

# EDGE OF THE WILD

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## FROM THE EDITOR:

Greetings and welcome to the Autumn 2018 issue of *Edge of the Wild*!!

With Midsummer and the Solstice passed, the days have begun to shorten as Nature directs her energies into maturing grains, fruits, roots, tubers, and nuts.

It is in this season of plenty that the four hobbit travelers Frodo, Samwise, Peregrin, and Meriadoc first step onto the Road and begin their journey into danger, and so we felt this would make it an appropriate season in which to explore some aspects of hobbit life that lend themselves to our methods of 're-creation'.

We trust you will enjoy, and thank you for reading!

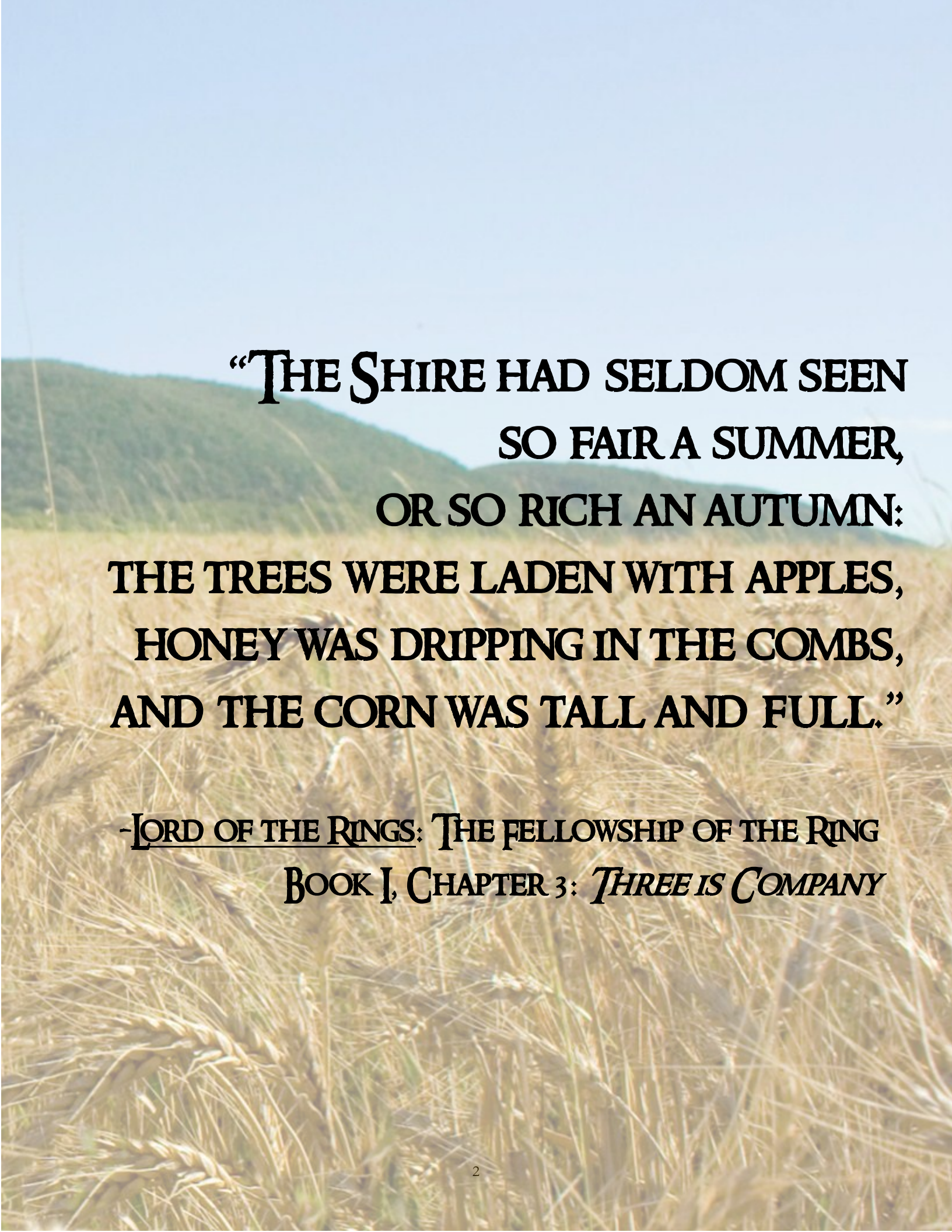
-A. Hollis

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**“THE SHIRE HAD SELDOM SEEN  
SO FAIR A SUMMER,  
OR SO RICH AN AUTUMN:  
THE TREES WERE LADEN WITH APPLES,  
HONEY WAS DRIPPING IN THE COMBS,  
AND THE CORN WAS TALL AND FULL.”**

**-LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING  
BOOK I, CHAPTER 3: *THREE IS COMPANY***

# PICK A PERSONA: HOBBITS

A. HOLLIS

In this installment, we will brainstorm some possible ‘occupations’ which could enrich one’s interpretation of Tolkien’s most esteemed race. It is worth remembering the Professor’s comments in Letter No. 178 that “[The Shire] is in fact more or less a Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee...”. This event occurred in 1897, and so in addition to the many possibilities we have teased out of the text, there are almost certainly a multitude of crafts and ‘heritage trades’ of the period also being practiced in the Shire, albeit ‘off-screen’. (For some ‘suggested readings’ on these kinds of vocations, see page 7.)

-Almost from the beginning, we are told that the hobbits of the Shire neither like nor understand “machines more complicated than a water-mill, forge-bellows, or hand-loom”, which gives us an idea of the level of appropriate technology expected in a portrayal of their culture. From this, **Miller**, **Blacksmith**, and **Weaver** are immediately suggested. In addition, Tolkien notes that *aboveground* houses “were specially favoured by millers, smiths, **ropers**, and **cartwrights**, and others of *that sort*.”(1); the published drafts add **Farmer**, **Carpenter** (1<sup>st</sup> phase), and **Wheelwright** (3<sup>rd</sup> phase) to this list (2). Other occupations ‘of this sort’ (what we might term ‘working-class’?) would include **Butcher** (3), **Potter**, or **Chandler**, and which were likely found in each town or village. Any of these would be fascinating to explore through an impression.

