

That's the place with the cement works, isn't it? Is the usual comment of non-residents hearing the name of our village? If they spare us that, and we are not ashamed of our cement works, after all the Romans worked the chalk, on the same site, they go on to inform us that we are an 'exploded' village, a ramshackle affair of building estates, unplanned confusions of 'cul de sacs', Groves, Drives and Druids Walks, and there is no future for us. But all these people could be wrong. We have had a glorious past in Chinnor, if not a particularly great one. We might well have a considerable future.

Very village in England has a history. Here in Chinnor, which the Saxons called 'Ceonna', hundreds of years after the last Roman had left the district, there is much evidence of Ancient Britons, men and women of the Iron Age who inhabited the Chiltern Ridge at the south end of the Parish. The Crusader in the Church had been dust for centuries when Sir Samuel Luke tried to defend the village against Prince Rupert on June 18th 1643. That staunch Royalist, and Rector of Chinnor, Nathaniel Giles rode out from the old Rectory to the death bed of his friend and political enemy John Hampden, in Thame, after the Battle of Chalgrove Field. For a long time the great Isaac Newton's Library was in the old rectory here, and no one is quite sure how it came to be dispersed. Within living memory a Saxon skeleton was unearthed in Church Lane, and, later, a Roundhead was found in the garden of this writer. We are part of the heartland of England, here in Chinnor and we can hold up our heads with the best of them.

When he wrote 'Chiltern Country', still compulsive reading, the late H.J. Massingham had become a trifle crotchety. He would have liked to put the clock back a century or two. He thought very little of Chinnor, saying that the village had turned its back upon nature and beauty. But then he thought the Rood Screen in the Church was new and artificial, whereas it is the sixth oldest screen in England and, made here in Chinnor from Chiltern Oaks. He did think, and he was right, that our foliated cross commemorating William of Leicester, who was Rector of Chinnor in 1314, and who rebuilt the Chancel, was 'one of the loveliest things to be seen in all the Chilterns. But he was silent about our famous brasses and our Bells. And he appears not to have seen the mediaeval glass in the windows of the chancel. Perhaps he just put his head round the door and flinched away from the pulpit, the main font, and the 'doubtful' pictures of Sir James Thornhill. The fourteenth century Purbeck marble font in the Church is of the greatest interest not least because it was thrown out of the church by the pious restorers of 1886, and recovered for us in 1938, at the instigation and expense of Mr A.J. Manchester, by the late Mr William Clarke and the late Mr. Jack Caple. Our Bells are famous too. We have the first Churchill Bell in the country, dedicated in 1965, and we have a fine peal of six bells, and a fine team of ringers to chime them, spanning the reigns of Queen Elizabeth the First, King James the First, and King Charles the First and Second. A more than fruitful couple of hours can be spent in the Church of St Andrew, Chinnor at Any time.

Chinnor has both the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways, the oldest tracks in the world, more than 2000 years old when the Romans made their first landings here in 55BC. The Upper Way, which runs from Dunstable to Watlington, more or less, was followed by all those persons who wished to feel safer from the dangerous and difficult people who have always inhabited this part of the world. The Lower Way, between East Anglia and Avebury, was used by the Romans for all their baggage trains and movements about the Chilterns. Their edible snails are still sometimes to be found on

the outskirts of Chinnor. Walk a quarter of a mile along the 'way' past the Primary School, inn Mill Lane and you will have a view of the Cement Works which may surprise you; a genuine thing of beauty, set into the Ridge against a background of beech.

Nearly everything in Chinnor has changed for the better, and the new inhabitants will most certainly be changed into, not only, Chiltern men and women, but the epitome of Chiltern people, 'Chinnorites'. From this village went unarmed men to take part in Oldcastle's Rising in 1411, and to be hanged and burned in St Giles Fields. We don't know their names but we can guess them by looking at the memorial to be dead of two Great Wars in the High Street. You can find those names matched in the Churchyard.

It is a pity that walking for the sake of walking is dying out. Living in Chinnor is really and truly 'living in the country', but you won't know that if you take your motor car to the shops, and to Church, and even to the pubs. Walk about now and again; Up the Donkey Track, up Wainhill down the lane to Emmington, or turn the other way to Sydenham. You will still be in the Combined Parish. Use the Icknield Way and open fields to join the Watlington Road beyond Crowell. On the way you will have passed Ellwood House, a direct link with Milton, Pennsylvania, and the Quakers. Pause if you like half way up Chinnor Hill. Miss Swain lives there, one of England's serious composers for the piano. On Wainhill lives Biddy Darvell, the painter, (Mrs Haslam), who is an authority on Shakespeare's Sonnets. In the High Street lives Miss Gibbs, who knows the answers to every Chinnor question you may care to ask; in Lower Road is Farmer White with a Holly tree in his garden, you can see it, older than anyone can guess.

Five hundred yards nearer to Princes Risborough (where the Black Prince had his castle), and you are passing the late Mr. Siarey's house and may reflect that it was from Chiltern beech that Ancient British mad made the first workable artefacts. You can belong to Chinnor as you walk around and about it.

You are very much part of Old England

Kevin Fitzgerald – 1983 Chinnor Review