

Above: *One of the approaches to the village, far from the roar of the main road traffic.*

MIDLAND VILLAGES

PLUNGAR

A FEW short years ago, the village of Plungar was nothing if not truly rural. Remote from Leicester in a spur of the county that runs north between the shires of Nottingham and Lincoln, it was recognised only as being part of that superb dairy farming district that is comprised in the Vale of Belvoir. Then suddenly little Plungar got its name into the newspaper headlines. It was the scene of what, in England—if not in Kuwait—constitutes quite a rich strike of crude oil. A prospecting company, working in close co-operation with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., made a series of drillings to a depth of 3,000 feet. Several were successful, and one of the wells disclosed was, for at least a short time, gushing oil to the surface under its own pressure. So a new and all-the-year-round harvest had come to fruition in the pleasant fields of Plungar.

Ever since, people who have to Plungar have tended to thi an old-world farming villa suddenly into a boom town, re oil and dotted about with pylon-like structures generally with oil production. The re that Plungar has changed Any sudden oily smells in its pure and wholesome air are r to result from a farmer rew tractor than from anything th cists have found in the u strata.

Apart from the fact that meadows, beam pumps ca working and looking rather like birds pecking on the groun little to indicate the unusual na contribution the village is making to the national economy. Twice a day two tankers arrive, and unobtrusively remove the stored output of crude oil from tanks near the pumps.

Borings still go on in the hope that the small group of wells now yielding in the parish may be extended. But the technicians who have been responsible for the oil prospecting and well development at Plungar have respected the ancient agricultural heritage of the village. Their aim has been to preserve the rustic atmosphere. So each pumping site takes up only a small patch of ground, and beyond its boundary fence the cattle graze undisturbed, just as though a barn, or a couple of hayricks had been fenced off.

While the oil is being taken away daily for refining, the prospecting programme continues. The boring teams avoid unnecessary interference with farm land as they flit their heavy equipment, steel towers and powerful motors from one drilling site to the next. In many cases



Above: *The village post office.*

St. Helen's, the Parish Church.



they have actually helped farmers by grubbing out hedges on request with their bulldozers, or doing a bit of earth moving with their time-saving machines, as a token of goodwill.

The village itself stands on a ridge of hills overlooking the Vale of Belvoir, and specialising, as it has for centuries, in the production of milk. Manufacture of Stilton cheese, for which the Vale is famous, has died out at Plungar, though it is still continued on quite a large scale in a number of villages in the district. A Plungar dairy which was once used for the farmhouse industry of cheese making has been closed for years, and is now converted into a house and garage. A few women who once worked in the local Stilton cheese industry still live in the village. Some, including Mrs. H. Watson, of the Cottage, Plungar, keep the tools of their trade, such as hoops and boards, although there is little possibility of the industry ever being revived. Nowadays, most of the village girls travel away to work in factories and shops in the big towns.

The parish church of St. Helen, or Holy Cross, is a neat structure in the centre of the village. It was restored and reseated about 100 years ago, when a new stone pulpit was erected, and the south aisle was rebuilt and enlarged and a porch and new vestry were added. Church records are unfortunately non-existent prior to 1754, all the registration prior to that date being missing. There is a story in the village, perhaps without foundation, that a former parish clerk was also the village grocer, and that he used the records and documents occasionally to wrap up the goods.

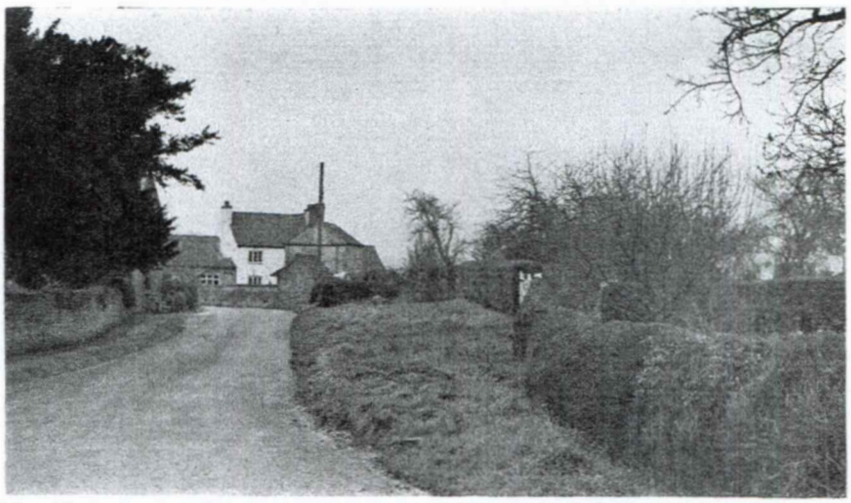
An interesting ecclesiastical point about Plungar is that it is the last place in the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Over at the other side of the adjacent Nottingham to Grantham canal and the parallel railway track, the northern territory of the Archbishop of York begins.

Plungar was in years gone by, quite famous for its sporting traditions, and particularly for its cricket team. Then for some reason the cricket club declined, and was disbanded. In the course of time, someone built a bungalow on the former pitch, and that was how the village came to have a house with the unusual name of "The Wicket." Lately the village cricket club has become re-established.

Until his retirment about a year ago, Mr. John Henry Welsh had been at Plungar Post Office since it was opened in 1911. His father was the first sub-postmaster, and he officially took over in 1937. On his retirement, he and his wife moved to another part of the village, but they still own and tend a garden on a small piece of ground opposite the post office building. They do this in memory of their only son, Noel John Welsh, who was killed in action on the road from Rome to Naples in the last war. Noel Welsh was the only serviceman of the village to lose his life in the 1939-45 war.



Above: *Some of the beautiful pasture land to be found around Plungar.*



Above: *Approaching the village from the adjoining villages of Barkestone and Redmile.*



Above: *Well-kept hedges and gardens are a great feature of this village.*

A section of the oilfields which are now being developed.

