



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

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



PHOTO: JIN TIGER MARKS STUDIO

Gladys' Leap in Cranham

Leap of faith

I want to share a lovely tale that sums up why the Cotswolds are unique, eccentric and witty. There is a magical place I visited recently that is so quirky it's ended up featuring on the OS map and also on the front cover of a famous album.

I had butterflies when I was approaching this location because in my mind it has reached mythical status. I was following the Google map arrow through the fields and woods near Cranham when I spotted the sign leading down to the water's edge. I was heading for Gladys' Leap, named after the Cranham-born postmistress Gladys

Hillier. She had delivered the post locally for 35 years and one particular house could only be reached by crossing the stream.

However, the plank of wood that spanned the water would often fall in meaning a very long round trip for Gladys to reach her destination. To avoid this time-consuming diversion, she would grab her post bag and leap the 3ft over the brook to make sure her community received its mail on time.

When she retired, her vaulting exploits were celebrated at a special leaving do arranged by the villagers. The band Fairport Convention picked up on this story and

decided to name their 14th studio album *Gladys' Leap* in 1985. The delightful story then captured the interest of the Ordnance Survey team who came down and registered this local landmark – it can be found at SO 8906 1206. If you put the words 'Gladys' Leap' into Google Maps it magically guides you through the windy single-track country lanes, eventually taking you onto a footpath that leads down to this iconic spot. Over the coming months I'll share my adventures when I visit other classic Cotswold landmarks including Granny's Pumps, Strip-and-at-it, Ready Token and The Land of Nod.



My garden plaque *inset*: Tramp poet WH Davies' cottage



Battle of the Plaques

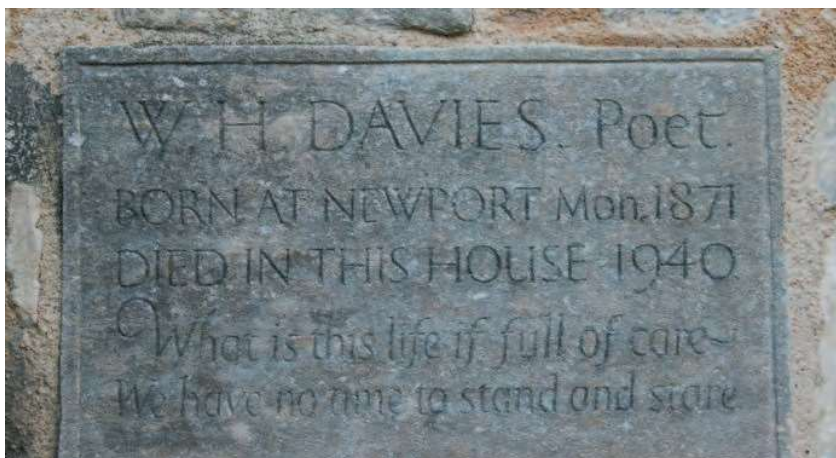
I've designed my garden to reflect everything I love about the Cotswolds. The Japanese maples were inspired by regular walks around Westonbirt Arboretum, the snowdrops by the stunning display at the Colesbourne Estate, the frogs in my pond came from spawn collected from a listener's garden in Gloucester and I fastidiously make sure I sip a cool local craft ale while chilling in the wild flower garden.

In this little paradise I have a wooden plaque hammered into my wall with the first two lines of one of my favourite poems:

*'What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand or stare?'*

The words come from the poet William

Henry Davies who spent his final years living in a small cottage in Nailsworth. He was known as the 'Tramp Poet' because in his early twenties he left his home in Wales and travelled through America as a hobo. His life on the road ended horribly when he lost his right leg in an accident while jumping from a train. He lived in various properties around the town ending up in Glendower, a small two-storey cottage with an elevated view over town. On a recent ramble I made a pilgrimage to his final resting place and ended up with severe plaque envy. His famous inscription is carved out of Cotswold stone and I'm glad I didn't have a hammer and chisel with me as I'm not sure if I could have resisted.



Plaque envy caused by the commemoration stone at Davies' grave

POLITICAL MINDER

It's general election year and I'm so glad to be out of the dogfight that ensues between the media and the politicians in the build-up. It was always a huge privilege to ask penetrating questions, hold people to account, untangle the spin and most importantly ask questions my listeners wanted answers to.

However, now I'm out of the rough and tumble I happily admit that I don't yearn for those days of trying to get a simple answer to a simple question. Some politicians 'get it' and know you are just doing your job, some don't. Many years ago, I was at a glorious party at Blackfriars Priory in Gloucester held to celebrate everything special and exciting about the Cotswolds. Staring at me from the bar area were three heavyweight local politicians who loathed me.

Luckily for me I was chatting to rugby legend Phil Vickery who always enjoyed my on air 'conversation' with the three stooges glowering at me. Acting as my own personal bodyguard, he escorted me to the bar, gave them a menacing stare and bought me a drink.

APRIL OR MAY?

As I've got older my favourite month has changed and I'm trying to work out why. I used to plump for July but age teaches us that summers usually over-promise while spring tends to do the opposite. I'm locked in a dilemma between April and May. In April I don't expect great weather but often we are treated to some blissful days which can be calmer and hotter than August. However, I also adore May because the warmth increases, the Cotswolds go crazy with eccentric activities and the whole summer still stretches ahead. I'm tempted to go for May as my favourite this year as I'm going to a Bruce Springsteen concert in Cardiff and I'm cycling from Bangor to Newent with some mates. Then again, in April my wife celebrates her birthday and for eight glorious months she is a year older than me. I'll opt for April as those cougar jokes never get old. ●