



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

with broadcaster, author and man-about-Gloucestershire **Mark Cummings**



PHOTO: MARK CUMMINGS

The road closure that put a spanner in Mark's plans

Lost in Little Rissington

It was the most beautiful, sunny, crisp Cotswold day and I was on a mission. I had six hours to cover most of Gloucestershire to complete a task for a project that I'm really excited about and hope to reveal to you shortly. This was the only day I had to achieve my goal and, with the pressure on, I was keen to get a good start. My first job was to get to Little Rissington, find the church and capture the simple but stunning image of a Red Arrow plane in the stained-glass window. To my horror, as I approached the village from Bourton I was faced with the dreaded 'Road Closed' sign. Never mind, I thought, I'll do a cheeky re-route via Great Rissington and come back in the top way. That road was shut, too. I decided it was worth walking, despite the extra hour this would take. However, I got

into a bit of a panic as the church is a little way out of the village, my phone had died and the clock was ticking. I've longed to see the Red Arrow window close-up as the history of the squadron's time at RAF Little Rissington has always fascinated me. I was searching for an arrow and the irony of the following definition wasn't lost on me. 'An arrow is a graphical symbol used to point or indicate direction'. I had to navigate by gut instinct and the generosity of the villagers who pointed me to my final destination. The troublesome journey to St Peter's Church only added to the magic of finally meeting my ruby-red Holy Grail. I sat alone and in silence for a few minutes, thought about the squadron and all the stories I'd heard, took my photos, popped some change in the donation box and ran up the hill ready for my next challenge.



Worth the effort: The stained-glass Red Arrow at Little Rissington's St Peter's Church



Cheltenham's Cavendish House in the 1920s

PHOTO: DAVID HANKS/CREATIVE COMMONS

Closing-down sale

As the iconic Cavendish House in Cheltenham announces it is closing down, I thought I'd bring you some bargain tit-bits about this famous store. Author Joanna Trollope had a humble childhood growing up in Minchinhampton, and she once told me a visit to 'Cav House' was met with a mixture of excitement and awe. The whole family used to get dressed up in their smartest attire for the annual pilgrimage from the Valleys to Cheltenham. Other memories people have shared include the amazing food hall run

by Mr Warburton and Mr Simms, with its deli counter, butchers, fishmongers and confectionery, accompanied by the smell of fresh bread and roasting coffee. Christmas was a big deal with twinkly window displays, Santa and the magical toy department. A close friend of mine worked there and he told me about a drunken Christmas Eve when he and his mates broke into the toy department for a laugh. For legal reasons, I can't give you the whole story; all I can reveal is that he woke up with a throbbing head in a wigwam.

DIY DISASTERS

Our local Facebook group is a wonderful litmus test for what is really tickling the G Spot of Middle England. Potholes, a war in the Middle East, flooding issues, unnecessary road closures... none of these register even a flicker because they are drowned out by the only topic of the day – the introduction of self-service tills at Waitrose. The anger and sheer disbelief vented in the now 3,264 comments prove what a controversial and meaningful issue this is. I fear we lost one customer mid-rant to a heart attack because their comment tragically fizzled out. 'I had to start again when the bloody scanner failed to recognise my ginger and liquorice root tea, this is a total and utter...' then it just stopped, poor soul. When I gently mentioned there might be more to life, I was hit with an astonishing backlash. Jerry and Cynthia from the golf club subjected me to some vicious waterboarding (Jerry was in the forces), the taste of alkaline water with apple cider vinegar will never leave me. Dorothy from my Pilates class pepper-sprayed me with a subtle mixture of ripe chilli peppers flavoured with mace, turmeric and vanilla. Fellow Rotarian Colin pinned me down and repeatedly smashed me over the head with a rolled-up copy of the *Waitrose Food* magazine. Can you imagine the trauma of seeing Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's grinning face repeatedly thundering towards your mush? On the bright side, mid-assault, I did spot his lovely recipe for a warm leek and white bean salad.

My lucky horseshoe

The horseshoe bend of the River Severn at Arlingham is one of my happy places. I was there the other day and enjoyed a few minutes of solitude where I contemplated why it's so special. I always think of Ivor Gurney's poem *Severn and Somme* with his depiction from the trenches and his yearning for the view of the river with May Hill in the distance. I've watched the bore here, done some fishing, crossed to the other side in a canoe and had many great evenings at The Old Passage Inn. This famous establishment is now being refurbished and will be used as a pub again. My favourite recollection is the time I once fell asleep here in the long reedy grass and woke up to the sound of the choir at Newnham church drifting across the water. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. ●



Ivor Gurney yearned for the River Severn and May Hill

PHOTO: MARK CUMMINGS