of children was not in demand.

Yet despite its importance, work on the land was not Lambley's main source of employment. In the 19th Century a larger proportion of the labour force worked in the framework knitting industry. This was a cottage industry that flourished right into the present century, though with decreasing importance.

Framework knitting employed whole families. There are records of children as young as seven and of people of 80 being involved in it. For hours on end, knitters toiled at the noisy machines set up beside the long windows, often using flasks of water or candles to reflect more light on the needles. With limited return for all their efforts and high costs being charged for the use of the machines, some unfortunate folk were little better off than slaves.

Power-driven framework factories in the larger centres gradually brought the time to an end. In Lambley the Nottingham-based firm of J. & T. Morley opened a factory on Main Street, making men's stockings around 1890. The building, a tall, gaunt brick affair of no surpassing beauty, still stands. The factory consisted of two large rooms linked by a stairway. Special machines were used, power being supplied by a paraffin-driven engine. With only a single fire to heat the entire building, conditions for the labour force (exclusively women) were scarcely idyllic during the dreary winter months.

After the factory closed the building was used as a store. Now, still in private ownership, it is used occasionally as a workshop.

Meanwhile, the men of the village had found another source of employment in the new Geming Colliery which came into production in 1902. Framework knitting had come to an end. In that component, William Kirk on Main Street, died in the early 1900s.

In the very different world of today, Lambley employs few of its residents, most find jobs in the Nottingham area. There are still some shops, three pubs and a post office. I concluded my stay with a visit to the Robin Hood where I enjoyed a splendid ham salad in congenial surroundings. Many thanks Robin, I'll be back!