

# RUTLAND: THE TOY COUNTY

By H. E. BATES

**I**N every litter of pigs there is one smaller than all the rest, called in some parts the dilling, and in the litter of English counties Rutland may be considered the dilling pig. Almost overlaid, as Shakespeare said in connection with Falstaff, by Lincolnshire, always overshadowed in guide-books by Northamptonshire and in constant danger of being overridden by Leicestershire, this is the forgotten baby of the English county system.

It recalls those tiny kingdoms which still exist in Europe, proudly independent but for-

gotten in the body of larger countries, where generals outnumber privates, where Governments remain tenaciously at war with other Governments though everyone else has declared peace, or where peace is tenaciously continued though everyone else is at war.

Rutland, like one of these toy kingdoms, has no claim to exist. Consider its size—18 miles long, 15 miles wide, 60 miles in circumference; its population—about 20,000; its towns—two, both of them villages, Uppingham with about 3,000 inhabitants, Oakham, the county town, with about 4,000. No rivers, no

hills, no moors, no cathedrals, no manufactures, no sea coast, no celebrated beauty spots, no claim to be looked at, let alone be separate.

Who ever heard of another county town like Oakham, a one-eyed, one policeman village where horses stand tethered to lamp-posts on dreamy mornings just as they might have stood there when Jane Austen was writing *Emma*? You could look round Oakham in ten minutes. There may be a cinema; I don't know. You could look round Uppingham in another ten. After that, you might say, there is nothing to



J. Dixon-Scott

A TYPICAL RUTLAND LANDSCAPE

Copyright

Looking west from the Uppingham-Peterborough road. The village on the left is Morcott, near Uppingham

keep you in Rutland. If you doubt this, look up the guide-book. "Rutland," it says with finality, "has no claim to be regarded as a picturesque county."

This, as I hope to show, only proves the value of guide-books. Rutland is the most orderly and decent little county in England, the most rural, perhaps the most pastoral. If you measure scenery by the Yorkshire dales, by Lakeland, by Snowdonia, or even by the rich yeoman beauty of Kent and Sussex, there is no scenery in Rutland. The guide-book will advise you, if you happen to be an artist, not to paint there. But then no guide-book could conceivably have recommended Van Gogh to paint himself minus one ear.

Scenically and architecturally, Rutland must be seen in relation to the great limestone chain that runs diagonally across England, north-east from Somerset. This stone is the bone-structure on which the green muscles of the rolling uplands have been moulded. It is the same combination of low hills and stone that makes the Cotswolds.

As you come up from Oxfordshire you can follow the course of creamy stone, deepening to sienna in the Northamptonshire iron zones, almost pollen-coloured in the famous Weldon district, growing at last a little greyer, more northern, sometimes white, as you come over



