



Above: Temple Court. Right: Rob and Alison Archer's pub, The Bell at Bosbury.



more evocative of days gone by. Walking down the street you get a sense of centuries of real lives, real people.

The magnificent, 13th century Holy Trinity Church on the opposite side of the road, with its large, imposing detached tower, seems to guard or protect the village, gathering the houses around it like children. Rumour has it that the detached tower, one of only seven in the county, was built to protect the village from marauding Welsh and there is talk that a statute still exists permitting the shooting of Welsh people on sight – but only with a bow and arrow. Nobody's tried it recently, as far as I'm aware.

There is no doubt that Bosbury is a place of great antiquity. Apparently, the name Bosbury is from 'Bosanbirig', which is Anglo Saxon for 'Bosa's fortified place' or 'Bosa's Town'. Bosa, the owner of the land at Bosbury, held office as possibly the King's scribe, in the household of Witlaf, King of Mercia around 833 AD. It was thought that Bosa's influence with the king procured certain privileges. It may seem tame to us now, but for Bosbury's inhabitants, a regular market was a real treat. In gratitude they named the village after Bosa.

By the time of Domesday (1086 A.D.) the Bishops of Hereford owned Bosbury and probably had done for at least the previous three centuries. Bosbury was an important town at the time and in a completely ostentatious display of wealth the Bishops built themselves an extensive and spacious palace here, which became an important episcopal centre.

The Bishop's Palace was also a favourite residence of many a medieval bishop such as Richard de Swinfield, Bishop from 1282, who died at the palace in 1316. Surviving household records from 1289-90 show he had a staff of over 40. Vast quantities of food purchases were detailed in the records along with 3,344 litres of white wine. Interestingly the diocese had it's own prison

to confine insubordinate clergy, whether gluttony counted as insubordination is not recorded, but we suppose not.

Tragically, the Bishops Palace no longer exists, but the gateway to the palace does along with what is thought to be the prison. Looking at the gateway today, you certainly see how magnificent the palace must have been.

Our pub itself dates back to the 15th century and was originally two houses also thought to be owned by the ubiquitous Bishops of Hereford. The Bell was first mentioned as a pub (or inn as they called them then) in 1870 and was one of five such places in the village at the time. The Dog, also 15th century, still exists as a dwelling, but not a pub and is situated almost opposite the Bell in the main street. Another surviving pub is The Crown at the end of the village. This was formerly the mansion of the Harford family who flourished in the 16th century and whose tomb is in the church. Sadly, the Crown is also no longer a pub. That makes the Bell the only pub in the village.

Another significant part of Bosbury is Temple Court. The house is early 18th century, but is built on a site once occupied by the medieval Knights Templar. This international order, founded in the early 12th century, was military, but bound by religious vows and under the strictest discipline. Their purpose was to fight in defence of holy places and protect the Christians who journeyed to Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades. The Knights themselves took personal vows of poverty, but the organisation was the recipient of many estates from benefactors. They were full of integrity, proud and mighty, but the brotherhood was very wealthy. After two centuries it was this power and wealth that led to the Templars' downfall. In 1308 the Pope, the King of France and other Sovereigns of Europe arrested all the knights. They were charged with all manner

of crimes of which they were most likely innocent. After torture and death all the properties of the Knights Templar were seized. You can see stones inside the church that are thought to be memorials to those poor lost, Knights Templar.

The site at Bosbury passed through many hands and nothing remains apart from a few stones built into the walls of the present house. This early 18th century house was named Temple Court in honour of the previous religious owners. It is now home to the Blandfords, an enterprising family if there ever was one.

Gerald Blandford's pride and joy is his BOSA herd of pedigree Hereford cattle. These majestic beasts are awe-inspiring and it's a pleasure to see them in the fields around Bosbury. Also prodigious commercial apple growers, Gerald's daughter, Sarah Hawkins makes her own cider 'Sarah's Cider'. A granddaughter of the famous Symonds Cider of Stoke Lacy, Sarah uses windfall apples from the

traditional orchards, which are grazed by her father's Herefords in the summer. Sarah produces a crisp, light, refreshing cider for her family's consumption, but it's so good she has been persuaded to feature a few bottles of it at the Hop Pocket Craft Centre in Bishop's Frome, at Bosbury's Farmer's Market and at Bosbury's Blossom and Cider Festival in May.

It seems Bosbury residents are very industrious. Much to our delight we discovered the Squeaky Pig Company. Richard and Tracey Westwood make the most sublime sausages, bacon, chops, steaks, joints and gammon from their own herd of traditionally reared Gloucester Old Spots and Tamworths.

Richard and Tracey started about two-and-a-half years ago and sell all their produce through Farmers' Markets and private orders. The taste of their food is superb and I asked Richard how they managed to maintain such good quality meat. Says Richard, "We have a closed herd

which means we breed our own pigs. We also have a rare breed, which, not only helps to preserve the species, but also makes for the finest quality pork. Also, the pigs' feed is grown within five miles from home and we mix it ourselves. All of which helps to preserve the quality of the produce."

Tracey sells The Squeaky Pig produce at one or two farmer's markets a week, all within a 20-mile radius of Bosbury. So, not only succulent, flavoursome meat, but low food miles as well.

I don't know if Bosbury is typical of all villages, but I do know it's the most fantastic place to live. Not only is it quite beautiful and historic, and I've only managed to scratch the surface, there's always plenty to do. The villagers, in the main, are resourceful and indefatigable. They are always organising things, whether it's events for money raising or just entertainment. The Bosbury Players have just completed a production of Charley's Aunt, to great acclaim and are now rehearsing for My Fair

Lady. Organisation is under way for the second Bosbury Cider and Blossom Festival to be held on 19th May and there are also plenty of concerts in the Church. A monthly Farmer's Market takes place in the village hall, and 'Flicks in the Sticks' brings us major film showings. The Bowling Green and Tennis Courts are open to the public and there is also an Open Gardens day on June 10th where you can visit some of the beautiful gardens in the village.

There are also numerous walks, that don't have to be too arduous, but will take you across the beautiful Herefordshire countryside that surrounds Bosbury. This countryside is really Bosbury's well-kept secret or the jewel in its crown. Walking through the orchards or the hop fields is one of the most peaceful and tranquil things you can do. All walks are clearly marked on the Ordnance Survey map and the routes themselves are signposted.

There's a certain air about Bosbury that I've never felt before. It may be typical of country villages everywhere (who knows?), but there's definitely a community spirit that prevails and far from being ostracised as we'd half expected, we were very much welcomed with open arms. Very quickly we became part of the fabric and I can only admire and be grateful to these villagers for being so friendly and supportive.

I'll leave the last words on Bosbury to Samuel Bentley who wrote a very interesting account of the village in 1881. He includes the following, quite surprising, information:

*In the Gentleman's Magazine for September 1754, the following account may be read:-*

*'Some persons digging for gravel at Bosbury, in Herefordshire, on Thursday August 8 1754, discovered about a yard from the surface of the earth, eleven sets of human bones, but little decayed, and lying very regularly about a yard asunder, without the least appearance of having ever been enclosed in coffins'.*

Maybe they shot themselves some Welsh after all? ■

**USEFUL CONTACTS:**

- [www.thebellatbosbury.co.uk](http://www.thebellatbosbury.co.uk)
- [www.bosburyciderfest.co.uk](http://www.bosburyciderfest.co.uk) or tel: 01531 640678 for a full itinerary of the day's events.
- [www.bosbury-church.org](http://www.bosbury-church.org) which lists all the activities taking place in the Church including, on 17th August, the Lonsdale Consort, which is a concert by early music specialists using an array of period instruments.