

Down Your Way

Top author
living in very
cordial place

SOUTH Woodchester's unspoilt surroundings have long attracted a rich mixture of residents.

Those inspired by its beauty include the wealthy 19th Century merchant William Leigh whose influence led to the village becoming a centre for the Roman Catholic faith.

Today the village is home to a variety of people including actors, an award-winning children's author and an order of nuns.

Few people know the Woodchester area better than 89-year-old Lance Cordwell.

Lance was born in North Woodchester but moved to the south of the village after marrying his school sweetheart Kate Garland.

After leaving school he studied planning and design and joined his father's firm of builders and undertakers.

Despite his advanced years, Lance is a keen gardener and grows a wide variety of vegetables and flowers.

He is also a stalwart member of the bell ringers at St Mary's Church in North Woodchester.

"I was on the tenor for years but they won't let me ring the big ones now so I have to be content with a baby one," he said.

Lance has seen a great number of houses built in North Woodchester, although fewer in the south of the village.

"They cannot go so far with building here because the lanes are so narrow," he said.

Lance's neighbour and fellow bell ringer is the award-winning children's author Aidan Chambers.

Aidan recently travelled to Switzerland to receive the international Hans Christian Andersen award for his book *Postcards From No Man's Land* which tackled adultery, euthanasia and homosexuality.

In 2000 he beat JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* to win the Carnegie medal for children's writing.

Aidan, who is currently working on his sixth book, came to the Stroud area as a member of an order of monks called the Community of the Glorious Ascension that was based at Stratford Park.

He also taught English at Archway School in the 1960s before finding his vocation an author.

Aidan and his wife Nancy moved to South Woodchester in 1975.

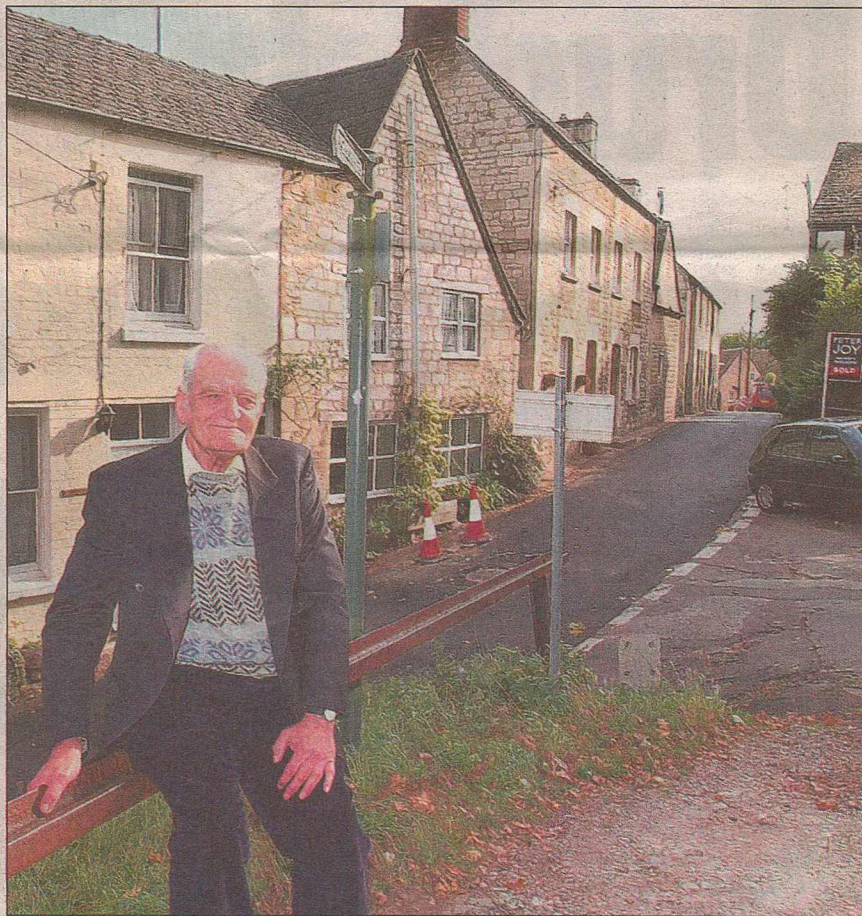
"We didn't really choose the village - we chose our house because it was what we wanted and everything else turned out to be right," Aidan said.

