

# *How it was -*



*Memories of life  
in the Fen Country*

*Collected by:  
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**JUST TO SAY**.....a big thank you to all the contributors who were interviewed in the Seventies and Eighties for the Farmland Museum Archives and to the friends who put the “spoken word” into written form. Special thanks are due to the staff at David Richards, Chatteris, who have combined three earlier publications (Ten Miles from Ely, Bog Oak Country and Village Voices) into this booklet to remind readers of times gone by. LD

Ten Miles from Ely



Mabel Demaine, a fen farmer's daughter born in 1908 and a life-long Methodist; recalls some village customs

When I was a child there were three old customs kept up in the village – which were the means of raising small sums of money. They were “goodnin”, “ploughboy’in” and “mayladyen”.

Widows went round on “goodnin day”; I do not know how it originated, but on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, the shortest day of the year, widows in ones and twos, went around knocking on doors where they were given small sums of money or a packet of tea or sugar.

Only widows were allowed to take part in this. And one year, old Jinny Crocksen joined the collectors. We all knew she wasn't a widow. It was true her husband was often ill and unable to work ... when she came to our house, her right to join the widows was challenged. And she promptly replied, “*I'm worse than widow woman!*”

Widows were really poor in those days and had a hard life. There were no pensions and often their poverty was acute. Sometimes they got some small parish relief – a mere pittance. And it meant pleading poverty and almost begging. And these women had their pride. I can remember one woman who was left a widow with an invalid daughter to keep. She went out washing and became bent almost double through bending over the washtub. There was the hard scrubbing to be done and then the ironing – a full hard day several times a week. No washing machines or electric irons in those days. We used to see her going home; her stooping figure, looking so tired and weary, after these washdays.

‘Goodnin day’, coming just before Christmas, provided them with a little extra for the festive season.

Then in January there was Plough Monday which was called ‘Ploughboys’ Day’. I think it was originally meant for ploughboys only, and they carried a decorated plough around when they did their collectin’. Boys always wore heavy hobnail boots with heel and toe cleats and studded with hobnails. What a noise they made! You could hear them coming a long way off. They ran around from door to door, sometimes they came after dark and would carry a (rabi) lantern tied to a long pole. It was made by making a big hollow in a rabyworzel and cutting a window in the side where the light from a lighted candle shone through.

Then on May the first it was the girls turn to go round ‘Mayladyen’. They all carried dolls. There was great competition with the dolls. They all had as pretty and as well dressed a doll as possible. The girls

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knocked on the doors and greeted everyone with, "*Please can you spare a copper for a May lady?*"

My mother wouldn't let me go 'Mayladyen'. She said it was only a form of beggin'. Oh! and how I envied the other girls who were able to take part in this activity. Especially when they told me of their financial results! This collecting was supposed to end at midday. And so the little girls often stayed away from school in the mornin' goin' from door to door.

Then there was another old custom. It was tollin' the church bell for any death in the village. The bell tolled three times for a man and twice for a woman and once for a child, with short intervals in between. This custom had to end at the outbreak of World War II, because orders went out that church bells were to be used as a warning of enemy invasion only.

Then years ago we also had a town crier and he went around the village with his bell and announced all important functions: sales and public meetings and lost property. Whenever we heard his bell, usually in the evening, we rushed to the door to hear the crier slowly shout his news. This custom also ended at the outbreak of war.

Charlie Ashton, who gave three hours of interviews, tells us of his childhood, spent travelling the British Isles

"I'm talking in my days, when I were young, all we used to do is sport. We never used to go to pictures much. Or out with girls a lot, only around our own lot. And our sport used to be boxing between ourselves and other travellers, bare fist boxing and wrestling. And cock fighting, or perhaps we race on ponies, you know, and all that sort of games. We had a game what you called peggy. I don't know if you've heard about that. Just a game where you could cut out the hedge, cut a bit of wood out the hedge about five inches long, point at each end, and then you cut yourself a stick out about three foot long a piece and if you laid this down - when you point it at each end, whip the end of it, like that the pointed end and then it jumps up in the air, you hit it and the one who could hit it the furthest was the winner. The game, known as Tippit is played at the museum on Games Day)

### Cock Fighting at Roadsides

These was all games us brothers used to play and other fellas when we had to look after horses on the side of the road all day. And then we'd have a session of who could stand and jump the furthest. Perhaps we had a ditch there and we'd be betting who could jump over that. For cock fighting we didn't believe in using spurs, no we didn't believe in putting spurs on. We'd buy a cockerel, a young'un about a year, eighteen months old, and that had just got its own spurs nicely. If

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anybody did tie things on the spurs I wouldn't let me cock fight with em'.

### We Moved around a bit: No Maps to Guide Us

And then come right through Suffolk, Felixstowe, Norfolk and Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and you know, dad knowed every stopping place. He'd know where we were stopping the night. And he'd tell us children b'fore we got there – every night. And when we'd stop that night and sitting round the campfire he'd say, "We're stopping so and so tonight." And tell us the name of the pub cos he liked a pint. You know he'd say, "I'm going down and have a pint." He'd know just where they were. And where we had been, if a policeman used to come down, he'd say, "It's all right, that's you, Mr. Ashton, you all right?"

### Tidy up Before Leaving.

We used to stop where they knew us, you see, and when we got up in the morning, if us children had sweets, he'd mek us pick every bit of paper up, no mess. And the campfire spoilt. He'd mek us clear the wood ourselves. He'd mek us pull grass up and put over it – you couldn't see where we'd been. And that used to go a long way. That's true Romany.

### Royal Connection

One time I'm talking about b'fore I were born, just b'fore I were born, my mother sold some flowers on London Bridge to the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). He come over and got out of a coach or somthin' and she spoke to him and he bought two bunches of flowers off her; I think she was selling violets and something else. And she also, in my time, she wrote to the Queen, what is the Queen Mother now (died 2002) and she got a reply. Straight from her hand, not from her secretary's, straight from her hand. She still got the letter now, I could show you. If she passes it on I should perhaps get that. We used to boast a bit about that and show it to the other Romanys.

### Money or Goods in Lieu

When we travelled around the Fens we used to do in the winter like, back then when we had nothing to do – we used to do a bit of what they call round here they call it steaming, don't they? That's thrashing really. We'd go and do a bit of thrashing for a farmer. He'd perhaps give ya about ten, fifteen bob a day. That used to be all right, ya know then. Some farmers paid in food if they couldn't afford it.

They'd give ya sack of potatoes and cabbage and lettuce and what they could, give ya a bob or two.

Charlie Bester, who was Parish Clerk for forty years and author of "A History of the Parish of Haddenham". He was a great supporter of the Farmland Museum.

Proceeding along Hill Row we find on the left a small derelict building (now modified for a house 2002), which was used for a period up to the 1930's as the Hill Row Mission Hall. It belonged to the local parish church and in its early days was used for a Sunday school, weeknight services and social events. It continued in use as a small social centre until around 1950 when, because of its condition, it was closed and restored to the owner of the surrounding field.

Adjoining the Mission hall, being part of the same field, was a pond, which was owned by the parish council under the Enclosure Award. The pond has been filled and was sold by the council to Mr. George Amory, the owner of the field from which the pond was taken.

#### Hill Row and Riots

This pond and the property opposite was the scene of an extraordinary event in 1921.

The Great Ouse River Board had assessed thousands of acres of land for drainage tax and hundreds of farmers refused to pay this new levy. Mr. W. Peacock, who lived opposite the pond and farmed the land in Hill Row Fen, objected to payment. And after the statutory notices had been served, the River Board decided to distraint on a haystack in the nearby farmyard. Notices were posted in the district intimating that the stack would be sold at 11:00 a.m. on Monday.

#### Ammunition found: Plans were made

Over the weekend a small corn stack was thrashed out. And the straw was stacked around and over the haystack so that it could not be seen. Ammunition in the form of rotten eggs was obtained. Several of the farmers' wives incubated thousands of eggs and the infertile reject eggs, some having been in a refuse pit for two years, were collected and carefully concealed near the farmyard.

The Haddenham and Hill Row Irregulars, having armed themselves, waited for the enemy to appear.

#### Arrival of Auctioneer

At 10:00 a.m. an auctioneer from Cambridge named Love arrived in a motorcar – escorted by two burley assistants and Police Constable Breeze, the local policeman. After some time the haystack was located and the auctioneer prepared for action.

### Warnings Given

Mr. Walter Player and Mr. Lewis Edwards, two local farmers, warned the auctioneer that he was trespassing as the haystack was on property owned by Mrs. Olive Peacock, the wife of the debtor. The auctioneer deferred immediate action and tramped to the telephone box in Haddenham to contact the clerk to the drainage board. Returning to Hill Row he announced that he would conduct the sale on the King's Highway. No sooner had he commenced his work, he was hit in his ear ole', (Mr. George Amory's description with necessary deletions), with a two year old egg, the contents of the missile running down his neck and a barrage of rotten eggs were hurled at the auctioneer and his assistant.

So terrible was the smell that several of the attackers succumbed to the fumes.

### Rule Britannia

Supporters of the irregulars encouraged them by singing "Rule Britannia" and the "National Anthem". The auctioneer attempted to carry on with the sale but his voice was completely covered by shouts from irate supporters of the farmer.

Another subtle movement by the irregulars was deployed. The crowd commenced an encircling movement. And the auctioneer, bailiff and assistants was slowly but surely forced into the muddy margin of the parish pond. At this stage Police Constable Breeze made his presence felt. There is no doubt he handled the situation with tact and courage. Using his authority he stopped the encircling movement and prevented a mud bath. It is thought the stack was sold privately. Auctioneer and assistants tried to obtain a wash and brush up before entering their car but were unsuccessful and were obliged to return to Cambridge in a very sorry condition.

Fred Clifford, who was padre at the RAF Hospital Ely (now Princes of Wales Hospital), was a retired Superintendent Methodist Minister

In the fifty years of my ministry my faith was always being tested. In a hospital when one meets some very gravely ill people, not necessarily among the aged but among the young, the question that's on so many people's lips 'Why' comes into my mind as well. And while there are various explanations for certain illnesses, there doesn't appear to be any particular explanation for other illnesses. And in that respect I'm agnostic. But I have a deep sense that somehow all the incongruities of human experience – the pain, the anguish, in other words the depth of human experience, along with its heights, its joys, its successes, its achievements, is all, as it were, within the over arching providence of God. Which has for us all a destiny, which isn't confined to this life

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alone with all its vicissitudes. But which in the very nature of our creation looks beyond into what I believe is the life to come and the nearer and the greater presence of God himself.

### I can't understand

There are times when, in my own experience, through things that have happened, in our own family, I have felt very angry with God. And there are times when I sometimes say in my prayers, "*I don't know what you're up to, I can't understand it.*" But I'm able to talk to God like that because I believe he's there. And I believe that, although I don't understand, he's still in control.

### Faith and the Future

At the back of my mind is the conviction that, increasingly, as the years pass, Christians are learning a bit more sense. And we're learning that our divisions are far less important than the things that we have in common. And I would like to feel that the Methodist Church in Haddenham will be increasingly making its contribution towards "The Church" and its witness in the world.

Roger Clarke, Director of Clarke & Butcher Flour Mill, recalls events in '44 and in '45.