-As would be expected in a pre-industrial society such as that of the Shire, Tolkien writes that “Growing food and eating it occupied most of

their time” (4). Therefore, by far the most common hobbit persona would be a simple **Farmer** (of roots, vegetables, grains, or pipe-weed).

-A more specific variation of this would be that of a working-class **Gardener**, such as Ham and Sam Gamgee. Based on the depiction of the prominent ‘landed’ families (Tooks, Baggins, &c.) it would seem that this would also be a fairly common occupation, analogous to a tenant-groundskeeper.

-Considering that there were seven *known* inns within the Shire (5)—and, in all likelihood, *many* more—both **Brewer** and **Vintner** (using using Northfarthing barley (6) and Southfarthing vines (7) respectively), as well as **Innkeeper** personas would be good options.

-Unlike the vast majority of the rest of Middle-earth, the Shire seems to have a large literate population, for whom the sending of mail appears to be a popular pastime for its literate ‘upper class’. From this, a **Postman** (8) might be an interesting angle to interpret.

-Several sources refer to hobbits using various types of **Basketry** (9), which could be a fascinating and useful craft to learn, practice, and demonstrate as part of a hobbit persona.

-Since—as indicated by the aboveground houses of the ‘working-class’—not all hobbits live in Holes, it would seem that **Thatcher** is another one of those nearly-lost arts which could lend a greater depth to one’s impression (10).

-For one with an interest in watercraft, a **Ferryman** would be an excellent fit. We know that the Brandybucks maintained the ferry from Buckleberry to the Marish, and there were boat-



men in southern Buckland who ferry Bombadil across the Brandywine to the landing at the Mithe Steps (11).

-Based on his apparent *great* familiarity with the word, Bilbo suggests that the trade of a **Furrier** was well-known in the Shire (12). Along these lines, it is also possible that hobbits were engaged in **Tannery** of animal skins (perhaps the source of Frodo's 'shirt of soft leather'? (13); historically, brain-tanned hides *were* originally a fabric of the working-class.

