

Churches and hostelryes with a tale to tell

BECAUSE of the cost of renovating and maintaining two churches in one small parish, it is expected that the Church of St Mary will be closed by the end of this year.

It is estimated it would cost £9,000 to repair St Mary's Church, while the expense of restoring St Michael's Church has been put at £8,000.

Both churches are ancient buildings in Early English style. St Mary consists of chancel, nave, south porch and tower containing six bells.

Restoration was carried out on the church in 1880 and again in 1896. There is seating for 128 people and the register dates from 1716.

EFFIGY

The Church of St Michael has a chancel, nave, north porch and turret with three bells. An unusual feature is an old stone effigy, dated 1290, which is attached to the outside of the chancel wall. There are seats for 138 and the register goes back to 1689.

Both Seavington St Mary and St Michael have more than their share of old buildings.

In St Michael, the Volunteer Inn dates back to the 1600s and it was certainly an inn in the late 19th century. Bert Hallett and his sister, Mrs Doris Lee, are partners and have been at this free house for six years, having come from Romford in Essex.

Darts is a favourite game at the Volunteer, which has a team playing in the Crewkerne league. Well known for its food, the Volunteer has a grill restaurant, able to seat 20, and also offers a varied choice of bar meals.

UNCLE BERT

Bert has not always been "mine host" of a village pub. For years he was a cinema manager, known to generations in filmgoers in Dagenham, Essex, as "Uncle Bert".

He began his association with the cinema as a page-boy with the old Dagenham Odeon, graduating to projectionist and then to assistant manager by the time war broke out. He spent five years as part of a small, RAF air-sea rescue team in Burma and India.

After the war he became manager of the Gaumont in Dagenham and, during the next 12 years, he managed several other cinemas, includ-

ing the Odeon where he started his career. In 1957, he joined the then Stanton Radio Company as general manager and, in 1971, he was made a director of Stanwood Radio.

RENOVATIONS

Also in Seavington is The Pheasant, where renovations began about 12 years ago and were completed four years ago. There are now 12 letting rooms all en-suite with colour television and radio-alarm. The building dates back to 1610.

Edmondo and Jacqueline Paolini have been hosts at The Pheasant for about three years. Before buying the hotel, Edmondo spent 20 years in London, managing some of the capital's top establishments, such as the Mayfair and the Kensington Palace. He also organised the opening of the Royal Garden Hotel — London's first new five-star hotel. Before taking over The Pheasant, Edmondo was chairman of the West London Hotel Management Association.

A fine chef, who specialises in creating new and original dishes, Edmondo does all the cooking at The Pheasant. Based on French and Italian styles, his cuisine includes

special sauces and all his own desserts. The charming dining room at The Pheasant seats 52 and diners can enjoy flambé dishes prepared at the table.

GUESTS

Fillet Steak Penelope is one of Edmondo's own dishes, specially created for the actress Penelope Keith. She and other members of the cast of the television series "The Manor Born" stayed at The Pheasant and part of the series was shot at the hotel.

Other famous guests who have stayed at The Pheasant were Prince Charles (while he was serving with HMS Heron at Yeovilton about four or five years ago), radio presenter David Jacobs and Australian entertainer Rolf Harris.

Shooting parties, functions for international oil tycoons — The Pheasant caters for these and many other occasions. And for very special wedding parties, Edmondo can sometimes be persuaded to lend the happy couple his own Rolls-Royce!