

Ringmere: Portrait of a
Village

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RINGMORE

SITUATED roughly in the centre of Bigbury Bay, with its beautiful coastal scenery and cliffs that vary in colour from red to dark slate, is Challaborough Cove and, inland, just half a mile to the north lies the unspoilt cob and thatch village of Ringmore. Writers describe it as "very attractive," "amiable, rambling—as pleasant as much of Devon once was," and mention that it has "charming views for the photographer".

Ringmore, most of which dates from the period between the 16th and 18th centuries, owes its preservation to its natural position in a wooded coombe among the hills: that is to say, largely to luck, for it would be difficult to adapt it to the requirements of the present commercial age to any great extent. Even nearby Challaborough, with its caravans, and the more residential Bigbury-on-Sea do not extend very far beyond their respective coastal positions due to the sharply rising contours of the hinterland and the narrowness of most of the lanes. And there are no towns near enough or large enough to attract suburban-type development at Ringmore. The small market town of Modbury is three miles to the north, on the A.379, while the larger town of Kingsbridge to the east, is five miles "as the crow flies," but about twice this distance by road—which has to go round the Avon estuary.

So Ringmore stays peaceful. Although the village receives its share of holiday visitors who pause here for a while, one is not too conscious of the presence of the motor vehicle. Indeed, the lanes in the lower part below the parish church (where one has no room anyway, to

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turn a car) have about them a languid quality which, one feels, conveys the true spirit of the place. Even the village inn, which is sited down a leafy lane on one side of the coombe, gives an impression of wanting to stay "away from it all" and is appropriately named the *Journey's End*.

But at one period of its history at least Ringmore was the centre of quite a commotion. It was during the Civil War when the Rev. William Lane was rector of the parish. Mr. Lane was a devoted supporter of King Charles, and when the Parliament men were storming the royalist garrison at Salcombe Castle, he thought of a unique way to prevent the enemy from receiving reinforcements. The besiegers' supply convoys, he observed, were travelling along the road that crossed the Avon by the bridge below Loddiswell, but it was he, Mr. Lane, who, apart from being rector of Ringmore, held the incumbency of the neighbouring parish of Aveton Giffard, and from here a commanding view of the Loddiswell bridge could be obtained.

The intrepid rector soon evolved a plan to harass the Roundheads, which proved to be highly successful. He mustered the able-bodied men of his parish, and, having trained them for the task ahead and acquired some cannon, he mounted a battery in a strong and well protected position from which the bridge could be kept under constant surveillance. As soon as an enemy convoy was seen to approach it the guns fired with great effect and supplies of food and ammunition were destroyed.

Eventually the officer commanding the besieging



• Above: The attractive little cove of Challaborough, half a mile south of Ringmore village.

• Opposite page: The Parish Church of All Saints' is unusual in that it has one of the few spires to be seen in the villages of Devon. In a secret chamber inside the spire the Rev. William Lane once hid for three months from Roundhead soldiers during the civil war.

• Below: The delightfully situated village inn.





• A contrast in building styles—the slated house is also the village Post Office.

force sent for aid from the Parliamentary garrison in Plymouth, and several boatloads of soldiers were sent by sea to capture the warlike rector. They are believed to have landed at Ayrmer Cove from where they soon reached Ringmore. But Mr. Lane, forewarned by one of his messengers, took refuge in a small chamber in the church tower, where at least he had the luxury of a fireplace, and here he remained for three months, secretly nourished by his parishioners. The Roundhead contingent ransacked the parsonage and made a thorough search of the surrounding countryside, but Mr. Lane's hideout was never discovered.

Alas, it was not long before the rector was ejected from both his livings. Some years later, in 1654, he decided to walk to London to place his case before the authorities, but he died of a fever on the way.

Those who explore the Ringmore district will no doubt be surprised that the church has a tower at all, for they are rare in Devon. The present building was heavily restored in 1862-3 and the Victorian influence still predominates. But the north transept contains Norman work from an earlier church.

At Okenbury, between Ringmore and the neighbouring village of Kingston, is a Domesday manor and here, it is said, are substantial remains of a former mediaeval mansion. But the present owner knows nothing of its whereabouts. The only historic building on his land, he explained, was the ruin of an old (square) dovecot, and he had knocked this down because he needed the stone for his farm.

• A quiet back-lane where time passes slowly.





• Top left : The thatcher's art.

• Above left : Three of the younger inhabitants who were no doubt rather amused by our strange appearance.

• Top right : A seat in the sun.

• Above right : A leaning chimney lends character to this lovely little cottage.

WHO ARE THE THREE CHILDREN IN THE PICTURE?

THE YEAR OF THE ARTICLE IS 1968 AND THE
CHILDREN LOOK BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT.

ARE THEY STILL IN RINGMORE

MASQUARADING AS ADULTS?

WHERE WAS THE SEAT WITH STONE PILLARS ?

IF YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS TO ANY OF THESE

QUESTIONS PLEASE LET US KNOW.