
Aspects of Chilham



Toads in Mountain Street

The toads of Mountain Street mentioned in Don Poole's recent parish magazine article, reminded me that, shortly before Don's arrival, Henry Fearon in "The Pilgrimage to Canterbury" [1956 Associated Newspapers Ltd], named this quiet lane "*the Road of the Thousand & One Toads*"

He wrote:

If Charing is beautiful (and no one will deny it that) then Chilham, which lies farther on along the road, is glorious. For myself, I would not like to choose between the relative attractions of the two villages ! Both were loved by the pilgrims as they journeyed on their way to Canterbury, and both, I know, will be loved by those who follow in their footsteps - now. We come to Chilham by a curious road, rising steeply from the forest—that same " narrow, hollow steep Way" which Erasmus mentions, with " a cragged steep bank on either side, so that you can't escape it "; but for me this road has special charms, and it is one I come to every year—when spring arrives—for a strange and special reason.

For this is the Road of the Thousand and One Toads, and here it is that toads breed in such profusion that, at times, it is impossible to walk along the road without stepping on them. The farm-carts which use the lane down to the forest cause havoc, and the slaughter of toads is quite terrific ; but for centuries the Toads of Kent have come to Chilham to be born, and for centuries, I hope, they will continue in this admirable practice. Every year, I put a couple in my pocket as I pass this way, and I may claim to have as fine a collection of Chilham Toads as anyone in England !

The pilgrims, incidentally, took a toad with them as well, though what its virtue was, I do not know; but it takes a man of humble heart to love a toad, and probably this was the reason!

Though the toads, like Chilham's herons, have all but vanished, this peaceful spot is not without interest to those with a sense of history.

More of this anon.....

Michael H. Peters
January 2008