

# A baked hedgehog *John Holder*

Through the single lane of this pretty village I go, slowing down on my Rudge bicycle, sometimes peddling backwards to maintain balance. We are in the Warfield, just two deer leaps from Bridgnorth, pausing here and there to inspect intrepid primroses lodged in cuttings beneath the hedges. Many wild flowers have come to this village knowing they will be welcome and cherished. Snowdrops near the bole of an ancient yew and daffodils prim and proper in cottage gardens, lend a pleasant colour to the church precepts.

The sun is shining, skewering betwixt the trees branches that are speckled with minute green buds. Bullfinches, yellowhammers chaffinches and several black-birds warble and chirp my presence to all. I invade their sanctuary with relish.

I notice an old warren in a clump of bracken with bluebells popping up to see if it might be true - spring is here! I rest here, and peckish, began to eat my apple and cheese sandwiches. Just then a robin alights two feet away, pleased with my crumbs. I fidget and notice an urchin hedgehog baking and basking in the sunshine, oblivious to me but content. A slow, cold wind reminds me that spring is not yet complete. I move quietly to keep my shadow from this wallowing, slumbering hedgehog who mumbles now and again.

The sun turns crimson and delightful, I smell the wafting woodsmoke as it assails my nostrils, a seven coloured linnet flies overhead, cascading through Queen Anne's lace, onto a gate troubled with the marks of ages past.

I glance towards our basking hedgehog but he or she has moved to a more private domain - I leave a morsel of apple and bread. The sun is now seeking respite, as if an arrow at the end of its flight, making a leisurely curvature on its way.

I ride away noting the surprised bleat of suckling lambs, watching me as I watch them - I hope to mutual satisfaction.

A bevy of wood pigeons fly overhead as I cycle through the winding lazy lanes, on to the hamlet of Badger, with its thatched cottages and pretty church slumbering by a pool. Riding on I am haunted by the whistle of birds and the scent of flowers and farm life. I hear the church clock strike seven - soon nature's music will be mute.

*A regular correspondent and contributor, John wins the £10 gift token for this wonderfully evocative article. Thank you, John.*