-Some may think that it would be fun to portray one of the Shire's *Shiriffs*. However, as they are stated to number only twelve prior to the War of the Ring (14), they would be comparatively 'elite' by hobbit standards, and this column (and the MERS as a whole) is geared towards interpreting the 'common' population. It is worth mentioning that under Lotho Sackville-Baggins' takeover, the number of Shirrifs swelled into the hundreds (15).

-However, if one has a mind to travel about and wants to portray a member of hobbit 'border patrol', there are always the **Bounders**!—whose total number was unknown, but which we know was "greatly increased" between 3001-3018 TA (16). ✨

#### References:

- (1) Lord of the Rings Prologue:I
- (2) The History of Middle-earth, Volume 6
- (3) The Hobbit Chapter 6; Adventures of Tom Bombadil #8
- (4) LR Prologue
- (5) ATB #2; LR I:1; I:4; VI:8; History of The Hobbit 815
- (6) LR VI:9
- (7) *ibid*

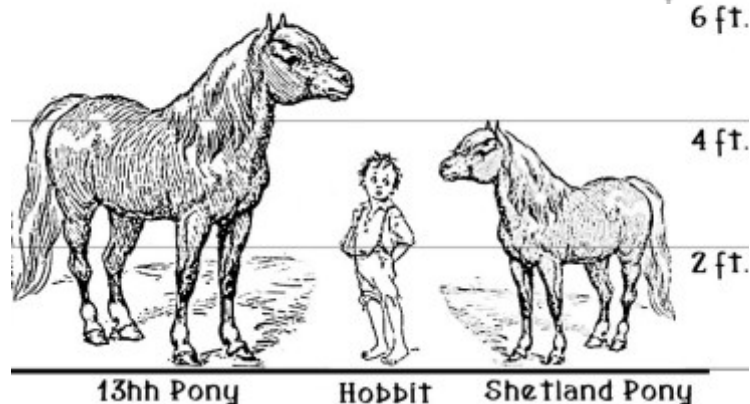
- (8) LR I:1
- (9) ATB #8, LR I:1, I:4
- (10) LR I:4
- (11) ATB #2
- (12) TH 7
- (13) LR II:6
- (14) LR Prologue
- (15) LR Bk VI, Ch 8
- (16) LR Prologue

## Out of Edoras

E. MEULEMANS

### The Ponies of the Shire:

Most pony breeds average around 13hh, with some as small as 11hh, but for a Hobbit that measures only about three feet in height, even such ponies would seem very large! There is one breed that fits quite naturally to someone of such stature, and that is the Shetland. Not yet a miniature horse, they are 7-11hh, and relative to their size are actually among the strongest equines, able to quite comfortably carry small children (or hobbits), and pull heavy carts (and were often used in mining)—the quarry at Scary may have used many teams of Shetlands! ✨