Born at Mill House, Roger's earliest memories are of seeing men around the town in uniform – in the early days of the First World War

### Surgery on the Kitchen table

As a small boy he contracted diphtheria which at the time was considered quite serious. He was operated on by the local doctor by lamplight at his home, for tonsils. No hygienic operating theatre for a lad as we would expect today!

### A Full Day's Work – 15 Hours

On leaving school, his working day started at 6 a.m. lifting and organising the grain, and at 8 a.m. he had breakfast, changed into office clothes and worked until tea time, then changing back into working attire he finished at the mill by 9 p.m. A long day even for the boss's son!

### The 1944 Bombs

Soham was found to be on fire. Despite efforts of the railway staff, two of whom lost their lives, the contents of the wagon exploded doing considerable damage to the town of Soham. The railway station was destroyed and the mill suffered a damage which caused it to stop running for two days.

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It was a national subject in the papers, Soham, and of course I was in Soham at the time and it was quite phenomenal when things had happened, when an explosion of such magnitude goes off. I believe the actual number was forty four bombs weighing 500 pounds each, all went off in one go. It seemed a pretty long time one after another, you see, these forty four bombs. And they were just going on and on one after the other and seemed to last for about half a minute.

When I looked out the bedroom window the gas works was on fire, which was close to the railway. And we thought it was a bomb on the gas works, really. We didn't realise what was going through. It was the whole trainload of bombs.

## The Mill

The Mill did not escape. It got a certain amount of damage. The worst part of the damage unfortunately was the steam engine in the mill. It had delicate moving parts in it, and those delicate parts were broken and the mill stopped for about three days to have urgent repairs done and then we were away again. But it was really a very big item in the affairs not only of the parish but of the mill and everybody living here at that time. And then of course shortly following that, exactly one year after D Day, we found ourselves once again in much trouble.

## Fire 45'

The mill was a blazing inferno and mills are always very dry inside, and mainly timber floors, timber wood inside, to carry the different flours going down'em. And it was just an inferno, it was so terribly hot, but the shafting which carried the pulleys was two inches thick and when it was cooled off the next day these two inch rods went right through the mill. They were twisted like children's hoops.

Over a period of time, now that I look back to 1945 when the fire was raging, three o'clock in the morning, standing outside beside my father, watching it all go up in flames, the sight was ... depressing is very much an understatement. It was a lifetime's work of hard work going up in smoke. And my father was always a man of very even temperament and he said, "*Well, never minds, good will come out of evil.*" And that was very true, very true indeed.

Henry Constable, who was Mayor of Ely from 1978 to 1980, lived at Wardy Hill. He was a local Preacher in the Ely Methodist circuit for many years.

I wouldn't like to see Ely become very much larger than what it is now (just think of modern expansion in 2002). I think Ely is just a very nice manageable size. I don't think I would want to be the Mayor if it was a great industrial town. I'm quite happy... I think it's a wonderful place, I don't think there's any place like it. It doesn't matter who I talk to;

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people who come in from outside, they say the same. And this happens all the time. This is perhaps one of my great worries, I don't know. We shall proclaim its goodness and therefore build it up larger than what we think it ought to be.

## Palace Garden Party

I should think without any doubt the proudest thing that has come our way was meeting the Queen at the Palace Garden Party, a fortnight ago. We were actually presented to the Queen. And we spoke with her for about five minutes and she's a very lovely person. Someone who's quite easy to converse with.

It was just like talking to your own family, one of your own family.

Con Cameron, lived in Chatteris in the 1920's. Con was probably the first lady taxi driver in the area.

"I do everything, make it talk. The old thing used to rattle. We only got curtains in there, they had to put a hood up if it rained and ya'd get your fingers squashed.

## Foot Control

I burnt me brakes out down at Shrewsbury because there was a flock of sheep coming up a hill and I went and shoved me brakes on quick. Course you could always use your reverse pedal there. See there's no gears. All your gears was with your feet.

I could drive one now if I had one! They'd be worth some money today!

## Repairs to Cars

After Dad left the mill (Houghton near St. Ives) we had these three taxis and then we had fifty boats and punts on the river, we used to look after them.

We used to do our own repairs with the cars; you used to grind the valves in. Oh yes! They'd all fall to pieces at the back axle there... We used to take the plugs out and clean those. We used to have to put side curtains up, well, it was ever so draughty. I used to be out all hours of the night. You had to have a rug round your knees cos it was so cold!

## No Heating

And you used to have to let the water out at night if it was freezing because they used to get froze. There was no such thing as anti-freeze in those days. And jack it up to start it in the mornin'. And then as

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soon as you get the jack up you could start it up and crank it up to try and get it to start! You'd jack it up then it'd fall off the jack!

My Dad used to say, "One of these days you'll get down that Huntingdon Station, that train will just be going out." I used to say I like to get down there in plenty of time. I used to have his car running and Tom's car running. All for that nine thirty train. It used to be the quick train to London. And Dad used to say. "No, I like to get there just on time."

My father would not buy any new tyres or tubes. And do you know, soon as there was a hot day all the patches used to lift off these blessed tubes.

### Kindness of a Stranger

I remember going to Cambridge once, we were going to the Botanic Gardens, and I took a crowd there, in our open Ford it was, and someone walked by and, some man it was, said, "Look at your tyre!" I looked at the tyre and there's a great big bulge. We hadn't been going long through Cambridge and it went off bang! So I had to go to a garage at Downing Street and they come and towed me in. Somebody gave me a lift to Downing Street; it was on a Bank Holiday anyhow, I know there weren't many garages open. And I said, "What am I gonna do?" And he says, "You're gonna have to have a new tyre." I says, "Well, I haven't got any money to get a new tyre I got a young baby with its mother and about four kids," and they went in the Round Church in Cambridge, fed this baby, get out the heat because it was a hot day.

And I was in this Downing Street pub and a young fella came up and said, "What's the trouble?" and I said, "I've got to get a new tyre and they don't seem to trust me", and I told him who I was and where I come from. I said I got to be back by 6 o'clock I got to meet the 6 o'clock train. He said, "Look", he said to the man, "I'll pay for that tyre". He was an Air Force fella from Duxsford.

### No Money for a Cuppa

They were happy days in that old Ford. They used to say, "*Send Connie along to take us to St. Ives shopping.*" I used to wait there all day long for these old fogeys to go shopping. And daren't charge them anything you know. I hadn't got any money to go and get a cup of tea or anything with. Because those days, I mean, six pence a mile...

My husband used to say to me, "*I can run quicker than you can drive!*" – I was very steady driver! He used to say, "*You're a nuisance on the road!*" (A comment often made about women drivers nowadays!)



*This sail reaper is the largest horse-drawn implement in the Farmland Collection: owned by Jack Kerridge (who was a regular helper on Open Days) and last used in 1947 at Hale Fen, Littleport.*



*A little girl turning the handle of a butter churn just like the one used by Mrs. Howe in her farm kitchen at Prickwillow: hand power and horse power were all-important before mechanization.*



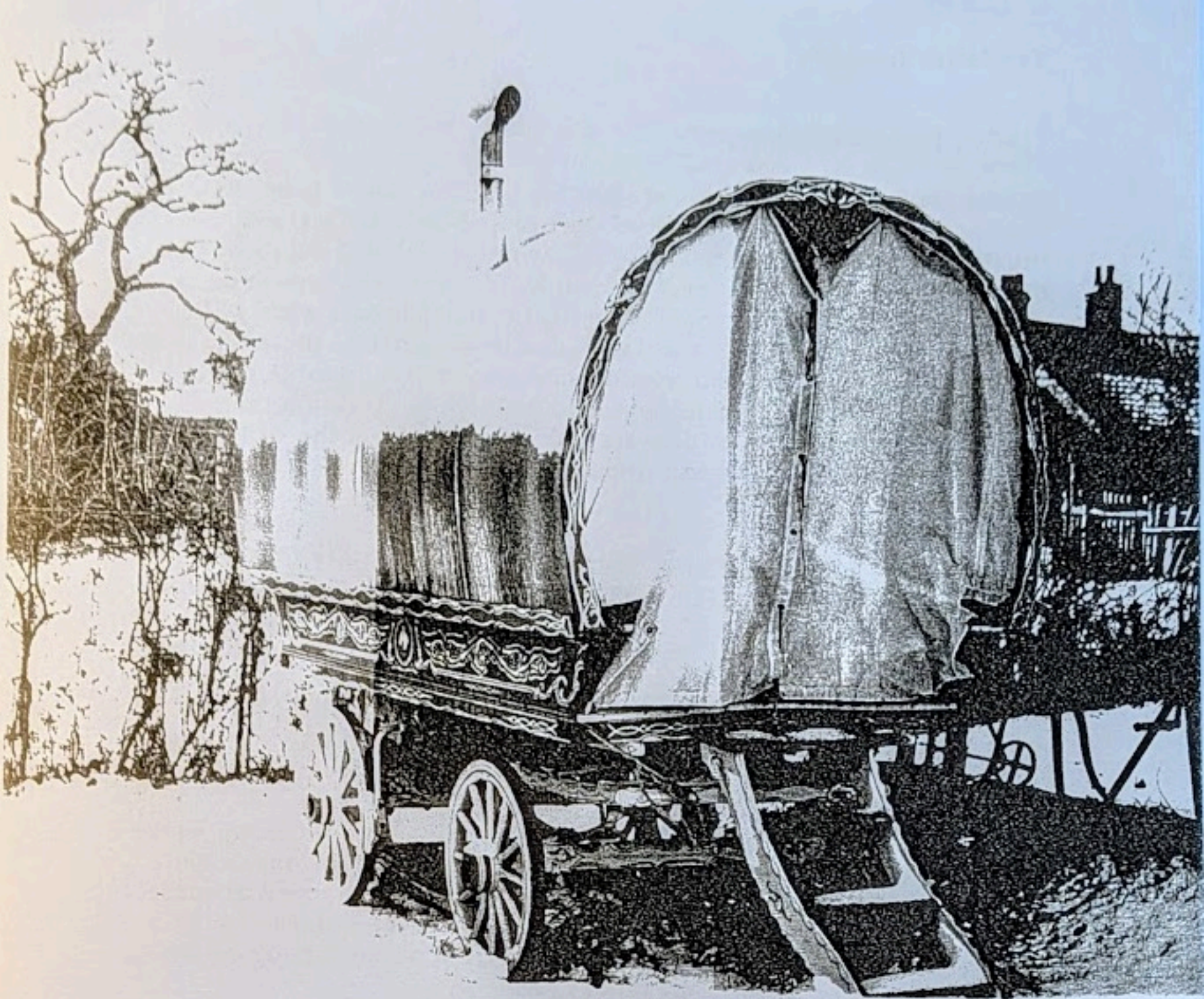
*H.L. Drake business card bought in a Norwich Antique shop, 2002. His daughter Ethel was the first woman taxi driver in the Ely area: note types of car and telephone number.*



*Floods at Sutton Gault in 1912 with a Savage engine pulling loads of farm produce: Richard Drake owned several similar traction engines – now seen at rallies throughout the country.*



*"Bed but no breakfast" one of many photos taken by W. Martin Lane of the 1947 Fen Flood. See Gaulty's account of the floods in the Fens.*



*"Barrel-type" caravan which was an exhibit at the museum for many years: the Ashton Family travelled all over Britain in horse-drawn vans.*



*Friends of the Museum in fancy dress for the annual Blossoms and Bygones Day which raises funds for the village centre. Jean Richards is centre back and Mike Delanoy is on right hand side.*

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### Feather Beds for Farmers

Spring cleaning the beds was another big job, the covers from the feather bed and mattress had to be washed and the mattress well brushed, especially around the buttons with a small stiff brush, then there was the "valance" round the bed. All the beds had a valance; it was like a frilled curtain round the bed. I remember ours were white print with pink flowers on and one with a lace insertion, these had to be washed and starched and ironed, what a business it was! A large white honeycomb bedspread was on the bed, white cloths on the dressing table and chest of drawers and lace curtains at the windows; all to be washed, starched and ironed with no electric washer or irons to help.

