

A Visit to Ewelme

An Extract from “Gone Rustic” by Cecil Roberts

‘That afternoon I went to Ewelme.



Ewelme Village

‘I have not yet recovered from the fact that for three years I lived near to anything so lovely and surprising without discovering it. Surely it is one of the loveliest old churches in England?



Ewelme Church



The Almshouses

‘It has a battlemented exterior, a gargoyled tower, and an alms chapel added about 1437. An almshouse for thirteen old men is reached through an archway of moulded brick, and the cloister of these almshouses has uprights of black timber with herringbone brick between them. All the bedrooms have dormer windows with a sitting room below each. Nearby there is a school, also of Tudor brick, with square-headed stone-mullioned windows and rectangular dripstones. This noble group of buildings clings to the hillside, with the village and its watercress bed below.



Ewelme Primary School



Ewelme Watercress Beds

'But it was concerning Mr. Chaucer that I had come hither, so I hurried on into the church. I must not digress, though sorely tempted. I could write pages about the roofs. The chapel roof is of beautifully carved Spanish chestnut, and, as the beetle cannot attack the wood, it has never been restored since the early fifteenth century. There is a carved font cover, with the Tudor rose on its counterpoise, four diminishing tiers of arches, and a richly crocketed spire with the figure of St. Michael on top. There are fantastically carved corbels and fifteenth-century brasses.

'Yet it is the tombs that make this church so rich in interest. That of the Duchess of Suffolk is a masterpiece. She has a ducal coronet on her head, and the Garter on her left forearm. Over her head is a canopy carved from a single block of alabaster. In the open space below the tomb (the Sexton supplies a cushion and loves to make you go down on your hands and knees) there is a gruesome emaciated figure of the Duchess in death. This lady married, first, Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, killed at Orleans in 1428; and secondly the Duke of Suffolk, who was murdered. His father was killed at Agincourt, but lies here, for his body was boiled and brought to England.



Ewelme Church Interior



Tomb in Ewelme Church

'Now this Duchess, so lovely above and so gruesome below her tomb, was Alice Chaucer. And this Alice Chaucer was the daughter of the Thomas Chaucer whose tomb lies nearby. Duke John gave to the church his mother's, the Duchess's tomb, the font cover and the shields on the tomb of Thomas Chaucer, his grand father. And this Thomas Chaucer, who died in 1434, was the son of Mr. Chaucer the poet.'

From "Gone Rustic" by Cecil Roberts, published 1934 by Hodder and Stoughton.