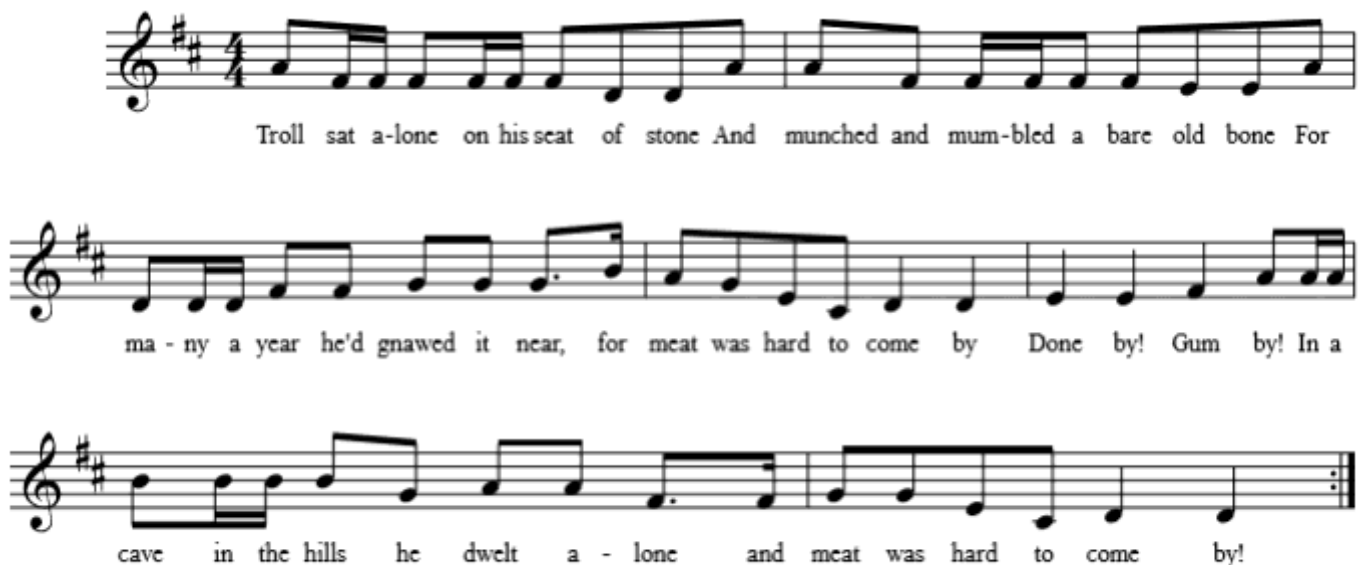
# Try a Tune!

*"They set no watch...for they were still in the heart of the Shire. A few creatures came and looked at them when the fire had died away. A fox passing through the wood on business of his own stopped several minutes and sniffed.*

*'Hobbits!' he thought. 'Well, what next? I have heard of strange doings in this land, but I have seldom heard of a hobbit sleeping out of doors under a tree. Three of them! There's something mighty queer behind this.' He was quite right, but he never found out any more about it."*

-Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring  
Book I, Chapter 3: *Three is Company*

Music and singing are integral parts of Middle-earth, and one's interpretation of Tolkien's world is greatly improved by the addition of a song or tune. For a bit of gaiety around your next campfire, try singing Sam Gamgee's "Troll Sat Alone on a Seat of Stone" (LR I:12) to the traditional tune "Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night"! (Tolkien's recitation of the troll song to his own tune may be heard at <https://tinyurl.com/yb5g3we2>)



Up came Tom with his big boots on.  
 Said he to Troll: 'Pray, what is yon?  
 For it looks like the shin o' my nuncle Tim,  
 As should be a-lyin' in graveyard.  
 Caveyard! Paveyard!  
 This many a year has Tim been gone,  
 And I thought he were lyin' in graveyard.'

'My lad,' said Troll, 'this bone I stole.  
 But what be bones that lie in a hole?  
 Thy nuncle was dead as a lump o' lead,  
 Afore I found his shinbone.  
 Tinbone! Thinbone!  
 He can spare a share for a poor old troll,  
 For he don't need his shinbone.'

Said Tom: 'I don't see why the likes o' thee  
 Without axin' leave should go makin' free  
 With the shank or the shin o' my father's kin;  
 So hand the old bone over!  
 Rover! Trover!  
 Though dead he be, it belongs to he;  
 So hand the old bone over!'

'For a couple o' pins,' says Troll, and grins,  
 'I'll eat thee too, and gnaw thy shins.  
 A bit o' fresh meal will go down sweet!  
 I'll try my teeth on thee now.  
 Hee now! See now!  
 I'm tired o' gnawing old bones and skins;  
 I've a mind to dine on thee now.'

But just as he thought his dinner was caught,  
 He found his hands had hold of naught.  
 Before he could mind, Tom slipped behind  
 And gave him the boot to larn him.  
 Warn him! Darn him!  
 A bump o' the boot on the seat, Tom thought,  
 Would be the way to larn him.