Ewart Drake was the grandson of the Sutton factory owner and director of the haulage contractors, H. L. Drake and Son of Ely.

### Family Firm

My grandfather built two factories at Sutton, one in the Brook and the other adjacent to the railway line at the station, where there was a siding on the Ely/Sutton line (see Paye's book "The Ely and St. Ives Railway"). It was a great big place and they had conveyors and elevators there to take the chaff (chopped up straw) up to the top where it was mixed with hay which had been cut and then steam was forced through the mixture to cook it. It used to have a special smell about it and was called "nosey". People could smell this ever so far off and could predict the weather just as you can with the beet factory smell (Ely beet factory closed in the late 1970's).

### Wholesome Food for Horses

There were boilers and a great big cylinder and they used to force steam into the cylinder to cook the nosey; this would then be put into bags weighing about forty pounds each; various mixtures were made according to the proportions of straw and hay and so different varieties were made just like cereals are today. These sacks were then loaded onto the trucks in the railway siding and taken to London (for feeding the horses pre-car days). Drake's had a depot at Bow under the railway arches, numbers 514 to 523 and had a registered office there too.

### Barter is not New

My grandfather was a tinker originally and started the firm, Richard Drake and Sons, in 1856. This was the chaff factory. It started with threshing for farmers (separating the grain from the stalks) and often the farmers did not want the straw and farmers did not want to pay to have the threshing done, so my grandfather would take the straw, hence the farmers did not have to part with any money.... all he had to get then was the hay (dried grass) to mix with it. When he was on holiday

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in Norfolk he saw around Hickling Broad some rush-like grass growing; he thought this would make good fodder to mix with the chaff so he bought some, loaded onto the rail at Stalham Station (now closed) and railed it back to Sutton-in-the-Isle. This is why my grandfather called his 'new' house in Sutton High Street Hickling House (now a super market). The row of cottages near the station was built for Drake's workmen and were called Bow Cottages (still standing and privately owned) after the depot in London.

### Mr. and Mrs. Charles Goulty of Littleport: Memories of the 1947 floods

Charles was one of the first people to be alerted when the water level in the Fen Rivers started to rise; he recalled the events of the first Sunday in March, 1947. "The wind was howling and I left my wife and little daughter to go to Ely to the Roswell pits to organise the filling of barges with gault. I stayed there on the houseboat-dredger and came home only at the week-end to get clean clothes and extra food. The riverbanks were patrolled by farmers, their employees and also soldiers. The water was rising quickly and I told my wife that she should open the front door and let it run through and out at the back, where the ground is lower." His wife added, "I took everything I could carry upstairs, including the jars of jam and bottled fruit I had made the previous summer. I sat in a fireman's coat and daren't go to bed – it was worse than the bombing." (Of Second World War some five years previously).

### Twentypence

Mrs. Goulty had had experience of the characteristics of the Fen Rivers (which flow at a higher level than the fields which they drain) having spent her childhood beside the Old West River at Twentypence, Wilburton. "There was only a fen drove leading up to the village and it took me a long time to walk up to the school: my granddad kept the Public house (demolished in 2002 to make way for houses by the Marina) and we lived in the white cottage (later owned by Eleanor Somerfield and Leonard Sachs of Music Hall fame). Beer for the pub was fetched by horse and cart from Wilburton Station and if I could get a lift home from school by horse or donkey cart I thought I was very lucky. I lived there until I went into service at Cambridge" (employment for girls at this time in the early years of the twentieth century was very limited).

A lot has been surmised about the name "Twentypence". It cost a penny per person to cross to Cottenham and two pence to include a bike. One suggestion was that from Wilburton Church to Cottenham Church the return journey would cost twenty pence for two carts, their horses and wagoners but this is only an idea...

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### From Cam to Wissey

Charles talked of his work with the dredger taking gault (clay) from the Roswell Pits to build up the banks of the River Wissey, making a ten foot channel in the middle and sloping the sides; barges could carry fifty tons each and pulled by a diesel tug (in earlier days horses were used for their pulling power ... hence tow paths along a lot of river banks.) "We lived all the week on the dredger and some evenings we would shoot a rabbit, skin and cook it for the meal in the evening. Sometimes we dredged out bits of pots and things which Major Fowler would give us money for: we got a whole quid (£1) when we found a skeleton which is now in the museum at Cambridge" (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Downing Street).

It was a hard life for the bankers on the Fen Rivers; because of the shrinkage of the peat since drainage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it is essential that the "banks" are maintained and the damage from moles etc. is repaired (see Thulborn, mole catchers).

### Mrs. Esther Howe, wife of a small farmer in the village of Prickwillow, known to her friends as Essie

"I used to get up about half past six. My husband would get up just a bit before cos I used to like my cup of tea in bed, you see. But soon as I had that I had to get moving. So I used to get up at half past six. My husband and the milkman used to go out and milk and I'd be ready to separate (take cream off by passing milk through hand operated machine) at ten minutes to seven when they came in with the milk. We used to take the cream off. People used to come years ago and fetch a ha'peth of milk. A ha'peth of skimmed milk. Quite a can full cos you wouldn't do anything cept give it to the pigs. Whatever container they brought, you just filled. I had all the housework to do and course there was butter to make once a week. And chickens, I had about 400 chickens. They were free range. Every afternoon, wet or fine, eggs were collected and the egg man used to come round and collect them in a big lorry - a huge container lorry. The boxes they used to bring would hold thirty-six dozen. I'll tell you an ordinary day's work. We had what we called dockey at quarter past ten. And then the men stopped for oneses just for a cup of tea and a bite of cake or something. And then come in at four o'clock for a cooked meal. That was in an ordinary day's work when it wasn't harvest. But harvest there were these four meals to get.

We went to bed earlier than what we do now. Yes, half past nine. If we thought it was ten o'clock, my dear, we was late!

### The Importance of the Women's Institute

I belonged to the WI and I've always belonged to the chapel. Years ago there were real old members, you see. They worked hard to get things

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going in the village. For instance, they got the water brought down here. Yes. That was through the WI that water was brought to Prickwillow. Now this was in the 1920's I'm talking about. What the WI said then bore quite a bit of weight.

### In the War Time

All this canning fruit went on, you know; the WI had its own canner. And then we used to go up to the Hall in turn so many afternoons during the week you see. And when the peaches were in season we used to go Ely market and buy a big tray of peaches and take them up to the WI hall to do. Cos we had our own hall then.

### War Effort

We used to knit for the war effort, you know, mittens and balaclavas and scarves and socks and that sort of thing. This fruit business was for ourselves; when we was canning all this fruit we got up to 106 members! So you know they came for what they could get out of it. You see everybody was so pleased to get this fruit done. And I forget if we was allowed any sugar or not but you know during the war for the harvest months and the sugar beet season the farmers did get extra margarine, tea, sugar, cheese...

### Rationing was not a Problem

Course it happened that I got one thing somebody else got another. Cos I could never make my tea ration last out, you see. But I could easily get a quarter of tea for a bit of butter cos we made our own butter. All this went on, you see. And of course we had our own eggs. We weren't short of milk or chickens. But there were things that we were limited with, but in the whole we did well.

Blanche Looker, who retired back to her childhood town of Soham, was a great observer of life in the country

"Everybody loved Herbert, my little brother. And we weren't jealous of him we girls, we all loved him. And we didn't have shoes, nobody had shoes until they were two and we didn't wear shoes during school holidays. But Herbert being a boy he'd got to have some shoes and we weren't jealous ... so mother went up the Coop which then was where Peers the chemist is, and she chose these shoes. They were brown kid. And they had some little butterflies on. And of course it was only tinsel but as far as we gals were concerned it was gold. And they were gold and they were two and six pence (12 ½ p.). And she paid the deposit of six pence and then she paid six pence a week until she'd paid for them. And she went two miles further round to come round to the town every week to pay that six pence.

## Ten Miles from Ely

When I think of it ... she used to take a short cut the other days. Even so she walked seven miles each day to her job at Stuntney picking onions, but she used to come around and pay that six pence. And the great day came she'd finished paying the two and six pence for these brown shoes. And we all gathered together, tho' father was at work, and Herbert was going to have his shoes. And all Soham knew; I told everybody at school my brother was having some brown kid shoes but they got golden butterflies, so that was news all through the school. "Blanche Looker's brother's got shoes with golden butterflies and he's never had a pair of shoes on his feet before."

And we propped him up in the corner and we gathered all round, all the whole lot of us, my stepsister was at home then, and he was laughing, he was always laughing, he was fat. And he took his first step. Well, the picture of my mother and all those miles she'd walked to buy that pair of shoes and the joy that we'd had got out of it. We didn't mind him having shoes with golden butterflies, we didn't care a bit, we loved it. And our happiness, as we were all round seeing him with his shoes on, it was lovely.

Harold Sennitt of Wicken, grass track cycle racer and the last of the peat diggers, enjoyed being interviewed by the media.

In his interview Harold recalled how, before the First World War, his younger brother had to be taken to London for treatment on a "club" foot and how he recovered sufficiently well to take up the sport of grass track racing. Visits to far away places, Chatteris and March, were well known local venues and prize money up in Yorkshire could be as much as £30 ... much more than in the Fen Country!

Bookies were involved and there was much "betting", sometimes with "fiddles" going on, proving that all was NOT as honest in the "good ole days" as we are sometimes led to believe!

## Food from the Fens

Living all his life at Wicken, Harold was well known as a gatherer of food from the Fen and he passed on the following advice: when decoying duck, set fire to a block of peat (harvested from the Fen) before setting out the decoys, and smoke will take away the scent of humans so that the real duck will, out of curiosity, fly in and settle with the decoys and can then be easily shot for the table or the London Market. Thousands of duck were shot in the fens and sent to London by train before the outbreak of World War 2, a useful cash crop for the Fenman, such as Harold Sennitt.

*The story of Turf Digging at Wicken Fen is recorded in Lohoar & Ballard's book.*

## Ten Miles from Ely

Percy Tharby was a choirboy in the Cathedral. Life then was very different from that of the choirboys of today.

