

FROM THE FISHING LODGE

I am an early morning person - always have been, in consequence I am at the fishing lodge every morning soon after 7.30. At that hour of the day my regular companion is the heron who can be relied upon to be standing on the opposite bank, motionless, like an old stick. He appears so laid back that it is a mystery how he ever catches anything - until you see him in action, and then you understand just how lethal that beak is.

In the summer months at that time of the morning, the sun is just peeping round the spire and shooting its golden fingers across the green and onto the Fishing Lodge door, which is actually already quite warm to the touch. In a mood of meditation I sometimes wonder if the picture was more or less the same 200 years ago when the Lodge was just a stone wall with a galvanised iron lid under which the boys hung their canoes on large hooks on the wall.

And thinking back to just 25 years ago when I dug the foundations for the little extension, I came across a quantity of broken pottery, mostly curved, as in pots, and some decorated, mainly cream on terracotta. I have often wondered if this was perhaps a careless servant's secret dumping ground for his accidents, or was it the site of a local pottery?

On one particular early morning when all was shrouded in a dense fog, I heard the honking of far off geese. I like watching and listening to geese and so I stopped and waited for them to fly over. Geese fly fast and in only a few seconds they were overhead, and past. I could tell they were quite low by the loudness of their honking and the speed with which they passed over, but I never saw them. My question is, how do they navigate in such a thick fog; how do they avoid trees and pylons and tall buildings, and how do they know where to land? And also, when they take to the air, how do they take up their formation, and who takes the lead of the wedge. Are they just following their leader, and if they are, and he gets it wrong, I presume its the last time they let him go up front!

Back to civil engineering, what a ridiculously long time it is taking to resolve the Catalpa square episode. It seems to have been going on all summer, with the square looking so untidy, all through the tourist season too. And why do we have to look at those computer generated designs when presumably a good garden designer could easily produce a sympathetic and appropriate drawing in keeping with the surroundings at a fraction of the time and cost.

At last the river has begun to rise, and the ducks and moorhens are exploring new territory by way of the irrigation ditches. The herons too, in their slow and stately way, are frogging rather than fishing. And all the water voles entrances are now under water, which doesn't appear to worry them as they have a number of entrances anyway, some permanently under water.

I have to say that I do not like to see the sheep in the water-logged meadow, especially as it has been my misfortune to see sheep on three separate occasions being swept away down river; not a pretty sight.

Talking of irrigation ditches, I must regale you with a particular episode in my early life when we thought it would be rather jolly if we had boats on the river. I may remind those of a later generation (which is practically everyone) that the ammunition and weapons for the D-day landings were stored in Grovely woods, and thus, in our lurkings in the woods, we set our eyes on two very suitable long range fuel tanks, as used on aircraft, which we thought would suit our needs very well.

We managed to purloin these, at some considerable risk, and dragged them home through the woods. They gave us years of Swallows and Amazons style adventures, among which was the irrigation ditches period.

The game was to drag the boat up one of the ditches, and then with a rope threaded through a ring in the bows and passed out to boys on either side of the ditch on the grass, they would

run hell for leather towards the river, letting go of the rope at the very last moment before they ran into the river, and watching the craft shoot out into mid-stream to be caught by the current and spun round at an alarming speed with the idiot boy aboard being totally unable to control it for a second. And if the ditch should be frozen - you can imagine the extra speed the vessel could have.

And now we have just had the wettest November on record, with 51 days of wind and rain, and people in the coffee shops have started to cough and sneeze (is that why they are coughee shops?).

And that reminds me of another time, long ago, when my wife had a sore throat, and as it happened to be a Saturday afternoon, she asked me to go down to the chemist and get something for it. Ever obedient, I did as I was bid. As it happened our doctor was there. He

was a big 'tweedy' man. When he heard me asking for something for a sore throat, he came round, put his hand under my chin, jerked my head back, said, 'Open wide young man', and peered into my mouth.

'Ohoo nasty' he said. Whereupon he rummaged about in his case and came up with a revolting green coloured pill the size of a half-crown, stuffed it into my mouth, patted me on the head, said 'Swallow that before you can taste it'.

The curious thing is I walked out of the chemist's like a zombie and went home - without the throat sweets. My wife was not amused, and neither was I.

I went back again later when the doctor was gone!

Of course this sort of thing wouldn't happen under the NHS - or would it!