But harder than stone is the flesh and bone  
 Of a troll that sits in the hills alone.  
 As well set your boot to the mountain's root,  
 For the seat of a troll don't feel it.  
 Peel it! Heal it!  
 Old Troll laughed, when he heard Tom groan,  
 And he knew his toes could feel it.

Tom's leg is game, since home he came,  
 And his bootless foot is lasting lame;  
 But Troll don't care, and he's still there  
 With the bone he boned from its owner.  
 Doner! Boner!  
 Troll's old seat is still the same,  
 And the bone he boned from its owner!



(Pauline Baynes)

# The Soul of the Shire

J. CORCORAN

Most everyone's journey into Middle-earth begins in the Shire. The countryside idyll may be an ancient aesthetic, but it is one that resonates with most of us who love to crawl into Tolkien's works.

For many of us today however, the countryside the good Professor saw passing away is now a nostalgic dream, with all the actual working detail lost. How are those of us that have grown up amongst asphalt and concrete expected to envision—much less try to recreate—the daily workings of the Shire?

Thankfully, we have a great number of reminiscences of the era to draw upon. The increasing industrialization of the English countryside troubled more souls than just that of Tolkien, and through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century authors rushed to record what they could.

Whether your interest is specific to Middle-earth reenacting or merely the delightfully *human* environment that was the English countryside of Tolkien's childhood—all of the following books are more than worth spending time with.



John Seymour—The Forgotten Arts (1984)

If Professor Tolkien's childhood encompassed the initial rush to urban industrialization, John Seymour's life witnessed the final days of the old ways of the countryside.

Like others in his generation, he hurried to gather what knowledge he could from those who grew up in the living traditions before they passed away.

The Forgotten Arts has a brief 2-3 page overview of each of a host of village trades of the period: bodger, cooper, wheelwright, tanner, etc....

Each is illustrated with period photos and lovely pen-and-ink illustrations. The book has no room for detailed how-tos, but is an invaluable up-close survey at the *types* of craftsmen that plied their trade from Shropshire to Suffolk—or from Westfarthing to Buckland. The book is also sold as The Forgotten Crafts or even The Forgotten Arts and Crafts—all are the same book! Some secondhand retailers will confuse this with The Forgotten Household Crafts: a similar book by Mr. Seymour focused on Edwardian home technology—both are interesting, but be sure to verify which you're getting!

John Seymour—The Countryside Explained

Another work by Seymour, this 1977 title is a more detailed book. Not exactly narrative, it is a description of countryside life in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Industrial methods of farming were edging out the older ways, but age-old crops, animals, buildings, and techniques are all covered.



If you've an interest in portraying a hobbit holding forth on the best mix of grasses in a hayfield, judging the perfect pig at fair, or which winter crop for feed—this is a fantastic place to start!

Trevor York – The English Village Explained

Unlike Mr. Seymour's books, Mr. York's 2011 work does not go into any great detail on the actual life patterns of a pre-industrial English village-dweller. Rather, he traces the development of the landscape and use patterns through time. This is more useful than it might seem at first: the pages are filled with drawings of deer hedges, fishponds, furrow and headland—all the artificial parts of the rural landscape that certainly also make up the world of the Shire.

David Tresemer—The Scythe Book (2001)

Is there a more pastoral image than a line of workmen scything down a field? While more of a direct how-to than the other books in this list, this short reference is a quick foundation in the most archetypal of country tasks.

Eric Sloane—A Reverence for Wood (1965), A Museum of American Tools (1973), et al.

Mr. Sloane is an American counterpart to the British John Seymour, and likewise rushed to document the disappearing rural landscape of the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While Mr. Sloane's books are grounded in the northeastern American experience, the shared history and similar geography to ancestral Britain make his work extremely relevant nonetheless.

While his entire output is worth studying and a joy in itself, the two listed works are likely of particular interest to a Shire reenactor. The former will give you a good introduction to a countryman's knowledge of which wood for which task; the latter is filled with line drawings of timeless hand tools and craftwork.

