

Notes by an Oxford Lady **Ewelme News, June-Jul 2017**

Notes by an Oxford Lady – visit by Barbara Bocardo in 1900

An article from Jacksons Oxford Journal printed on Saturday, August 25th 1900 describes a visit by tourist Barbara Bocardo, and is titled *'Notes by an Oxford Lady'*,

“A very pretty cycle ride it is to Ewelme. The road lies through Nuneham and Dorchester, amidst leafy lanes for 5 or 6 miles further, till you reach a sleepy looking hollow, about 4 miles from Wallingford, when you come to the famous watercress beds. Ewelme too, has some considerable reputation as a health resort. I was assured that quite number of visitors spend a summer holidays there, and in spite of its quiet and secluded appearance, it is not without its resources. Some first-rate golf links adjoin the village, and fishing and shooting excursions may be made in abundance. There is also much historic interest in the place. Chaucer was a frequent visitor to Ewelme when his son owned the Manor, and the brook which meanders through the village and feeds the watercress beds is alluded to in the lines - *'In the world is none more clear of hewe. Its waters flow fresh and newe, that whelmeth up in waves bright. Its mounenance three fingers height.'*

The cress beds rising one upon another as the road ascends towards the hill at the end of the village are about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile in length. They are divided into sections by means of wooden partitions to facilitate the current of water. Half a dozen or more men are kept in constant employment. The cutting of the cress requires much care or the young growth which succeeds the ripe crop will be injured. Each crop is cut or “sheared” to use the technical term about once in 6 weeks or 2 months and the produce of the beds is dispatched all over the kingdom to London, Manchester, Birmingham and other large towns daily during the season. An idea of the importance of the industry may be gathered from the fact that on a busy day as many as 40 or 50 baskets are sent off, each basket containing 60 lbs weight of cress which will fetch 9 shillings or 10 shillings in the market. Of course, this is not all profit: the expense of keeping the beds in order and of gathering and packing are considerable.

Passing the watercress beds, we come to the picturesque block of almshouses situated on the slope of the hill rising from the main street. Fronting the street is the school, a fine old red brick building, through which a passage leads under a brick gallery to the almshouses, or hospital, as the building is called, the word being used in its old sense. There is a tiny quadrangle of red brick, with an arcade running round it, on to which open the doors of the inmates. The hospital was founded in 1436 by Duke William of Suffolk for 13 poor men. Its Mastership has, since the days of James I, been attached to the Regius Professorship of Medicine at Oxford.

Rising above the carved oak gables of the almshouses is the massive tower of the church which is reached from the quadrangle by a flight of stone steps. It is an interesting specimen of pure Perpendicular architecture, and the beautifully decorated interior contains some fine monuments.

The visitor, before leaving Ewelme, should climb the hill opposite the church, from whence he will get one of the prettiest of the numberless pretty views of England – *'lovable and paintable'* – to quote Professor Von Herkomer.” [As Ms Bocardo came from Oxford her reference to Sir Hubert von Herkomer 1849-1914, a German born British painter, may be related to his appointment as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University from 1885 to 1894].

Ewelme Village Archive