"It has a lovely view looking towards St Chloe and Rodborough. I work in an upstairs room which looks over the car park of our local pub, The Ram, which is interesting when I am writing."

John Boswall was unforgettable in his role as the ancient butler in the 1990s film *Three Men and a Little Lady*.

But the part was just one of many per-

Pictures: C224009-MP56



■ **OFF STAGE:** Actor John Boswall has made his home in South Woodchester for three years and at 82, is still "in the market" for TV and film parts.

formed by John during his 32 years as a professional actor.

John, known to most people in South Woodchester by his real surname of Stuart, started performing on stage at the age of 11.

But it was not until he was 50 and running a toy shop that his career as a professional actor took off.

"As an amateur I had acted for a director called David Jones," John recalled.

"He got in touch with me after several years and said he had written a piece and one of the parts he had written was me.

"I went to Equity and got a temporary membership and afterwards started banging on people's doors to work off my 40 weeks to become a full member."

John started using the name Boswall when he joined Equity as the actors' union already had a member called John Stuart.

Over the years he has worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company and at many of the country's most respected theatres.

John moved to South Woodchester three years ago with the family of his fellow actor Richard Latham.

And despite turning 82 and undergoing an operation on his throat last year, he has no plans to give up his acting career.

"I am still in the market as it were," he said.

It is largely due to William Leigh that South Woodchester has its own Catholic church, school and convent.

Leigh, for whom the unfinished gothic masterpiece Woodchester Mansion was intended, was a deeply religious man.

He invited members of a religious movement known as the Passionists to live in the village, although they were later replaced by Dominican friars.

Leigh also paid a large share towards the construction of the Priory Church of the Annunciation.

The building was designed by the architect Hansom, although Pugin is said to have been involved in its early stages.

Today worshippers travel from as far as Nailsworth, Minchinhampton, Avening and Horsley to attend services at the priory church.

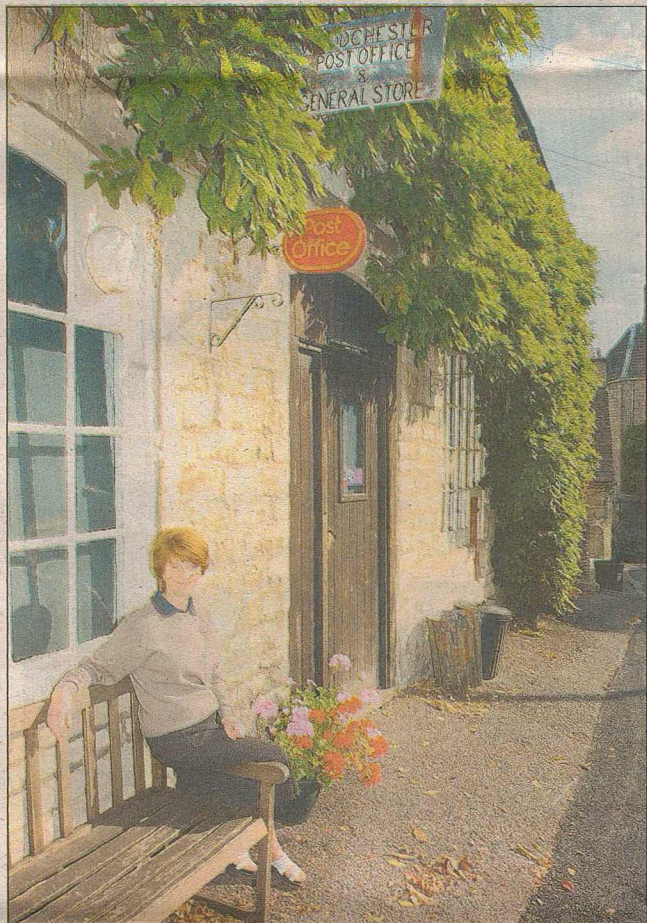
Father Piers Linley has been their parish priest for the last three years, although his association with South Woodchester dates back to 1958 when he joined the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans, which had a house for novices in the village.