### New Boy

Well, I had just celebrated my eighth birthday when I went. And, you know, it's all very awesome. You go upstairs at half past eight in the morning when school started, so you got there by five and twenty past eight, and then within a few moments upstairs came a tall serious looking young man I remember him well and everybody stood round in a circle at their music stands and rehearsal started in the morning. He would certainly note. "*Oh, you've arrived, have you? Good. Hope you get on all right.*" That's what he would say. But may I add here that whilst we were perfectly behaved in the cathedral, like all small boys we had our moments when we were away from it.

### Caning

However, on this occasion I'm afraid I forgot myself and someone very quietly pinched a sheet of music from my stand and I shouted, "*Hey! What are you doing there?*" And music stopped, everything stopped. And Poncenby said, "*Who was that?*" I said, "*It was I sir.*" "*Right! I cannot deal with interruptions in the course of the music lesson. You will go and report to my housekeeper and she will give you the cane*". I thought he meant that she would hand it to me when I got there. Not to give it to me. But she was a fine ole Irish lady known affectionately by all of us as Sarah. She said, "*Surely he's not going to beat a little fella like you!*" Because I was terribly short for my age. However I came back to the school, this was the third day of being a cathedral chorister and he gave me six of the best. I can assure you that was the end of that sort of episode.

### Jews' Harps

During my period Jews' Harps came into strong fashion. On one Friday evening practice which was at seven thirty, we assembled in the nave of the Cathedral and then promptly proceeded to play our Jews' harps. Unfortunately we were playing a little longer than anticipated and the organist came into get ready for the rehearsal, and of course there was eight of us banging away at these Jews' Harps and he was not terribly pleased. The following morning the precentor came up into school and he said, "*Right, outside!*" And we all had to line up and we got a terrific leathering! Every boy, well, not every boy in the choir because it was early on in the season, eight of us out of the sixteen got a good hard six. In fact, the precentor had brought along two new canes to make sure that we got the best of it!

Ten Miles from Ely

### Canes Cost a Tanner

Tommy Coats, who was a famous tenor in our choir, used to keep a lovely tobacconist shop in St. Mary's Street. And I'm sorry to say, was the supplier of the canes. And in those days they cost six pence each.

A good thing about the school was it was standard clothing from Monday morning till Sunday night. And weekdays you wore a nice little suit and particularly short trousers for the boys and on Sundays you wore long trousers – you had the Eton suit with the striped trousers and ... there's a little thing ... we had Mr Elfins arrive and he previously had been a Royal Naval Chaplain and so he was from the discipline. And instead of us tracking over to the cathedral as we used to do, he had us all formed up in twos and we all marched over. Furthermore – and this was the horror of it until we got used to it – on a Sunday we used to meet at twenty to eleven and what was this for, pray, at eleven? It was for the precentor to carry out an inspection of his choristers.

### What did the inspection entail?

First of all on the order given, you stuck out your hands and he came along the line and inspected your nails and your hands and particularly your wrists. From there he looked you up and down to make sure your suit was in order. And then he walked down behind you, looked at fellas' necks, hair and every now and again you'd get a clip of the ear and he'd say, "*Haircut!*" And if you were not too clean he'd tell you about it. And there's a point too about haircuts... in those days you'd get a jolly good haircut for six pence but that wasn't good enough for him. We had to go to a firm in the High Street who were known as Doppler's; he was of French origin. And he used to charge eight pence. However, he'd called in and seen the proprietor and given instruction about this. We were all to have extra short haircuts. I do remember on one occasion that I'd had a haircut and the precentor looked at me the next morning he said, "*How much that cost you boy?*" and I said, "*Eight pence, sir.*" he said, "*Right, go back and have the other four penneth.*"

Albert Thulborn, member of a well known local family, had a wealth of rural stories to tell.

Mr. Thulborn started his mole catching career for the Cottenham, Rampton and Willingham Board and he only changed to the Haddenham Board when his mother died. He had left school at about twelve years of age after taking his leavers examination as Stretham. He passed it, and Miss Langford was glad to see him leave! He drove steam engines from Cottenham before becoming a mole-catcher at about twenty four.

### Sale of Skins

He was paid weekly and was allowed to sell the skins, which earned him about ten pence or a shilling for each one before the war. He sold them to a firm at Wisbech called Friends. Since he caught about forty-five per week, he reckoned it was a good bonus. He didn't hang his skins on barbed wire, as some catchers did, but dried them by staking them on boards. He set his traps out in different fields on Mondays, section by section, knowing where the moles were by the mounds, and moving further forward each day.

### Farming Moles

He didn't trap where there were breeding grounds, because it wouldn't be sensible, he admitted, to hinder his trade. In a way, because he looked after the moles, he considered himself to be a mole-farmer!

### Need for Control

There haven't been so many moles since the floods of 1947 because many drowned and others took to the banks. The catchers had to try to catch them there, but the moles could weaken the banks and tunnel through. He was issued with clamp traps which sometimes got stolen by someone trapping a mole in their own garden (see Guy Smith "Moles and their control").

Jean Richards, editor of "Village Voice" and lay reader in the Church of England, received the M.B.E. for her work with Ugandan Refugees.

I had a very nice job in the Land Army, because I worked for a very – by the standards of the time – a very large farmer. He rented round about a thousand acres. And I had a job with him, which was partly being the farm secretary; I did all the paper work. And I used to rear about 120 calves a year. A cousin of mine was in the Timber Corps, that part of the Land Army which was concerned with forestry and timber. And they worked as gangs. In the horticultural areas they worked as gangs. But in an awful lot of the other areas there would perhaps be a single girl just living in the household. Some areas they had hostels and a group of girls would live together and go out to the farm. I lived in the household with the farmer and his wife and the children, and that was perfectly common then. The hours were very, very long but I mean, people don't know they're born nowadays.

Jack Reeve, a farm worker who spent all his life in the village of Stretham, was a mine of local history.

Jack was the only son in the Reeve household; his father had died when he was just a child leaving his mother with the responsibility of bringing up that family of three girls and a boy.

### Public Houses

They lived in a pub, the Crown, and as Jack recalled, "*Beer at two pence a pint was a lot of money in them days*". There were nine other public houses in the parish all trying to get trade ... The Sun, The White Lion, The Malt and Hops, The White Horse, The New Red Lion, and The Bell and Bridge House. The two remaining ones at the time of the interview – 1977 – were the Chequers and the Red Lion (The latter now in 2002 functions as a good restaurant).

### A Shilling a Day

Jack knew everyone in the village in his boyhood: a government "pass" issued in farming areas during World War I enabled him to "*start work on the land at the age of eleven for a shilling a day which began at seven and finished at five*". Harvesting was very hard work: Fields were mowed with a hand scythe. "*My first job was to make bands of corn to tie up the sheaves with*" (No self-binders in that farm then!). You had to be tough to do the hard work and long hours: "*I was at work by five to feed the horses and had to rack them up after a full days work before I could go home... all for thirty bob for a six-day week, no half day on Saturday.*" In those day's the workers were under the thumbs of their employers and Jack endured "*sharp winters with no protection from the weather but no work meant no pay, so we just carried on.*"

### Smaller Farms Make Bigger Units

The farm was eventually owned by Stan Hopkin of Ely who planted many of the trees which can be seen today around the Old West River, (Currently the land is farmed as part of the Shropshire estate) but on the whole farmers "don't want hedges around the fields as they were when I was a boy; they want bigger and bigger fields so that the machines can keep going on and on." In his interview Jack referred to a neighbour's donkey then kept solely as a child's pet; in his young days donkeys provided transport for carrying, enabling farmers and small holders to go to Ely Market on Thursdays and other place.

### No Leisure Centres Then!

*"I had some good times and some ruff uns ... I was so tired when I got hum a' nights that I'd just fall asleep. No leisure time like folks have today: the only place to meet people was at church or chapel on Sundays.* Like so many of his contemporaries, Jack married his school-girl sweet-heart, Emily, and he lived to be over eighty, maintaining that if he had to live his life over again, he "would not change a single thing".

What contentment with his lot!

Mabel Demaine's memories of 80 years ago: How do they compare with ours of the twenty first century?

Christmas Memories

Peeping through the curtains to see the village Bandsmen clustered around a lighted lamp tied to a pole and hearing, 'Hark the herald' and 'Oh come all ye faithful' played with great gusto – and joining with other young people as soon as darkness fell to tour the village to sing these same well-loved Christmas hymns are two of my earliest recollections, deep snow and sparkling frost added to these pleasures. Why did we never feel the cold in those days?

Homemade Decorations

There were no luxuries in those bygone days, homemade paper chains and holly decorated our rooms and a pile of logs filled our hearth; homemade cakes and puddings and mincemeat filled the pantry shelves. A box of dates, a dish of nuts, oranges and apples and a bottle of ginger wine were included in our Christmas fare. Christmas Eve was always a busy time for my mother, stuffing the goose, preparing the vegetables, getting the children off to bed early. This was no trouble on Christmas Eve, the night when Father Christmas came. I can remember trying to keep awake, waiting to see him arrive, at the same time being somewhat fearful of some stranger filling that long stocking of my father's which hung at the foot of my bed. I can still recall the rustling sound that stocking made when I awoke next morning and pushed my feet down the bed towards its bulging sides – an orange in the toe, a few nuts and sweets, a handkerchief – just a few simple things were all it contained and yet what a joy and thrill they gave me. For several years my younger brother and I had our Christmas day tea with some elderly relatives who lived two miles away.

I wish I could make a ground rice cake like the one we always had for tea; no rich iced Christmas cake could compare with that rice cake, with its sugary, buttery, mouth-watering taste and how I would have liked a second slice! (Children were expected not to be greedy)

No Computer Games or Television

After tea we played dominoes and draughts and "I spy" and then hot mince pies and a cup of cocoa and muffled up with scarves and coats we walked home.

I can remember those walks over fifty years ago. It was always moonlit and frosty, and how the frost did sparkle – and the stars – I watched the stars, they were so bright and a shooting star gave me a shiver down my spine, it seemed such a fearful and frightening thing. I never see a shooting star now without being reminded of those walks home on Christmas nights.

*George Amory told the story of Topsy the horse so many times for local radio, newspapers etc. and always word-for-word.*

### Topsy

"We all lived at home, that was one little cottage and next door lived Fred Peacock. And he wouldn't come and say he wanted something done, 'Will ya do this and will ya do that?' ... He used to come and tell you to do it (a characteristic of many Fen Folk!) Well anyway, me and me brother, Sam, was still at home, young men - other brothers were married and gone. Well, he had a mare expectin' a foal named Topsy. So my poor ole dad, he never done work for years - he was bad with asthma and he couldn't get his breath and that ... so anyway, we were out at work and this here mare was ready to foal, so you exercising this here mare and at night when we'd had our tea and that he comes round next door, "Where are ya?" We sat there ...he says, "The old mare will have foal tunnight". He didn't say will ya come help me, he said, "I shall knock on the door when I want some help and don't be a bloody hour a comin'!" All right...

We knew my dad would know cos he never slept much. Well anyway, about one o'clock, in the mornin', there come a knock on the front door. My dad said, "George, yup, Freddy's just been." Well I woke me brother, Sam, and said, "Sam, Freddy's just been". We gets out a bed, gets dressed, comes up garden to his, cuz there's no light cept the oil lamps, no electric light. So anyway, we went in the stables, he sat there with this here mare; we sat there, about half an hour. Afterwards he said, "I don't think she's gonna foal by now" She got up and started eating. We still sat there bout nother half hour and 'No', he said, she in't gonna foal tunnight, you might as well go and go to bed. So course, we went. So when went got up stairs, me dad says, 'What ya got?' I says, 'We aint got noithin'. I says, 'It's a false alarm.' (This cliché has been frequently used in the family since!).

