

# FROM THE FISHING LODGE

'I say - you there'.

This was the strident voice of a large 'tweedy' woman calling from across the car park; was it me she was hailing?

'You there - man - yes you'.

I had made the mistake of turning my head.

I stopped in my tracks.

'Are you a resident here?' she shouted.

'Well, not exactly.'

'Oh come now, you must know where you live, or are you some sort of a vagrant?'

I chose not to answer.

'Well whoever you are, I'm looking for a good strong man'.

'Not likely' I thought.

Just at that moment a large white van came between us, and I seized the opportunity and nipped smartly round the corner of Queens and hid in Nigel's doorway until the coast was clear.

It was not long before I heard 'tweedy' hailing some other unfortunate man. That was my cue to dash across the green and lock myself in the Lodge.

Moving on.

I would like to think that somebody is soon going to do something about the walnut trees. The one in particular that is encroaching upon the apple tree is long overdue for attention. Apart from the damage to the apple tree (which crops well, and 'keeps' until March), the grass has not been mown, and is becoming decidedly scruffy.

Perhaps a reminder is in order here that a walnut tree grows to 100ft in height, and 50feet in girth! That would be totally out of place in the position it is. So will somebody please think about it.

Talking of walnut trees, I am sure I have told you before about the little squirrel I found under our walnut tree at home. Having fed it with walnuts it became so attached to me that I put it in my pocket - where it went to sleep! When a friend called later on and remarked on the tremendous crop of nuts, it reminded me of my sleeping guest, and I pulled it out of my pocket, rather in the manner of a magician pulling the rabbit out of a hat.

My friend was most impressed, and together we cracked a few more walnuts and put him (the squirrel not my friend) on the wall with the supply of nuts, and went indoors for coffee.

My brother had a similar friendship with a young thrush who simply would not leave him alone and even sat on the end of his brush as he swept the paths.

But I digress.

I have lately been watching the civil engineering genius of a pair of coots building an island in the middle of the fairly fast running river. It is quite absorbing, not to say exciting, to see how they raise the level of the nest as the river rises, and to watch how they just manage to keep ahead of the water level.

Incidentally, on one occasion when they were both away, a duck took possession for a short time, but it was apparently not to her liking, and she left quite soon.

It occurs to me that now the weed is never cut, it must be an advantage to the coots, as it gives them more prospective sites for their nests.

Nostalgia took over here and I began thinking about the

days when the weed was cut by that great, clanking, ponderous, Heath Robinson thing that ground its way up and down our river here in a cacophony of sound that could only have been equalled by the '1812'.

The man who sat a-top of this ridiculous machine was obviously frightened out of his wits, if the look on his face was anything to go by. It was clear to all who watched that he was in imminent danger of falling off his perch, while being shaken to bits as if he were riding a road drill. It was also very clear that he had practically no control over this monstrosity at all; he is probably even now half way across the ocean!

How different it was when I lived four miles further up the Nadder. The water bailiff and his men quietly went about the same job, attired in their waders. Working down-river of course, the only sound to be heard was the regular pendulum movement of the scythes accompanied by a gentle 'swish-swish', and they talked to each other in soft voices that carried so well over the water.

As boys at the time, we looked forward to the weed cutters coming because they would find all sorts of our lost treasures and toss them out on the bank for us. We recouped our valuable lost balls, rubber tyres, toy boats, fishing lines, arrows, spears, and all manner of things that are valuable to boys.

Now back to ducks.

Earlier this year while I was up on the roof clearing off the ivy, I discovered a duck sitting on a well-concealed nest. I left her undisturbed, and when I went up again a week later, she had gone, presumably with her brood as the broken shells and nest were all as I would hope to find them. The wonderful thing to me is how on earth did the little chicks get from the roof to the river without mishap?

Ain't Nature wonderful?

Continuing with nests. We had a blackbird's nest in the Hydrangea outside our kitchen window. We were careful not to disturb it until they had all flown, and then we needed to trim the bush. We found the nest and took it out during the trimming, but to our surprise when we looked into it, we found a dead bluetit, curled up and looking as peaceful as you could ever wish for.

Nature is also beautiful!

I am sad to say that I did not hear the cuckoo at all this year, or see the foxes, or hear of any crop circles. Some time ago a policeman reported watching a UFO making a crop circle on Harnham Hill. My mother read this report in the Journal and told me about it when I visited her.

'Did you read about the UFO on Harnham Hill?' she asked.

'Absolute rubbish Mum' I said, authoritatively.

'It's not at all rubbish' she quickly replied. 'One comes past my window every morning half-past-four - it wakes me up!'

'Of course Mum'.

Well - she *was* 97!

*B. Foster*