He was ordained in 1968 and has spent most of his time since then preparing people to become priests, although he returned to South Woodchester to look

In our weekly feature reporter Sue Painter visits villages and hamlets across the Stroud area meeting the personalities at the heart of their communities...

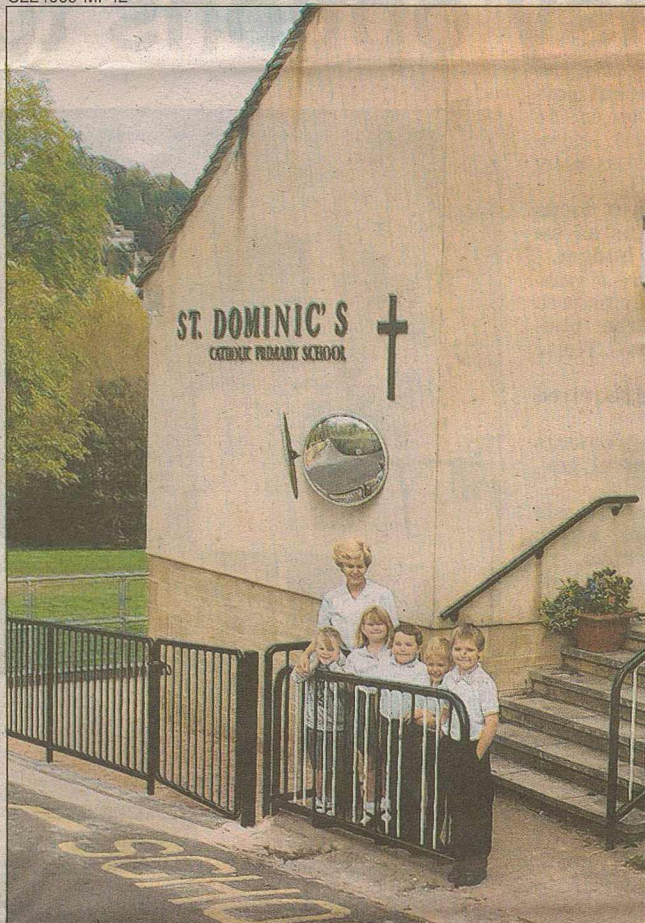


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■ **STAMP OF AUTHORITY:** Julia Morgan took on the village post office and stores 17 years ago after looking for a job that she could combine with bringing up her young daughter.

