



### TALES FROM THE HILLS

"The worst piece of road in the world" William Cobbett called it. So sticky was the clay along the lanes of Ashmansworth during much of the year that he gave us that unenviable title of owning the "Worst Piece of Road in the World." And he of all people should know, from his constant travel on the roads in England, Europe and the USA.

We eventually lost our title on 24th November 1822 when, after one of his famous Rural Rides, Cobbett made the following adjudication after struggling down an exceptionally muddy lane near Hindhead in Surrey:

"When we got to the bottom, I bid my man, when he should go back to Hurstbourne Tarrant, tell the people there, that Ashmansworth Lane is not the worst piece of road in the world."

So we must content ourselves with being second worst.

Should anyone care for a reminder of those days, then the mud of our prehistoric Ox Drove (or Wayfarers' Walk) after a week or two of rain can still offer a taste of how things were. But even that's not as muddy as it was before they banned the traffic, when tractors and four-wheel drives used to dig troughs in it two feet deep.

Mud is one thing. Snow is another. Wilf Cooper of Lower Manor Farm used to recall the winter of 1928 when the snow was as deep as the height of a horse's head, and the village of Ashmansworth was cut off from the outside world! His obituary reads: "With his men, Mr Cooper opened up the road and was able to obtain emergency rations, using his horses and wagons. He always treasured the engraved silver teapot presented to him by the villagers for his efforts."

Wilf now lies in the churchyard at Ashmansworth with his wife Elizabeth.

*Agricola*