**[While we are on the subject of contemporary founts of near-forgotten knowledge, I cannot recommend enough the works of one Roy *Underhill* (good hobbit name!), the playful host of the long-running PBS series *The Woodwright's Shop*, and author of a number of books on the subject of traditional woodworking projects, many of which would be familiar sights to an inhabitant of the Shire.—Ed.]**

Peter Ginn, Tom Pinfold, Ruth Goodman: *Tales from the Green Valley* (2005), *Tudor Monastery Farm* (2013), et al.

This team has created a number of BBC documentary series covering agricultural life in Britain in a number of different eras from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the Second World War.

Each series covers approximately one agricultural year, with period skills demonstrated as best the hosts can manage: thankfully without manufactured drama!

While the detail may seem a bit sparse to the seasoned reenactor, there is nothing like *seeing* a task done, and for that reason alone every one of these series is worth repeated viewing.

The list goes on...

Cookbooks, herbals, folklore of plants, how-tos...the number of relevant references one could list in print alone are staggering. Hopefully though, this is a pleasant start on the road—back to the door from which it began. ✨





# Seed-cakes for Shire-folk

E. BURTON

*“A little beer would suit me better, if it is all the same to you, my good sir,” said Balin with the white beard. “But I don’t mind some cake — seed-cake, if you have any.”*

*“Lots!” Bilbo found himself answering, to his own surprise; and he found himself scuttling off, too, to the cellar to fill a pint beer-mug, and then to a pantry to fetch two beautiful round seed-cakes which he had baked that afternoon for his after-supper morsel.”—The Hobbit, Chapter 1: An Unexpected Party*

Recipes for English seed cakes can be found going back to the 16th century (1), and remained popular through the Victorian era. The seeds used in these cakes were typically caraway seeds, which many Americans associate most closely with rye bread, but they add a lovely anise flavor to the dense cake. Recipes from the early 20th century often include baking powder as a leavening agent (2). Although modern baking powder was discovered in 1843 and would have likely been available in the 1897 Warwickshire village Tolkien cited as his inspiration for the Shire (3), mixed chemical leaveners do not fit into my personal view of Middle-earth. With this in mind, I looked for a version of seed cake that did not include baking powder, and found a late 17th century recipe.

*To make a seed cake*

*Take the whites of 8 eggs beat them very well then put the yolks to them & beat them very well together then put to it a pound of sugar beat & sifted very fine & beat it for half an hour then make it a little warm over*

*the fire & after that put in 3 quarters of a pound of flower very well dried a quarter of an ounce of caraway seeds stirr it well together & put it into the pan it will take 3 quarters of a hour to bake it—Catherine Cotton’s recipe book, 1698 (UPenn Ms. Codex 214)*

Catherine Cotton’s seed cakes were leavened with egg whites, which she had to beat for half an hour to incorporate the necessary air. This time can be shortened considerably by using a wire whisk. Wire whisks were invented sometime before 1841 (4), and do not seem much “more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom” (5), so I feel that hobbits could have possibly used them, although there are no direct mentions of wire whisks in the text. [A common 18th century equivalent is a whisk made of peeled birch twigs—Ed.]

While I did not want to use baking powder, I felt that hobbits would appreciate the richness the butter used in early 20th century seed cakes would provide. While looking through other early cake recipes, I found an 18th century recipe for “queen cakes”.

*To make queen cakes*

*Take a pound of loaf-sugar, beat and sift it, a pound of flour well dried, a pound of butter, eight eggs, half a pound of currants washed and picked, grate a nutmeg, the same quantity of mace and cinnamon, work your butter to a cream, then put in your sugar, beat the whites of your eggs near half an hour, mix them with your sugar a butter, beat them exceedingly well together, then put in your flour, spices, and the currants; when it is*

*ready for the oven, bake them in tins, and dust a little sugar over them.*—Hanah Glasse, The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy, 7th ed., 1760.

These cakes were also leavened with egg whites, and required the same quantities of eggs, sugar, and flour as Catherine Cotton's seed cakes, but added an equal amount of butter.

By combining these two recipes, I came up with a cake that I felt would be fit for a hobbit's table. I chose to bake six small (3 ½ inch) cakes, but the recipe should also make one 9 inch cake, albeit with a longer bake time. (Double the recipe if expecting a party of dwarves.) I made the batter by hand, but a mixer could be used.