THE MARKET PLACE AT OAKHAM, WITH THE BUTTER CROSS



J. Dixon-Scott Copyright

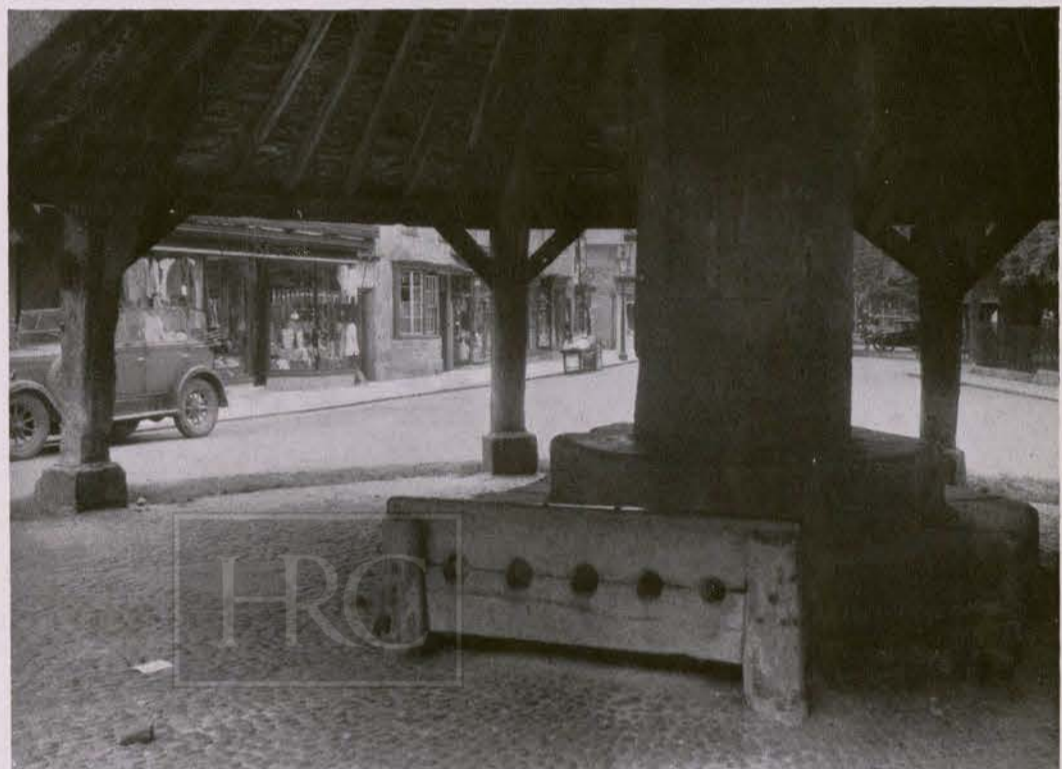
THE PUMP AT OAKHAM

the Northamptonshire border into Rutland. In the Cotswolds it is the whole architecture, from the great wool-churches down to the walls of the fields; up through Northamptonshire the field-walls cease, recur, cease, and then recur again at the north-eastern end, becoming strong again in Rutland.

And this combination of rolling grassland and stone field-wall has great charm. Its beauty arises from contrast, grey-cream against green, solidity against softness, bone against flesh. Rutland rolls in a series of valleys, and the bony switchback of walls keeps the eye swinging away over the distances as hedges cannot do.

These runs of stone are broken by the villages, with very endearing names like Edith Weston, Stoke Dry, Whissendine, Tickencote, Thorpe by Water, and by stone manorial houses, and sometimes farmhouses, that have that air of timeless prosperity and clean beauty that is typical of the richest of Cotswold architecture. There are barns here, with high arched entrances, that have the impressiveness of churches. Their richness arises, of course, from the richness of the land, which is in turn expressed in the parklands, such as Exton, with its great lake, and in the churches themselves, of which the example of late and enriched Norman at Tickencote is superb.

It is stone, I think, that gives the whole county its air of clean neatness. It is good that there are no towns. One straggling bit of raw industrialism would have ruined this



W. F. Taylor

Copyright

INTERIOR OF THE BUTTER CROSS, SHOWING THE ANCIENT STOCKS



J. Dixon-Scott

THE VILLAGE AND CHURCH OF COTTESMORE  
The Kennels of the famous Hunt are at Oakham

Copyright



J. Dixon-Scott

GENERAL VIEW OF UPPINGHAM  
The school buildings are seen on the left

Copyright



THE HALL AT OAKHAM CASTLE

Any peer passing through Oakham for the first time was required to give a horseshoe to the lord of the Castle. Many of these, some of great size, are preserved on the walls

landscape of calm decency. Stone is quarried at Ketton, where cement is also made, and at Clipsham, almost on the border. There is nothing else to upset the grasslands, the parks, the hunting packs, the schoolboys wearily paper-chasing on winter afternoons.

An ancient custom dictated that the first time any peer passed through Oakham he must give a horseshoe to the lord of Oakham castle. A large number of these are preserved on the walls of the castle hall—famous among antiquaries as the only Norman hall in existence, complete with its round niches and romanesque capitals to the stout columns. The horseshoes are of every size up to nearly six feet high: many of them bear the coronet and name of their donor, and go back to Elizabethan date. Thus it is perfectly correct that Oakham should be what it is: a toy county town, sleepy with mediaeval houses and tea-shops, two or three hotels, a

Butter Cross, a grammar school, and a faint smell of standing horses. It is, in some ways, the pleasantest county town in England. It appears long ago to have given up the pretence, so common to county towns that flaunt the rather sinister pageantry of judges on circuit and high-walled gaols overshadowing the pleasant pavements, of being important. Like Uppingham it is an over-sized village on a hill, a kind of pleasant accident in a pleasant place.

Except for the school, Uppingham would, I suppose, long since have slipped into absolute obscurity. Take away the school buildings and, in contrast to Oundle, nothing remains. Neither Leland nor Camden mentioned the place with credit, *Domesday Book* not at all. And now there is an air of rather grey prosperity about the place, beside which Oakham seems quite coloured and gay. The one long street breaks into a little market place, with a hotel or two, and then slides away over the hill up which the tired paper-chasers and the steaming hunters struggled back in the sunsets of peace-time winter afternoons.

So in reality there is nothing to go to Rutland for: unless, by some chance, you happen to like things in miniature. And on that principle, the principle that though big pigs are invariably hideous, if lovable, little pigs are both lovable and enchanting, Rutland is the most charming piece of land within official boundaries in England. It is something of a mystery, too, for it remains uncertain as to how, when or why this toy county got its separate existence.

Its name, too, is uncertain in origin. It seems certain only that from remote times it has been a remote land. And it remains so to-day—unspectacular, unassuming, off the map, so little that it is almost absurd: the littlest pig of the county litter, the dilling, in some ways the darling of them all.



"Country Life"

THE OLD HALL AT NETHER HAMBLETON

Copyright

"That air of timeless prosperity and clean beauty that is typical of the richest Cotswold architecture"