

# *Froxfield*

## **A Gem in the Kennet Valley**

*By Mrs D. M. Bridle*

Between Marlborough and Hungerford, on the Bath road, lies Froxfield. The charm of this village lies in the spacious green quadrangle of the Duchess of Somerset's Hospital.

The Duchess was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1692, but her greatest monument is here. Over the gateway are her arms and the inscription:-

THE SOMERSET HOSPITAL  
FOR TWENTY CLERGY AND THIRTY LAY WIDOWS  
FOUNDED AND ENDOWED BY THE LATE MOST NOBLE  
SARAH DUCHESS DOWAGER OF SOMERSET  
A.D. MDCXCIV

Nowadays the tenants of these attractive little homes (all the cottages have recently been modernized and are self-contained) are not necessarily widows or even members of the Church of England. They come from all walks of life. Many of the ladies are keen and energetic gardeners, and it is a pleasure to see the results of their labours.

In the quadrangle is a small chapel which has recently been very beautifully restored. The blue and silver décor is lovely in its simplicity. The inscription on the chapel wall reads as follows:-

“The Original Chapel being in decay, The Right Honourable Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury, K.T. One of the Trustees Erected the present at his sole Expense A.D. MDCCCXIII Not only for the Accommodation of the Widows But out of respect to the memory of his late Noble Relative Sarah Duchess Dowager of Somerset, The Pious Foundress of this munificent Charity.”

In spite of the rush and noise of modern traffic near by, it is not difficult for a sensitive person, or even perhaps the less sensitive, to see and feel life as it was here in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is well worth while to visit the College, as it is known today, which is open to the public from 2-4 p.m. on Tuesdays from May – September – so the notice reads on the gatehouse wall. It is quite possible that visitors may be able to view on other days and times on application to the Warden, who lives in a bungalow in the College grounds.

The College is near the Kennet Canal, now, alas ! very derelict, but it is a pleasure to wander along its banks, where moorhen and coot are busy, and a swan may majestically pass, as one dreams of the former activity on the canal in this lovely valley.

The small flint church, with its single, rather appealing, bell, stands in a lovely setting, overlooking the villages and Kennet Valley. It was built over 800 years ago. There are two 12th-century doorways, a scratch dial, and a very old font, probably as old as the church itself. The architecture of this simple but lovely little church is 13th to 15th century. It is unusual in that the north wall is longer than the south.

The village shop is very picturesque; a little thatched cottage, where one is served with courtesy and friendliness.



Froxfield, I am told, means Frogs-field, which, with the Kennet flowing through, seems very appropriate.

Not far away is Littlecote Manor, and just over the Berkshire border is one of England's historic inns, The Bear Hotel.

Froxfield itself has The Pelican Inn, which must have seen many notorious happenings during its existence on the Great Bath Road.

*(Original source not recorded)*