Course, next day we gets up like and goes to work, in the mean time Fred used to exercise this mare up and down the road, my poor ole dad was there, he says, "She foal tunnight Freddy!" "Yes, I think she will." he says. Milk was running from her teats, a sure sign that a foal is about to come.

So anyway, when we come home and had our tea I says to me Dad, I said, "Has Topsy foal?" He says no. 'Well, I says, 'hope she foals b'fore we go to bed'. Anyway, we sat there bout, oh I think, nine

o'clock, course there was nothing to do, had to make our own amusements then (No TV, radio or computers). He come round knock at the door and he said, "*We shall have a foal tunning.*" So he said, "*Don't be an hour comin'!*" All right. I said to Sam, 'I'm going to bed, it'll be about an hour or two', so anyway, we went to bed. Bout half past twelve, perhaps one, there come a knock on the door. Dad said, "*George!*" I could hear ... I said, '*Right!*' said to Sam, 'he'd just been.' So course we got ready and way we come up this yard. And went in the stables. "*Gonna have a foal Freddy?*" He said, "*Yes I think we'll have one tunning.*" So we sat there bout half hour, she lay down – well we got the foal, beautiful foal. So he said we'll stop with her a little while – when a foal's born they try to get up. So we stopped with her bout half hour, foal tried to get up and we steadied it. Foal tries to suck soon as ever they get on, they want to suck. So we stopped with it and that sucked.

Well he got a horse keeper named Billy Mills; he used to live in Butlins lane in the little ole house. So Fred says to me, "*Now George, you go down and fetch Billy Mills up.*" 'No', he said, '*you go down and knock Billy Mills up and tell him to come and don't tell him we got a foal.*' I says, '*alright*'. So course him and Sam go an boil a kettle for a cup of tea. '*You can have a cup a tea when you's come back.*' I said '*Right*'... I goes down to Butlins lane and knock the front door – well, back door cos one in front is in the lane. Billy put his head out the window – this is about what ... two in the morning, half past two. I says, '*You got to come*', I says, '*the ole mare's uneasy*'. Well, she's got to foal, ya see... '*All right*', he says, '*wait for me.*' He's only a little fella. Of course, Billy got dressed and out he come. He said, "*Do ya think she's gonna foal, George?*" I says, '*She keeps getting up and layin' down*'. So I said, '*No doubt she'll have it.*' Well, she's already got it...

Come up the yard here, come in the house. So Sam and Freddy got the tea, cups of tea. "*Come on Billy, and have a cup of tea.*" He says, "*I think I'll go an have a look.*" "*Come and have a cup of tea!*" So course, he sits down has a cup of tea, I sit for my cup of tea – I hadn't told him bout the foal or nothin'. So we sat there and Billy says, "*I think I'll go an have a look at her*" He got the little ole oil lamp, ya see, away he went – course, we sat in this kitchen, in this very house. He were gone no end a while. Freddy says, "*What the hell's happen?*". He says, '*He don't come back.*' I says, '*No, he will do.*' Anyway, all at once Billy come in. Freddy says to him, "*You been a long while, Billy.*" "*Ha*", Billy says, '*good job I went just as I*

*did." He says, "What's the matter?" He says, "She was just having a foal." "Well, what's she got two?" "No", he says, "She's only got one. I got there just in time" "Oh", he said, "You bloody liar, he said, "we foaled her half hour b'fore George come after ya!" Chuckle ... real Fen humour!*



*Wicken Fen Cottage has been furnished with early twentieth century items, some surplus to the Farmland Museum Collection. It is open to the public some weekends in summer as part of the National Trust Reserve which is the oldest in the United Kingdom.*

*Charlie Ashton a real gentleman, had so many interesting stories to tell of his travels that a complete book could be written about his travels.*

### Patriotism in the First World War

Charlie was one of a family of thirteen, some of whom were born before 1914. As soon as war was declared that year, his father pulled the horse-drawn wagon to the side of the road in Worcestershire and went off to fight "For King and Country".

"My Mum took the kids down to London and lived in a house until Dad came back. He could not stick it there and so he bought a wagon for £20 and took to the road again."

### No Electric Blanket or Double Glazing

Charlie recalled sleeping under the caravan on an "oat flight bed" or "under the sheet" (tarpaulin) on the horse-drawn trolley. The boys made pegs while looking after the horses – seven or eight of them – and the girls fashioned paper flowers to sell from door-to-door. The family travelled from Cambridge to Nuneaton, on to Birmingham and Coventry and through Shropshire up to Manchester, where in winter months, he had to attend school which he did not like!

After using the wagon (or caravan) for twenty years, the Ashtons sold it for £100 to a farmer's wife in Norfolk, got rid of their horses and became motorised. Later in the 1970's Charlie and his family settled on a permanent site at Hod Hall Lane.

### Charlie's Mother, the Fortune Teller

At the time of the interview, 1977, Charlie's mother was still alive at ninety-five and living in a stationary caravan at Over, near St. Ives. In her youth she was famous at fetes and fairs in Essex as a clairvoyant known as Gypsy Mead.

One particular young man visited her at the fair and she told his fortune, predicting the appearance of the girl he would eventually marry, the success of his garage business and even the dates on which certain things would happen.

Two or three years passed before the Ashton family were back in Fyfield again, within hours a smartly-dressed man knocked on the caravan door. "Is Mrs. Ashton in?" he asked. On seeing her, he pushed a £10 note (one of the big old white ones) into her hand and said, "Gypsy Mead is what you were called at the fete, your predictions for me have all come true and I have called my garage (specialising in Rolls-Royces, no less!) "The Gypsy Mead Garage" in honour of you."

Charlie said that sometimes his mother would decline to tell fortunes, saying, after the client had left, "There is no future for that person". Often this proved to be true.

### Grim Woman Lane – A Ghostly Story

"Sitting by the open fire, Dad often told us children stories of his travels; this one is true, and the lane is still there in Staffordshire, linking one road to another.

“One evening a gypsy couple and their son pulled their caravan onto the lane; the grass was lush and the horse was put in a nearby field. The couple retired to sleep in the van, and the son settled down under a sheet (tarpaulin) to sleep.

About midnight a rattling noise woke the son, and there, looking at him, stood a smashing girl. Her face changed to a grin, and the lad was terrified. He knocked up his parents and sat in the caravan by candlelight.

About an hour later he heard voices; a policeman and a local gamekeeper appeared at the door. “Surely you are not going to move us on at this ungodly hour”, said the father. “No, we are just surprised you are here at all. Don’t you know this lane is haunted?”

Apparently, the grim woman only appears to solitary people; hence the P.C., always accompanying the gamekeeper on his rounds for illegal poachers. The gamekeeper dare not walk the lane alone for fear of being accompanied by the Grim Lady!”

*Len Burton, Fen Farmer, was a member of a well-known horse breeding family and long-time member of the Parish Council*

### The Horse-Keeper’s Day Started Early

“That was a very interesting life when people was a horse keeper. It was a profession, if you like to call it a profession, that needs a lot of dedication, love of animals, and it was hard work but very enjoyable.

Well the first thing in the mornings when you went along to get your horses in the wintertime, they laid in the yards, in the covered yards, you get them in the stables and the first thing you do is light your lantern, it would be an oil lamp. Just the paraffin and a wick. Very often they’d only show a very dim light because the glass would be blurred, but anyway, you would usually be up at about five to half past – every horse keeper worth his salt would always see his horse had two hours feeding before he was taken out to work. That was about the time it took to make a horse satisfied.”

### Little and Often

“And you fed him little and often, that was small amounts at a time because if you put it in his manger very thick, his breath from his nose would make the food warm and not palatable. So, all good horse keepers would always feed his horse small quantities and often.

The first thing you did when you got your light alight, (Note, no electric lights as on farms today) you get them in and they'd always come into the same position, they knew the position in the stables to stand and always got in the right position. You tie them up to the mangers and ya give them the first feed, which would be chaff – that is straw, chopped up which used to be done by thrashing machines (or earlier on hand chaff-cutters). They used to be cut and stored in the chaff place. And so you'd get a little bit of heat on it to make it a nice smell. One stone of oats a day was a good ration of corn – fourteen pounds.

And then they'd have chaff and ground mangolds. And then probably give them a little ground linseed oil cake or something like that to keep their coats in good silky condition.”

#### Grooming Was an Everyday Job

“You'd do that and while they was feeding you'd get your curry comb and your brush and they'd be all brushed and combed all over. It would take about ten minutes to do each horse, you'd do that while they was feeding, keep feeding them along at the same time. You went along, you pulled the tails out with the comb and then you braid the tail up before they went to work each morning so that didn't get all in the dirt during the day and also, you see, when they had a crupper put round the tail it was much easier to thread through. So while they was feeding you did all this, you might nip out and get your own breakfast, and the farmer, if you was working for a farmer, he'd tell you what horses were needed for work for the day and they would be yoked – we called it yoked, that was the name for it that means putting a harness on the horses. Course, if you was going on the cart, the horse would just have his collar put on. Which you always put it on upside down and turned over the way its mane lays, you always turn it one way.

You always turned it to the left when you was facing the horse. Because the mane was always hanging over that way and you didn't ruffle it.

Then you'd still hang the bridle on the horses and you'd still continue feeding and then you'd put his saddle on. And that horse would be ready for work.”

#### Starting the Working Day

“When the men came to work they'd take the horse, whichever they were gonna use, and put his bridle on and then take him off to do the job. Of course, there was several ways of attaching the horses to the

different implements. It all depends whether you wanted two or three or one behind, two in front or three single. There was several different methods of attaching horses to different implements. It was very nice to work three horses."

*Mabel Demaine - World War II. Extracts from her 'Recollections of a Country Woman', published 1988.*

"During World War II there was plenty of activity in our village. Not only was labour short, men and women were fully occupied by work on the land. They also had to fit in many duties connected with the war effort. The Home Guard enlisted a number of men and under the training of two soldiers - William Rushbrook and Albert Gaetkuss - they were put through their paces. And what a difficult task these two elderly but active officers!"

### The Home Guard

"My brother reached the position of Corporal, and he often recounted some amusing stories about some of these raw recruits; they hardly knew their left foot from their right! One dark winter's night the company had a special exercise which involved blacking their faces getting camouflaged and creeping along hedges and about the lanes and fields. Going home after this activity, my brother, completely forgetting his blackened face and dishevelled appearance, and armed with his rifle went home to his wife, who was so scared by the spectacle she promptly passed out in a dead faint."

### Fen Folk in Uniform

"An outstanding member of the Home Guard was the village fishmonger, Frank Bristow, a big burly man with a loud voice. He had been a sailor in his younger days. He could often be heard from a long distance at his post outside the local post office, challenging those who came anywhere nearby. He used to say, "*Friend or foe?*" Even people he knew well and lived nearby received this same challenge. And with his rifle at the ready, one dare not ignore this request. What a queer sight these men were with their ugly, ill-fitting khaki uniforms! So often looking like comic soldiers. The Air Raid Wardens looked far smarter in navy blue suits and peak caps and berets. They paraded the streets every night and woe betide anyone who showed the tiniest glimmer of light. I think they enjoyed their position of authority and with the village policemen made sure that even keyhole lights were not visible.

