yellow and burning orange, light up dark corners and hidden recesses. Ivy twines through the carved wooden rails and trails long fingers down from the pulpit, not quite touching the circlet of rusting hydrangea heads. Scarlet-berried berberis and cruel, gleaming holly branches lie on stone sills, and round the rim of the font. Blackberry suckers thread through rosy apples and russet pears along the window ledges. Silvery-green branches of ash droop with the weight of their orange clusters and each translucent honesty pod lifts its face to the coloured light streaming through the windows.

Just inside the door, below the squat tower, a large brown sack of potatoes is surrounded by a mound of groceries: bags of sugar and flour, packets of tea and biscuits, tins of peas and corned beef and sardines; they are offered as 'a harvest gift from the children of Appledore school for distribution to their older friends of the village'. Metal polish and furniture wax mingle their scents with those of ripe fruit and vegetables pulled straight from the warm earth, but heavier than them all hangs the musty odour of ancient stones.

The congregation is assembling. Sunday best still means something; the women, old and young, all wear hats, the men look uncomfortably constricted in dark suits. The choir, in their surplices and blue Wolsey caps, process up the centre aisle and take their places behind the screen, closely followed by the 1st Appledore Brownie troop, the smallest of whom is carrying a banner inscribed 'Lend a Hand'. The vicar announces the first hymn, the organist strikes up and we all launch into:

'Come Ye thankful People come
Raise the song of harvest home
All is safely gathered in
Ere the winter storms begin.'

Later, many of the same people will expand their rejoicing in the Red Lion. **Carolyn Faulder**

Sports day

THE SMELLS of mown grass, string and carbolic soap mingled with those of the old rubber tyres, tarpaulins and hair rugs that were being laid out for the obstacle race. It was a sunny day but not too hot – ideal weather for a summer sports day. At the Anthony Roper Primary School in Kent the long, green stretch of the playing fields and the groups of children in white shorts and shirts in their house colours of blue, green, red or yellow made a picturesque scene – at first sight. There was a brief interval between the three-legged race and the obstacle race and most of the children had collected into clumps to discuss recent victories or failures.

'You've got to try harder,' a staunch girl in pigtails lectured a small bespectacled boy who was desperately trying to free his leg from hers. She stood like a miniature Goliath clearly enjoying her captive audience. Some more energetic competitors were engaged in deaf and dumb conversations with their parents who were seated just out of earshot on the opposite side of the track. The latter smiled benignly or tried to look sympathetic in response to the Morse code signals and continued to compare the size, weight, looks and health of their respective offspring among themselves.

There was no sign of the hats, loudspeakers or officious games masters that usually haunt the more pompous school sports days. It looked more like an enormous family party in the country until the headmaster got up to announce the next event.

A hushed silence fell, followed by a great deal of noise and bustle, and neat rows of boys and girls were soon lined up for the obstacle race. The moment the starter sounded the whole scene was transformed. Blood-curdling yells of 'Yellows to win,' 'Come on Reds,' or 'Hurry up Harry', broke forth simultaneously and fists, arms and the odd mascot were waved ferociously at the competitors. One small boy who had clearly overindulged in his school dinner was having trouble getting through the rubber tyre and a loser cunningly evaded retribution from the rest of his house by diving under the tarpaulin and remaining there till the race was ended.

When the final runners crossed the winning line there was a loud burst of cheers and boos. The triumphant Reds jumped up and down letting off whoops of joy which only subsided when the potato race was announced and everything was forgotten in anticipation of the next event.

Orangeade and biscuits were being distributed at the uneatable hour of half past three and the last winners had to forego the glory of a public ovation because the school bus had arrived to take unaccompanied children home. The winners rushed over to their families for praise; the losers for comfort. Two conscientious boys remained behind to roll up mats, stack rubber tyres into neat piles and collect the paper cups. Sports day was over. **Betka Zamoyska**

Cricket match

EVEN IN ENGLAND in summer on Saturday it sometimes doesn't rain. At 2.45, as Rumwood opened the batting at West Farleigh, the sun struggled through the leaden clouds and a brisk wind blew up from the river. 'You don't see that at Lords,' one of the lads waiting in the pavilion said, pointing to an umpire perched comfortably on a shooting stick. Everyone's thoughts – and some of the regular players – had deserted to Lords where the home county, Kent, was playing in the Benson and Hedges cup final.

Hitting the trees is a four, over the fence is a six – a ball landing in the strawberry field was particularly popular with the fielding sides earlier in the season. Rumwood opened slowly and both teams have played inconsistently. Wild bowling and strokes that would have been suicidal if the fielders had held the ball contrast with neat and stylish play. Tea is called when the eighth wicket falls at 127, the off stump turning a neat somersault. 'Every picture tells a story,' his Rumwood team mates grin. The West Farleigh captain, Simon Day, fair and tanned and fit, has taken four of the wickets. 'Load of old rubbish, wasn't it,' he mumbles, leading his team back into the brick and thatch pavilion donated by his grandmother.

Two farming families – the Days and the Fermors – **are** West Farleigh cricket. Simon's grandmother succeeded his grandfather as president, his uncle followed his father as captain. His father is now chairman and his cousin's playing today. The Fermors used to be able to field their own team. Now they provide the president and two players. Two Baines brothers – sons of the village storekeeper – are in the team while a third keeps score – erratically. The classic schoolmaster, tall, stooping, greyhaired, is one of the keenest members.

Tea is a top-notch tuck-in, provided by mothers, wives, girlfriends: egg, tomato, cucumber and ham sandwiches, brown bread and butter and jam, scones and cakes. Rumwood have declared at tea, following tradition, and Simon Day instructs his openers, the schoolmaster, Reg Oldfield, and Peter Cooper. 127 isn't a massive score but Rumwood beat West Farleigh by five wickets a few weeks before. In fact, West Farleigh hasn't had a very good season at all.

West Farleigh clear away the tea things, tune in to the Lords commentary and sell raffle tickets to each other, wives and girlfriends huddled in cars and an elderly couple who've paused in their afternoon stroll. Reg Oldfield makes baffling gestures towards the pavilion and five minutes later someone realises that Rumwood are only fielding 10 men. No one knows whether only 10 arrived or whether one has been mislaid during the game. West Farleigh's most malleable member is dispatched to the centre as substitute.

The openers bat fast and well. Oldfield is stumped for 51 at 110 and acknowledges his team mates' applause with sheepish pleasure. 'We call him our senior professional,' the captain murmurs affectionately, ticking off names for next week's match. Rumwood is engaged in moving a sight screen. 'It'll go into the ditch,' Donald Fermor says smugly. It does. He's known as a big hitter and when the second wicket falls swiftly he's in. After some initial mistiming he squares up for two enormous sixes and shortly after at 6.40 West Farleigh scrape past the Rumwood total. Puzzlingly, the final scoreboard reads 131 for 2. At Lords, Kent has also won.

'We used to have a beer match if the game finished early to see who paid for the beer in the pub,' Mr Reffell, secretary since 1945, said. 'Now they don't even play darts much.' By the exit the vicar has got up an impromtu game with the tennis ball and a couple of passers by.

Stella Bingham