"That's the green belt," he replied.

So it was London's green belt, where no new building is allowed, that has saved so much of the countryside near the churchyard.

"But otherwise it's practically a suburb of London," he said. "In fact, some would like it to come under the London County Council. Rents are terribly dear out here. Fancy £2/8/- for a council house in these parts. That's what my daughter pays."

"It seems dear to me, compared with the rents of Government houses in New Zealand," I said. "I suppose you get a lot of visitors here?"

"Hundreds in a day at this time of the year. Look at that lot coming up the path now. With a guide," he added in a tone that gave his opinion of this kind of nonsense, from which I, without a guide and with the handle of a lawnmower in my hand, felt comfortably excluded.

"Well, it's a famous place," I said.

"Yes," he agreed, and continued: "There's a rare lot of yellow and black come to see this."

"Plenty of Jamaicans, I suppose. But what about yellow? Do you mean Chinese and Japanese?" I asked.

"Yes, there's a Japanese with that crowd there," he said, pointing to a group of Americans coming away from the church, but he did not offer any further explanation.

I asked him about the village of Stoke Poges.

"Not worth seeing," he said. "You could call on the vicar, but he's away for a couple of days."

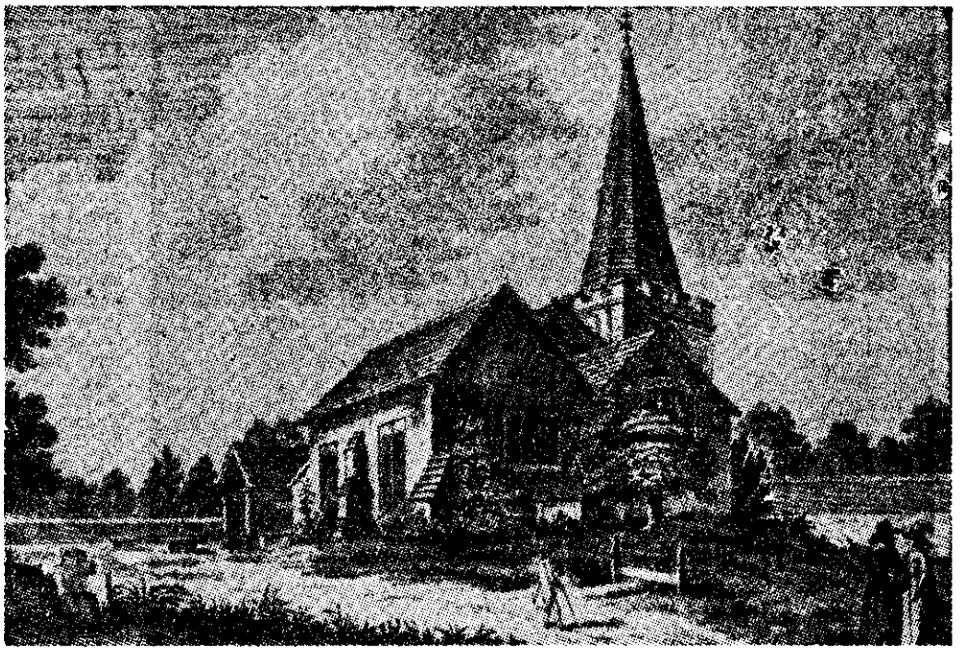
Nevertheless, we did walk across the fields to see the village, where we found a lot of heavy traffic, some old cottages, a modern housing area, a big service station, and the Stoke Poges Community Centre. There was not much to see, and we took a bus back again to have a look at the Gardens of Remembrance adjoining the churchyard—a modern cemetery for cremated ashes, laid out in 1934, the first of its kind in England.

"They used to have people from other places buried in the churchyard, which was extended over 40 years ago," the man in charge told us. "But it became so bad that the local people protested and had it stopped."

Though it is possible, then, for strangers to get married in the church it is no longer possible to be buried in the churchyard along with the most famous gathering of undistinguished dead in the world. But the Gardens of Remembrance are very attractive, and the gate between them and the churchyard is locked, not to keep those in the gardens out of the churchyard, but those in the churchyard out of the gardens, to which admission is by ticket only.

We walked back into Slough—"a horrible place, don't go near it," we had been told. It is now a very big industrial town, manufacturing not heavy machinery and textiles, but practically everything else, chemicals (there is a big I.C.I. sports ground on the way to the churchyard), prepared foods, confectionary, electrical goods, light manufactured products of all kinds under trade names which are household words—exactly that—in many parts of the world.

Actually the old town round the railway station is quite pleasing and elegant, the architecture dominated by the style of the period from about 1820 to 1840, with the interesting odd differences and old-fashioned touches (such as occasional Adam decorations) which give English countryside towns an individuality apart from London. When we got there, just before six, there were quite a number of people about, their fashionable clothes, confident gait, and cheerful expressions giving a sure indication of full employment. Here the pubs in the evening don't open *till* six o'clock, and everyone may as well go straight home after work and have his (or her) evening meal before having a drink. A good idea?