At the outbreak of war the local policeman, Sergeant Lees, who was on the reserve list, was called up. Sergeant Lees was a likeable, pleasant man who married a teacher from the village school and was happily settled in the police house only a very short while before he

was called up. After only a few weeks the sad news was received of his death on active service. He was one of the first casualties.

A former village policeman, an elderly retired constable, took over the duties until the end of war. He was PC Alfred Hudson."

#### Our Local G.P. who lived at The Lodge

"Early on a very enthusiastic branch of the Red Cross was formed, run by Dr. and Mrs. Fairweather. They organised classes for the members. The Lodge, Dr. Fairweather's home, was its headquarters. In fact, the Lodge became the busiest house in Haddenham. Not only was it the first-aid post, but also the big business of organising homes for the evacuees was done there, with all the problems involved in that undertaking. Mrs. Fairweather was tireless and hard working. It was amazing the amount of work and organising she did. One day she said to me, *"You know, I've got into a dreadful state. If I sit down and do nothing, I get such a guilty feeling."* Her house was chock-o-block full of blankets, gasmasks, first-aid equipment, stretchers, clothing and food for evacuees."

#### Invasion from the East End

"The evacuees sent to the village were mostly Jewish from the East End of London – the Whitechapel slum area. I shall never forget one of the first coach loads to arrive. It came on a Sunday afternoon. There were a number of expectant mothers with young children. With their gasmasks and bundles of belongings, they were a pathetic sight, frightened and bewildered. And although they were given good homes and every care, they could not settle. They missed the noise and bustle of Whitechapel with its fish and chip shops, its cinemas and pubs. And before a week had passed many had returned home, preferring, as they said, to be bombed out in London than to stagnate and die of boredom in a quiet country village.

However, the staff and scholars of a London East End school settled in more successfully, using the Church Hall as their school. The children with their own teachers found it easier to adapt themselves and make friends among the village children."

#### Volunteers Help with Food Shortages

"Another worthy scheme in operation during the war was run by a willing band of volunteers. It was the pie scheme. With the restrictions and rationing of food, it became increasingly difficult for housewives to satisfy their hungry families. Packed meals for the farm workers and others became a problem. And this pie scheme was a great help. Twice a week hundreds of jam turnovers were made and baked in the local bakeries. And these were distributed to many families at a nominal charge. I can remember how we met in Steel's bakery and in Jane Adams' clubroom to make and bake these turnovers. And we really enjoyed this very worthwhile job."

*Eric Drake, born at Sutton, became a tutor at Loughborough Teacher Training College and retired to Potter Heigham, near Hickling Broad (see references in "Ten Miles from Ely"). He was a Fen boy born and bred and a prolific letter writer of his memories of childhood. Some of which are recorded here.*

### Grunty Fen Express

This is the name we boys had for the train which shuttled between Ely and St. Ives.

Earlier, I travelled on it from Haddenham to Ely, later from Sutton, to join the train to Soham to attend the grammar school.

The train consisted of steam engine, a couple of passenger coaches and as big a number of goods vans as the season demanded.

Haddenham had a Station Master. His official house may still be there (Yes, now part of Anson Packaging from Grunty Fen.) in the corner formed by the road embankment and the train tracks. He was an important gentleman with navy brass-buttoned suit and braided military style peaked cap. He met every train and blew the whistle whilst standing on the platform. This allowed the train guard to wave his flag to signal the driver. Goods trains travelled the line and Haddenham took away trucks loaded with Grandad Hepher's bricks and cheese (from York Villa).

### Bog Oak

"Bog oak first came to my notice when we lived at Wayhead Farm, Coveny. Black, decaying logs at the drove sides and field edges were everywhere. Later I learned these had been pulled out from under the peaty fields because they were an impediment to the plough. As they lay beneath the shrinking peat their presence became known when a plough share jagged on them. A marker stick was inserted and afterwards, at the farmer's convenience, the peat was dug away, revealing a trunk and a stump of roots. A chain was attached, and the whole thing was extracted from the soil pulled by a team of horses or, in my father's case, a tractor (called an "overtime").

The rotting oak logs were sodden. As they dried out they began to crumble. The oaks were black in appearance, the colour of coal but not shiny, and of crinkled appearance. I understood that the remains of these trees had no commercial value, not even as firewood, and so they were left on the surface to decay. However, many years later, I decided to get hold of some Bog Oak timber, and I located some reasonably intact specimen at Ramsey that would go into the boot of a car. From these I made and gave away a small casket, a table lamp and some paper knives. (In more recent years a local wood turner has sent Bog Oak carvings to Ireland, Canada, USA, Japan and New Zealand – a reminder of the Black Fens!)”

### Doctor and Dispensary

“Doctor Fairweather lived in a large house in big gardens next to a public house, The Three King’s, whose landlord was Parker. Opposite stood Billy Green’s pharmacy which lives in my memory as the Green Store.

It was a double-fronted property and I believe incorporated the house in which Billy lived. Impressive in the windows were a number of elegant stoppered glass containers with, in each, a different coloured liquid – very eye-catching. On one of the windows was the simple statement *Aperient Waters*. I had no idea what these were, but thought the coloured bottles were in some way associated!

It was quite a small shop with a counter in the middle and an array of drawers covering two thirds of the walls. Each drawer had a glass knob and a title on the front (in Latin) which described its contents, in gold lettering.

Billy was a short, plump figure with thinning hair plastered to his head and a straight parting in the middle, an impressive person!

When a patient arrived from the surgery and crossed the road, there was Billy waiting to deal with the prescription. What he did to the box, package or tube was wonderful in his speed and neatness. His equipment was a metholated spirit lamp (burner) and a series of piles of white paper of differing sizes. Almost at the blink of an eyelid, Billy had wrapped the package and by red sealing wax the end flaps were stuck down all most impressive! The instructions labels, beautifully handwritten, were then attached by sealing wax in a most dextrous way!”

## *Ewart Drake Recalled Life at Sutton in the Isle Houses for Workmen*

“Grandfather Drake had enough Savage engines to need someone to come and repair them. So he got in touch with Savage’s at Kings Lynn and told them he needed repair man. He were told that if he needed repair men, he had to supply them with somewhere to live. So grandfather said, “OK” and built two houses at the Brook in Sutton, and they’re still there (1980). One repairman chose not to return to Lynn, but stayed on in Sutton. He was called Mr. Robert Pinch. He eventually left Drake’s and went to run the Mepal Pumping Engine. The other man was Mr. Jack Seyman Bridges, and he went back to Lynn. As a little boy I connected these two men by thinking one man made bridges and the other pinched them round! One house is called Carrisbrook. I’m sure the other has a name. One of my uncles went to live at Carrisbrook when he got married. He had a bit of alteration done.”

### The Bungalow, the Brook, Sutton

“The bungalow where I was born (on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1900 at 11.45 pm) was put up the month before in sections like a pre-fab. The entry in my father’s diary reads, “He came just in June”. Mr. George Few told me that.

The bungalow had a large room, with bay windows down low, with a wide shelf where my sister and I could play with our toys. I remember I had an engine and a trailer which my father connected up for me. From the ledge I could see traffic coming down School Lane. Included in the traffic was Grandfather’s engines, and I knew some of them. I could tell by the man that was on them. That was Ambrose’s engine! I was about three at this time (1903).

In the hay field behind the bungalow we would have my birthday tea with strawberries. The Vye sisters came from Witcham using one cycle, each riding or walking in turn from gate to gate.” (Ewart always had strawberries for his birthday tea until the year he died, 1985).

### Electric Cabs from London

“Our bungalow was lit up by electric light. The current were supplied by batteries from an old electric cab which my father bought cheap in London. Electric street cabs were not a success, being too heavy, and so they were sold off. The engine and dynamo were used to supply power for our works and the chaff factory (see ‘Ten Miles from Ely’). Father used to charge the cab twice weekly in winter and once weekly in summer, the cab was in a building at the side of our bungalow, he would connect the leads onto the wires

which he the wired into the house, and we had power! Now we had a master switch in there, and they tell me that, when I was a little child, unbeknownst to me, I went in there and, fumbling around, pulled the, master switch off, and all the lights went out!"

*Dibber of Prickwillow, whose real name was Reg Gipp, began work on local farms at the age of fourteen.*

### Life-long Farm Worker

"We come from Prickwillow, Shippea Hill way. There's a road go by the pub where Green's farm is now. And I was born down that drove a little way."

### Schools: No Extra Help for Special Needs in these Days

"Shippey Hill, Burnt Fen they call it, on that corner. I went to Barton Mills for a start and then we went to Kenny Hill, then Shippey Hill and then Prickwillow. I finished up here after a little while and left at fourteen and then I got a job down there, and the old man came after me what used to bike round school checking on attendance. Well, that was sixty year ago yesterday (Taped January 1985)."

*How did you get to school in the wintertime?* "Walked, went there through John Brown's farm there. There was a foot path round, cross there, you could cut a bit off, you see but that would be just over a mile to school we had to walk. There were four on us born. Four went to school. There were four on us walked."

*Did you like school?* "Well I never learnt nothin'. I left knowin' nothin'. I couldn't read nor write nor tell the time when I left."

*But you could work on a farm though.* "Ah, yeah, that were six days a week then. And on Saturday it was an hour less for 12 shillins', seven til four, we'd get down there at seven, down that road here. You left off at four and then bike home."

*So you'd be working horses then, would you?* "Horses and cattle. We had fifty-four horses there. There were a lot of houses down there on that farm then. There's only two left there, on that farm." *And that was Frank Hiam's farm?* "Yeah, he died after we got there." *You were there at the funeral, weren't you?* "Yeah, I were at the funeral at the cathedral. And I think there were 500 there, I bet, all farm labourers. Now there's about thirty or forty... ahhh a difference." *Did they have horse keepers?* "Yeah, second man, there were second mans and third mans if they had enough horses" (Horse keepers were the most important men on the farms).

*George Green was born in 1890 and served with the Suffolk Regiment in First World War, known as 'Greenie' to his friends.*

### Family Life

"There were ten of us family – five boys and five girls. And there was the Allsops; there was ten of them. And there was the Angiers there was ten of them. And there were the Howards; there were ten of them. We were all within a hundred yards of one another, down West End. I remember when I went to Wilburton school cuz we used to have to go for a labour certificate to leave school ya know, and I went to Wilburton and passed out. The schoolmaster (He was a very good schoolmaster Mr. Miles was) he come down see my father one night ... he says, *"Tom, you're not gonna let that boy leave school."* He says, *"Look at these little mouths around the table."* (There were ten of us there). He says, *"There's only me, we could do with the money!"* So I left. A wonderful man, Mr. Miles were."