### **Shire Seed Cakes**

Makes 6 cakes/Prep time: 50 minutes/Baking time: 40 minutes

½ pound of all-purpose flour (approx. 1 ½ cups)

½ pound of turbinado sugar (approx. 1 cup)\*

½ pound of butter

4 eggs, separated

1 ½ tsp caraway seeds

Pre-heat oven to 325°F.

Butter and flour six 3 ½ inch ramekins.

In a bowl, work the sugar into the butter until it is evenly mixed. It may be easier to add the sugar in batches, instead of all at once.

Separate the eggs, adding the yolks to the sugar and butter mixture and placing the whites into another bowl. Mix the yolks with the sugar and butter.

Add the caraway seeds to the sugar, butter, and egg yolks and mix.

Add the flour to the sugar, butter, egg yolks and caraway seeds and mix. As with the sugar, it may be easier to add the flour in batches instead

of all at once. The batter will resemble a dough more than a cake batter at this point.

Using a wire whisk, beat the egg whites to soft peaks (about five minutes).

Mix about half the egg whites into the batter to lighten the mixture, then gently fold in the remaining half.

Spoon the batter into the ramekins and bake for about 40 minutes. The cakes will be done when the tops are domed slightly and the edges have begun to pull away from the edges of the ramekins.

Allow the cakes to cool for 10 minutes, then run a knife around the edges of the cakes to ease removal. Allow the cakes to cool for an additional 10 minutes to allow the crumb to set.

Serve warm or at room temperature.



*[As this recipe includes sugar, it is not strictly authentic to Middle-earth standards. With some trial and error, you may be able to substitute sugar with honey to maintain a similar level of sweetness—although this will require increasing the amount of flour.—Ed.]*

### **References:**

- (1) Matterer, James. "Seed Cake". A Boke of Gode Cookery. Retrieved July 30, 2018.
- (2) Rice Hannah. "History Bakers: Seed Cake". Hull History Center. Retrieved July 30, 2018.
- (3) Letters, No. 178
- (4) see for example P. Masters, The Young Cook's Assistant and Housekeeper's Guide, London, 1841, pp. 222-3, 265
- (5) Lord of the Rings: Prologue 1: *Concerning Hobbits*

**At right: freshly-baked seed-cakes ready to be gobbled up by a hungry hobbit.**



# Review: The Story of Kullervo

G. LAMMERS

The Story of Kullervo was a very early project of Tolkien's. It is not strictly a tale set in Middle-earth, but rather a retelling of a Finnish epic poem in prose. Still, I pursued it because of its supposed inspiration for the character and life of Turin Turambar, which would then have a connection to the overarching line of great Men from the First Age through to the War of the Ring. Tolkien's prose is clearly evident throughout; it reads and feels like a novel set in the world we know and understand. The mythic nature of the subject matter, including magic and swords, may feel familiar, but the content is

darker even than I anticipated. The parallels between the title character and Turin are evident, but Kullervo for certain is no role model for anyone. Tolkien's work on turning the epic poem into a short story was fascinating to dig into and a refreshing return to his writing style, but disappointingly unfinished. As it is not strictly a Middle-earth tale, it was edited by Verlyn Flieger rather than his son, Christopher Tolkien, who has largely kept his focus on the more completed works of his father. ✧





# ABOUT US

*The Middle-earth Reenactment Society is dedicated to the furthering of J.R.R. Tolkien cultural studies, within the framework of 'historical' reenactment.*

*We exist to recreate the cultures of Middle-earth in both form and function, and to mold ourselves into peoples fitting to associate with and live as members of these fully-realized cultures.*

*A part of the [middleearthrangers.org](http://middleearthrangers.org) Tolkien re-creation community, the Society publishes the online quarterly periodical Edge of the Wild, showcasing new research, methods, materials, and instructional articles, while meeting throughout the year at various sites deemed 'wild' enough to still capture the reality and imagination of the wild lands envisioned within the pages of Tolkien's works.*

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