STOKE POGES Church as it was in Gray's time. The spire was built in 1703 and replaced by a new one in 1831. This spire was removed in 1924

But where there is plenty of work accommodation is bound to be scarce. How do these people fare? How does their lot compare with that of the farm workers of Gray's time?

> For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
> Or busy housewife ply her evening care;
> No children run to lisp their sire's return,
> Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

For the young couple here today, such as that we saw getting married, the big question is when the blazing hearth will begin to burn. In the meantime, they will have to live in rooms, or preferably, they and their local bodies think, in caravans bought for £750 to £1000 and parked on one of the big sites provided. The problem extends itself as far as the gates of Windsor Castle: the overflow population of Clough, which includes a large number of Jamaicans, has made housing a real headache for the Royal Borough, which has had to provide something even less comfortable than the transit camps of New Zealand under the name of "rest homes"; here families are accommodated but the men and women segregated.

Every married couple is preoccupied with the problem. A woman living on one of the caravan sites told us: "We've been here 11 years, living in rooms at first, and do you know we haven't been to the castle yet." Like most of the housewives round here she began to ply her evening care only when she got home from work at the same time as her husband, who, of course, assisted her; and *they* both shared the envied kiss of perhaps only one child—not too many under these conditions.

The people of Stoke Poges are in this big area dominated by the industry of Slough. Gray saw illiteracy and poverty:

> But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
> Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
> Chill penury repressed their noble rage
> And froze the genial current of the soul.

Well, poverty has gone, and so has the illiteracy. The education system in England now takes everyone right through to the finish of a university course provided he passes the appropriate exams (the terror of ambitious parents) at the appropriate times. No need to worry now that "some mute inglorious Milton here may rest." I wonder: perhaps the system may be equally freezing to "the genial current of the soul." Gray, by no means of wealthy parents, did quite well without it.

Unlike their predecessors, whose "sober wishes never learned to stray," the people of today have the opportunity to emigrate. Oddly enough, the only two I heard of to go to New Zealand came back again. One, the part-time caretaker at the churchyard informed me, had made a lot of money sheep farming, but had returned to spend his old age in his native country. The other, I was told by a gardener at Eton College, not far away, had "a lovely little milk round at Windsor," which he sold to go out to New Zealand. *He* lost all his money sheep farming and returned because, as he put it, they "pushed him too hard." I don't know quite what was meant by this. However, I am quite sure that there were others of whom no news was good news. Buckinghamshire and Berkshire people are like New Zealanders, easy to talk to and understand and to mix with. We got on well round here; great interest was taken in the fact that we were New Zealanders; elsewhere, as a rule, not.

Stoke Poges Churchyard is probably unique in the closeness of its association with a great and widely-known work of poetry, and the Elegy is probably the most widely-known poem in the English language. A visit here intensifies its meaning: I was surprised to find myself hearing it as an exact and literal statement—not merely as a piece of somniferous organ music. I was one of those who at the point where "the rude forefathers of the Hamlet sleep" would tend to drop off, too, hearing the obvious reference to ourselves in the "gem of purest ray serene," but otherwise unaware of so much, though at the same time knowing it so well, like the features of a familiar place recalled by a visit after a long absence:

> There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
> That wreaths its old fantastic roots so high.

Now in the churchyard, among the graves of century upon century, which made the wedding seem but the prelude to another generation of graves, the reading of the Elegy, thoughtfully printed in the church guide-book, makes it easy to fall into a state of sad reflectiveness. In this mood, lulled by the sonorous and reasonable statements about human life the understanding is suddenly struck by an equally sonorous and, it is to be supposed (to keep faith with the poet), equally reasonable statement on human immortality. The lines seem hardly to accord with the philosophical, pious, and withal sceptical outlook of the 18th century so well expressed in the Elegy, but rather with that of hope and faith of the early 19th—that of Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality. They almost seem to belong there:

> Even from the tomb the voice of nature cries,
> Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.

Be that as it may, the visitor cannot help feeling that something of the past comes to life in places like this. Not more than 10 miles away, at Chalfont St Giles, is the cottage where Milton lived during the great plague of London. When we went there first we were given a lift in a car by a middle-aged couple, who told us that a caretaker was needed for the cottage, now a small museum. "There are quarters for a married couple," said the woman. "It would just suit an educated gentleman like you!" It was there that Ellwood, the Quaker, is said to have suggested the writing of *Paradise Regained*. There is still a big Quaker farming settlement at Jordans—six or seven miles from Stoke Poges—with a barn, now used as a hall, which is said to be built with wood from the Mayflower. William Penn returned from America and is buried near there. It was his grandson John Penn who erected the big monument to Gray near the churchyard—perhaps I should have mentioned that before, but there is so much to mention before and after. Why, the place where Magna Carta was signed is quite near. And, as I have said, Windsor Castle and Eton College, too, which Gray could contemplate, even if he called it "a distant prospect." And so on. What a country to come to! I often wonder about that job at Milton's cottage.