### The Shopping Bill

"My mother bought bacon at fourpence halfpenny a pound and got a pailful of chitterlings for sixpence, a full shopping basket for four shillings with biscuits at four pence a pound and coconut sweets at two pence. For sixpence (now two and a half pence) I could get a clay pipe, half an ounce of 'bacca' and a box of matches. I walked to the Wilburton School and obtained a labour certificate to leave school and start work. I remember working down Haddenham Fen where we had to get water for the stock (animals) by lowering a pail down the well (situated at Lands End). I worked for Will Freeman and he was a wonderful man to work for ... he never complained when things went wrong and I can remember one day when the rope broke – with the help of a "creeper" I was able to rescue nine or ten pails .

Will always got up early and had milked his six cows by five thirty. When I arrived one morning, "Had your dockey, bor?" was his comment. In the evening we used to chop straw on the chaff cutter, known by the locals as the "joy wheel".

An Extra Shilling a Week

“I spent three and a half years there and then moved to get an extra shilling a week but that meant walking down to Wilburton Fen making my weekly wage up to nine shillings and sixpence a week. I kept a cow at Freeman’s and was paid ten shillings an acre to plough fields in Grunty Fen.”

“George ‘volunteered’ and joined the Army in 1914. He was wounded and hospitalised in Africa where he was nursed by the Vicar’s daughter of his home village here in Haddenham.”



*The High Street showing the Bell Public House, the disused bakery and Harry Savage's wheelwright's shop, as mentioned in Frank Steel's tour; all demolished to make the entrance to Camping Close which leads to Bell Gardens and Mallard Rise.*

*Esther Howe, an old lady at Prickwillow whose recollections are also in Book I, 'Ten Miles from Ely'.*

Events in the Life of a Smallholder's Wife

"One of the funniest things that ever happened to me this particular Monday morning – I said to my husband, "I have washing to do so will you put those cattle in the yard?" Well at half past ten he was ready for dockey and he hadn't put them in the yard so I said, "You didn't put those cattle in the yard, will you do them before you have your dockey?" So he said yes, which he did.

Well four went in the yard (shed for wintering animals) alright but the other one run down Ely road. Someone turned it back. When it came back that got in the dyke. So I thought, "Oh dear now, I shall be for the high jump!" So he said, "Now what do you think we're going to do?" Well I said, "We'll get it out the best we can." But he said, "We shall do nothing with it." We had a yardman and a horse keeper there then. So they all came to help with this cow but we still couldn't get it out. And dear old Mr. Bullingham, he worked down here then for the Commissioners (maintenance controllers of the Fen drainage system), he came along with another lad. So I said, "Mr. Bullingham we are having a job getting this thing out of the dyke will you stop and help us?" "Of course I would", he said. So he stopped: then the dear old roadman came along, Arthur Jakes, so I said, "Arthur, oh we are having a job with this thing, will you stop and help us?" "Yes", he said, "I'll do what I can, but I think I'd rather dig than pull." So of course he dug. And my husband by this time he wasn't very pleased. He put his shovel down and he says, "Now, I think you've asked quite enough people to come out and help us so stop it!" So I said, "alright". When he spoke like that I knew I got to stop it. I'll pull a bit harder myself. So I went and got on that end of the rope, twisted this rope round my hand. Well, before I realised, this cow had come out of the dyke, this rope still round my hand, the cow went galloping down the field pulling me behind. Well I didn't know what to do. I thought, "Well, I'll let the cow pull me cos there's a dyke at the bottom. If I get in there we shall be sure to stop." But anyway, the rope came off the cow's horn – that didn't come off my hand – that still kept round my hand and I wonder that didn't pull my arm out. But to feel embarrassed to get out and face all these other men ... well I didn't know what to do. I didn't face them I just went back round the field and got back in the house that way! (Amazing how such a trivial event is remembered with such detail!)

### Real Fen Food: Before the Days of Slimming!

“You cut your onion up and make your dough what used to be done with the suet. You’d roll that out, you’d put your onion and perhaps slices of bacon or perhaps spread some sausage meat over it and then you’d boil that for about a couple of hours. And they’re delicious. But you can’t tell that to young people now cos my lot won’t eat them. You see, they were too fattnin’. But we didn’t study our figures in them days.” (Folk needed to eat lots of carbohydrates to make the energy needed for hard land work.)

### Wash Day

*What about washday? That must have been quite an ordeal without a washing machine.* “Oh, my dear, that’s’ right and without a copper. That used to be a boiler hanging over an old hearth. And you’d have a big hook come down from the chimney and your boiler would be hanging on this hook and your clothes boiling in the boiler.”

*What would you use – because they wouldn’t have Persil or Ariel, would they?* “We had soda and soap. And I remember the first washing powder that came out, it was A1, penny a packet. We thought that was marvellous, A1 that was called. We used to soap all our clothes before they were put into the copper. Our clothes all went into the soap.” *And you literally boiled the clothes?* “That’s right. No copper, that was in a big ole boiler, but that was in my mum’s day. Cos I always had a copper in my day.” *Did you use a scrubbing board at all?* “Yes, an ole wash board.” *When did you have your first washing machine?* “Well my mother when we lived up Quanea, Cutlacks they were the first people in Ely to have these, a Darling, I think it was called, a big pot with something in it to swish the water round (See exhibit in cottage at Farmland Museum). Some handles did go round and round. But this Darling washing machine pushed backwards and forwards. Course, before that there were these dolly things. You know you used to work them up and down but I never did have one of those.” *It must have been hard work.* “The Wilsons who lived round the back had one of those dolly things. And I think my mother was the first one to have this Darling washing machine from Cutlacks cos she always said that if anything came out to make washing easier, cos, what did we have? three, she looked after another family up there, so there was three, four, four boys and two men to wash filthy shirts and towels – they used to be. Cos we used to say to the men, I don’t know, you seem to wash your

hands on the towel and dry them on the flannel. And you see they always washed their hands before they came to the table for their meal and not much time you see, and not hot water like there is now.”

You had to keep an old kettle or two boiling all the time.” *That must have been cold in the house in the winter.* “Oh that was. But we used to put bricks in the oven. Anyway, mother would wrap them up in something for us and we used to take those to bed – hot bricks to bed. But I’m real pleased I lived in that time. A hard life, but we never grumbled like people do today.”



*Farm work was hard work before the days of mechanisation' here is a gang of labourers riddling potatoes "by hand". No wonder that the number of farm workers has decreased by thousands over the last eighty years! Much work is now done from the tractor-seat.*

*Pat Norman was one of the first "tutors" for Farm Students even before the Cambs. College at Milton was built; his family have farmed in the Fens for generations.*

Excerpts from a letter written in 1995

"In those distant days of recall, there were many clear frosty days, times for skating on the Fen Washes at Earith (where the Bedford Rivers start) with Bluntisham Church in the background, down the Old West River (part of the Great Ouse) and on to Aldreth, where Hereward is supposed to have fought. My grandfather, Fred, held British Championship for five years and for a time I looked after those silver and gold medals which he was awarded for these feats (Now in the County Folk Museum at Cambridge).

Because I had the natural build, and some ability at speed skating, my father had ambitions for me to enter the challenge in later years. This was to be frustrated by the rupture of torn ligaments in my ankle, taking part in a university rag! Like so many requirements in top performances these days, you have to be better than very good, and it would be wrong to presume that the challenge of the championship was within my reach!

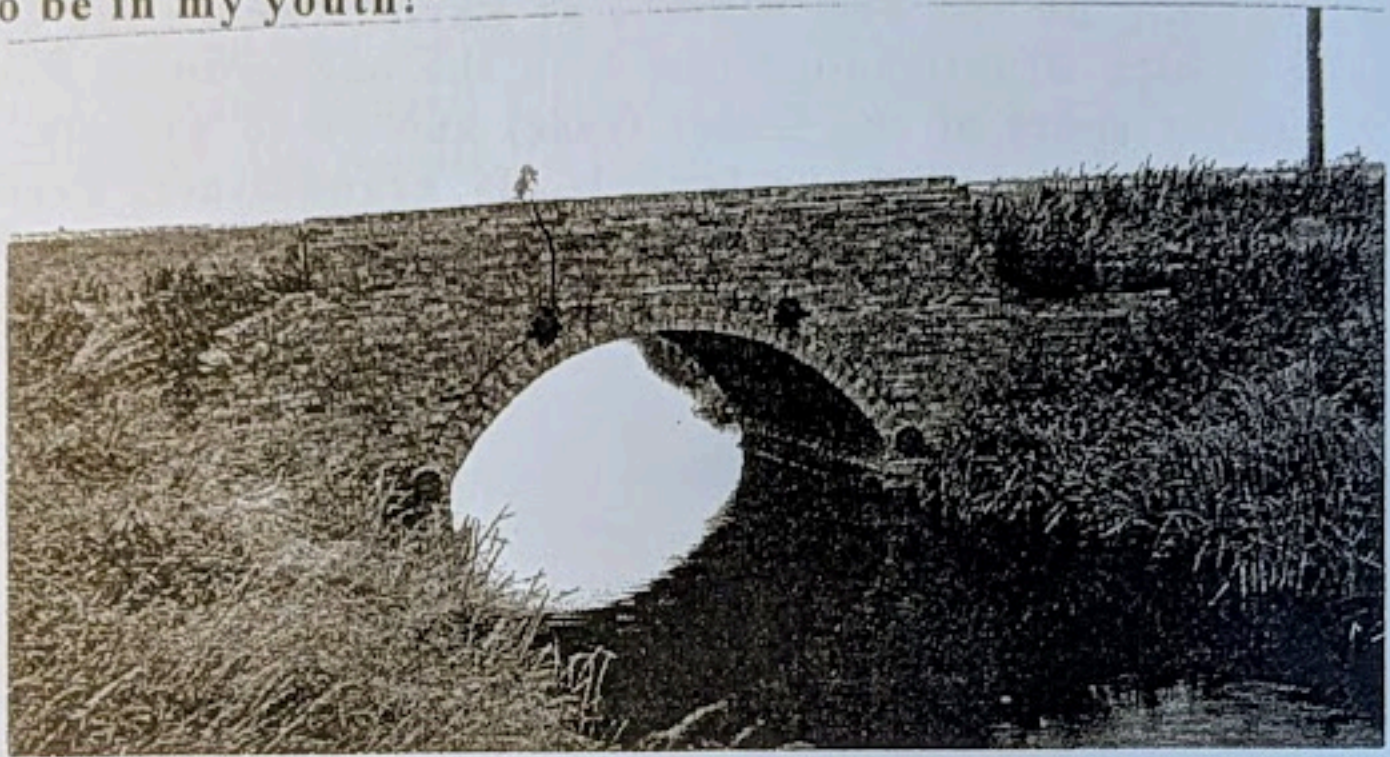
One great achievement of my Grandfather's skating, and that too I never emulated, was to "skate round the Isle". A little misleading, perhaps, but it entailed skating down the Old West to join the Cam South of Ely and then the Ouse as far as Denver and returning up the New Bedford River to rejoin the Ouse at Earith. My Grandfather, then a young man (in the late nineteenth century) had only to walk out of his back door from his farm at Queenholmes, Willingham Fen, to step onto the ice of the Old West. (See sketch map inside front cover).

Whether this was ever repeated, I do not know. The skates on which he made the tour, I used as a boy: they were called "Fen Runners".

