

Willow Cottage

Curtis Mill Green

1996 update

One job that has been "on the list" for some years is the uncovering of the old road that ran across the top of Curtis Mill Green to join what is now the London Road at Passingford Bridge. Traces of this can be seen on the 1777 map of the district. Last year when a couple of strong grandsons and an enthusiastic granddaughter seem willing to tackle the task we were delighted. Earlier mention has been made of this road which in the 16th and 17th centuries seemed to have been much used. Its sunken surface and the banks on each side have always been very obvious, and when clearing was started it was easy to follow the direction of the road, and very exciting to see it curve away under the arching branches of overhead trees. It is, of course, a very minor clearing, but seems romantic to visualise the old carts rambling off to London, and to picture it Dick Turpin himself riding Black Bess through the mist. Last year when we took friends into the forest to see the road, there are as in the days of Good King Henry, stood half a dozen deer, still and silent for a moment before they bounded away. Very beautiful and evocative, but they are becoming an increasing problem in the garden -- so destructive to young trees and so difficult to keep out. This winter we have also suffered from a surfeit of rabbits!

For the past few years we have had a garden walk in June, when the popular broadcaster Ken Crowther of BBC Essex Radio and Crowther Nurseries answers questions. He has broadcast two editions of his gardening programme from the cottage garden, one on Boxing Day and one the following summer. It was not the first time that Willow Cottage had been "on the air". Dick had broadcast in November 1969 when he wrote and wrote a piece for Woman's Hour. It was called "Count Your Blessings", and regaled the listeners with an account of buying the cottage and learning to live in the country. It was, he wrote, a constant battle against birds, moles, squirrels, rabbits and deer! Nothing changes!

Most of our regular supporters will have noticed the great improvement in the road surface. The Green is now managed by a few of the residents who give their time to help keep things running smoothly. We also now have a grant from the council to maintain the road in reasonable condition. Everyone who lives on the Green has an interest in keeping the "feel" of this place special, and preserving its unique atmosphere. Here is a deep sense of peace and history, for here truly "a country habit hath me by the heart, for he is bewitched forever who has seen, not with his eyes but with his soul, spring flow through the woods and stipple leaves with green".