



Calm, unhurried, beautiful — and it's Hampshire's Best Kept Village!

by ARTHUR BELLWOOD

THE Martin I refer to is delightful Hampshire village which has at long last won the coveted 'Best Kept Hampshire Village' competition. After

being runner-up on numerous occasions, local pride and the efforts of the villagers has reaped a just reward.

How did I come to be involved in this

annual struggle? In a word, unwittingly — although I should hasten to add, not unwillingly.

We were living in that part of Surrey commonly referred to as the stockbroker belt when, on my wife's return from a few days in the country, I was greeted with the announcement that she had found the perfect cottage in which to spend our weekends. Upon asking, "where?", she replied, "Martin". Never having heard of Martin — other than in connection with a man's name, which immediately roused my suspicions — my response was not exactly enthusiastic. However, on being informed that all I had to do was to take a quick look at the place, visit a nearby estate agent, and move in — in that order — the least I could do was to comply with her wishes.

After what I had been accustomed to, my first sight of the cottage was something of a shock. I am reliably informed that my first comment was, "It's a doll's house". Being over six feet tall I could foresee a series of cranial tragedies stretching before me — which prediction proved to be correct.

So we moved in and began two years of weekend commuting, tiring but worth it. Gradually, the lure of the countryside took precedence over the noise, traffic and hectic pace of London and consequently two years ago we became full-time residents of the village of Martin.

Originating from a Yorkshire village, the first thing that impressed me was the friendly atmosphere, accustomed as I had been for many years to the impersonality of the capital where I worked. People invited us into their homes so that from the very beginning we found ourselves drawn into the life of the village.

Martin is situated on the edge of Cranborne Chase and surrounded by rolling downland — Martin Down, Toyd Down, Tidpit Down — and rich arable and pasture land. Away from the mainstream of traffic, I'm pleased to say, it is nevertheless within easy reach of the facilities afforded by the towns of Salisbury and Fordingbridge.

The village was once part of the county of Wiltshire until a Local Government Act transferred it to the county of Hampshire. Its Wiltshire antecedents can, however, still be found in the dialect of the common speech of the local people.

The name Martin is derived from the old English words, 'maere' meaning a boundary, and 'tun' meaning a farm or settlement. Which probably accounts for the different ways in which the name has been spelt over the centuries — Mertun, Martone, Marton, to name but a few.

Despite its, to me, commonplace name, the village and the surrounding area is steeped in history. Parish boundaries appended to a charter ascribed to about 945, by which Martin and the