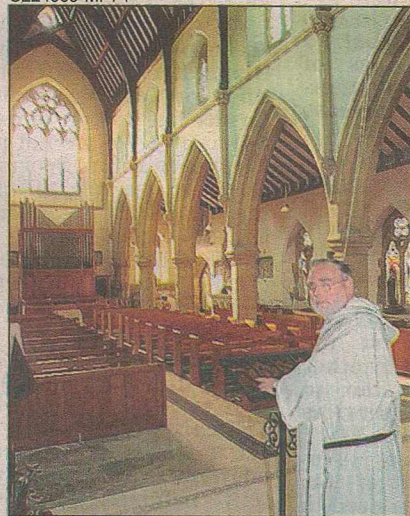
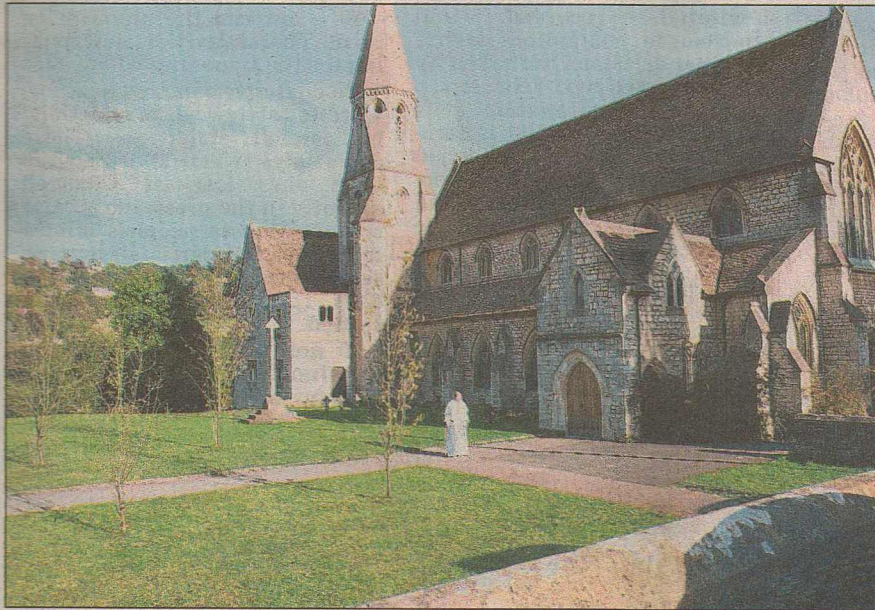
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■ **SCHOOL:** St Dominics Catholic Primary School pupils with head Margaret Smith. About a third of its 71 children are Catholics, with the rest sympathetic to the school's Christian ethos.

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■ **WORSHIP:** Left – The Priory Church of the Annunciation, South Woodchester with (above) Father Piers Linley inside the church.

after the parish whenever its incumbent was on holiday.

“I will have been the parish priest here for three years at Christmas although I have been assisting the church here for something like 30 years,” he said.

Nuns known as the Poor Clares came to South Woodchester in 1860.

Their main work revolves around prayer, although the sisters earn an income by baking communion wafers, or altar breads, for around 200 churches and convents.

They also hold meditation groups that are attended by Catholics and Anglicans from the area.

The Convent of Poor Clares at South Woodchester currently has nine members, aged between 40 and 89.

The nuns dress in dark brown with a black veil and a cord with three knots signifying their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Sister Mary Anthony explained that the convent was “enclosed”.

“We go out for necessary things such as doctor’s appointments and shopping but normally we stay in our enclosure,” she said. “We live a very simple life.

“We are here really to give glory to God and to pray for the world and the people in it. A number of people come to us and ask for prayers and we try to support them.”

St Dominic’s Catholic Primary School was founded in 1884 and takes in pupils from the villages surrounding South Woodchester.

Around a third of its 71 children are Catholics, with the rest sympathetic to the Christian ethos of the school.

Head teacher Margaret Smith said pupils benefited from small classes and a wide range of after school clubs.

Its children also have the opportunity to learn a variety of musical instruments.

“We are constantly aiming for excellence in numeracy and literacy but we also believe in the wider curriculum,” she said.

Frogmarsh Mill has been put to many uses over the years, including a pin factory and a tannery.

It is now home to a number of companies including Bottlegreen Drinks Co.

Bottlegreen was founded by Kit and Shireen Morris in 1989 after they moved to Gloucestershire with dreams of mak-

ing English wine. Their business really started to take off when the couple started developing their non-alcoholic elderflower cordial.

Bottlegreen now sells a range of cordials, presses and spritzers nationwide and employs 35 people.

Legions of people still pick elderflowers for the company every June and July, although in recent years a local farm has started growing them especially for the soft drinks company.

The Water Warehouse has been based in the old water tower at Frogmarsh Mill since 1999. It distributes water coolers to factories, offices and workshops throughout the South West.

Julia Morgan must be one of the best known faces in South Woodchester.

She took on the village post office and stores 17 years ago after looking for a job that she could combine with bringing up her young daughter.

“I came from Bristol and used to work for the telecoms side of the GPO,” she said. “It was only by chance that my husband and I found this place as we did not know the area at all.

“It was quite a surprise to discover what a lovely area it was.”