Harsher Winters Than Now

"A further epic is worth mentioning and probably beyond the memories of people today Mr. Chapman, who was the assistant teacher at the Arkenstall Boys' School, lodged at Earith and no doubt on most days made the journey to and from school by bus (a

daily service between St. Ives and Ely). One winter's morning he made the journey on Fen Runners along the Hill Row Causeway (a distance of over five miles), and he was probably one of the few men who can claim to have skated "up hill". A road covered by either frozen snow or the glass frost from frozen rain could easily provide a surface for the type of skate in those days (early nineteen twenties). It seems to be a fact that the winters are warmer than they used to be in my youth!"



*Man-made drains and dykes are a common feature around Ely. Here a brick-built bridge carries farm traffic over a waterway near Queenholme. A lot of land in the Fens is below sea-level and water has to be pumped up from the fields into the rivers. Plan a visit to Stretham Old Engine!*



*Flooding over the man-made river banks is a common sight in winter in the Fen Country. The grazing land between the two Bedford Rivers acts as a reservoir both for flood water and migratory water fowl (See Welney Wildfowl Trust and Josh Scott's memories)*

*Josh Scott of Welney, Wildfowler and a very knowledgeable Fenman on such topics as bird life, flooding, skating and shepherding*

The full story of the life of Josh can be read in his book "From Guns to Binoculars", but here are a few of his recollections told in 1977.

Work on the Washes

"For generations the Washes have been used for summer grazing, mainly by horses, and they were looked after and checked each day by my forefathers; the animals' owners lived as far away as Diss and Saffron Walden. However, in the winter there was no work for these 'shepherds', so they asked the wash owners if they could have the shooting rights of the land and anything they could find on it. Wildfowling became a way of life and eels were a source of money. Mushrooms and blackberries could be eaten or sold. My Great Uncle, Will Kent, lived on the Washes and after I had had an accident and hurt my knee (running to get some cigs from the pub for the old men), my Great Aunt invited me to stay down at the cottage with them, and it was there I learned so much about life in the Fen, being a lad about ten at the time."

Son Follows Father

"My Dad looked after about 200 acres before the Second World War. I was taken prisoner until 1946 and, when I returned home, I was offered the 500 acres which Shepherd Smart had looked after, but was then too ill to do so and so that was how I became employed on the Washes. When Sir Peter Scott (no relation!) was looking for a Warden for the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, it was suggested that as I was the "bird Man" the job should be offered to me, and so that is how I became the first warden at the Welney Reserve." (The Wildfowl and Wetland Reserve is open every day of the year except Christmas Day.)

Museum Open Day

In his retirement Josh enjoyed demonstrating the 'explosions' from his punt gun and was a regular attraction at both the Wildfowling and Conservation Days at Haddenham and the Country Fairs at Swaffham Prior. His punt gun is a permanent exhibit at the Welney Centre, reminding visitors of how the duck were "harvested" from the Washes years ago.

*Frank Steel who was born in 1908 recalls a variety of trades in a fen village. He was the son of the local baker and a very keen bee-keeper*

### High Street after World War I

“If you take shops on the High Street to start with, we had the main grocer’s shop that was owned by a Mr. Tebbutt who employed two men and three or four girls and a milliner. And he sold normal groceries and draperies and hats. The reason they kept the milliner was that the ladies wanted them feather-dressed or such. The next place down the village on the High Street was the Doctor’s called St. Ovins, where a speaking tube is still visible at the front door (now a Supermarket). Followed by the local watchmaker, Adam Palmer. And followed then by a man by the name of Doyle who owned a grocer and draper’s shop, and he opened from eight in the morning until ten at night. And you could always get your supplies from there almost any time of the day” (no drapers left in 2002).

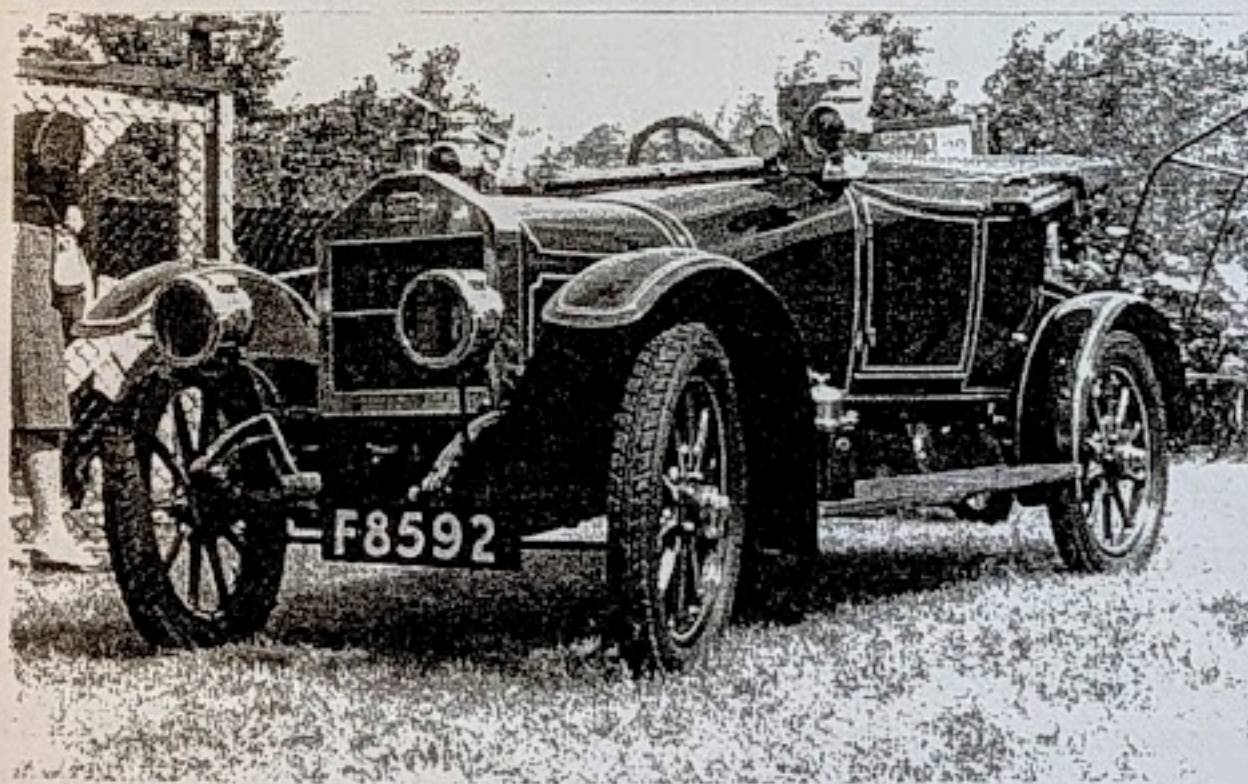
### Butchers, bakers, carpenters and basket makers

“Going by there we had the butcher’s shop, by butcher Palmer, Arthur Palmer. And next to that was the local cyclist shop, which was run by a man from Sutton by the name of Alf Drake (Eric’s Dad, see Bog Oak). And as you go farther down the village you come to a disused bakery, next door to that was the wheelwright and carpenter, Harry Savage. He was a tradesman and a very skilled man at that. But he would never work when anyone else was there apart from the time when they was shoeing wheels (see the tiring platform at Farmland Museum at Denny Abbey). He would leave off work the moment anyone went in the yard. But he was an excellent ladder maker and made quite a number of carts and wagons in my time. As well as ladder making he turned over to making four-wheel trailers with rubber-tyred wheels (To be pulled by tractors after WWII). That of course is gone now.

We had a public house called The Bell. And behind that was a field, which was called Champions Close (now the site of flats for retired folk). No doubt that’s where the bare-fist fights used to take place (known now as Camping Close). Farther down the village still we had the basket maker’s shop (who grew their own willows in the Fens) owned by John Burton. And he would make a picking basket

for one and sixpence or with a cane handle you could get one for one and nine pence (now 7 ½ and 8p). And he also made the flats, as we used to call them, that was a square or oblong basket with the lid on which they used for sending away asparagus (This area was well known for asparagus-growing, and the Museum has been given several asparagus knives).

Next door to him was the tailor shop where you could see the tailor sitting cross-legged on his bench making suits. His name was Harry Collin. After we got past that, we come to another butcher's shop that belonged to a man named Ernest Peters. Beyond that we had Robert Collins' shop which was a grocer's and draper's (latterly Croft's Stores). Then we had a public house or two and then we had the derelict brewery. This was still used as a store by one of the brewers but no beer was brewed there, not in my time. The public house which was on the front of it was called The Vine. When you got by to that we had another tailor's shop, which belonged to Robert Peters. Next door to that was the blacksmith's shop belonging to a man by the name of Miller (One of his horse-drawn implements is in the Museum). And then we came to the local farmyard – belonged to a man named Ulman (His son, Ron, is still there in 2002). When you left there, then you got the road leading down to Aldreth (Thought to be the site of Hereward's battle) and you had gardens on either side." (Now 'built up' with domestic properties and with the Great Mill (structure restored in the early nineties) dominating the sky-line).



*One of over forty veteran cars which visited the Haddenham Farmland Museum in 1984 when Ewart Drake was guest of honour; some models were similar to the one he drove in 1917 without a licence!*

*George Amory and Fred Woolstenholmes were two fine Fen characters who spent their entire lives in Hill Row.*

### Over the Fen in a Dukw

“Course, I was working on me own the when the floods come. Oh yes, I was on me own. All the land was flooded in Hill Row and the old fens was in ten feet of water. Waves hit Arthur ‘awkins’ bungalow and went clean uvver the ruff ... the water was ten or twelve foot deep. I went across the fen in one o’ them things that can go on land and water ... what do you call em, amphibious dukws that belonged to the army. I tell you – Fred Palmer, he had four grub corn stacks down Long Drove and on the Sunday night (March 16, 1947) a gang of us stood on the Sandhole Hill and I said, “Cor, do you know, one of them stacks are a moving.” And they said, “Don’t talk so silly, don’t!” And I said, “I tell yur, one o’ then stacks are a moving.” And do you know, one of them stacks swum across there to Ventures (Adventures Fen), you could see it moving from where we were a standing!”

### Weeds Were Six Feet Tall

“That flood blew the Third Bridge down the causey (Hill Row Causeway) and within a month of the fields being drained there were weeds six foot high, and higher than my lil’ ole’ Fordson tractor and I’ll tell you how we got rid of em’ ... we rolled em’ down! Taters and mangolds left in the land was lost and so was the next harvest – the water lay there for weeks and weeks ... bit o’ land that you could get on you sowed: I grew two acres o’ cauliflowers and had never grown them afore in m’ life. The farmers down the fen had to bring all their livestock up to the higher ground.” (Buildings at Mepal Airfield accommodated bullocks, horses etc.)

### Sightseers in the Fen

“The road was busier than the Strand in Lunnon and the police had to turn sightseers away! Yew see, the bank fust blowed beyond Earith viaduct and the water flooded Over Fen. I told Perce Allen, “You can flit” (meaning leave your house) and it came over there into Haddenham Fen. But I’ll tell you it did the ole’ fen good: crops could be grown arterwards won’t grow afore ... and it did the farmers good tew (see Anthony Day’s book of photos of this event, “Times of Flood.”)”

## Bog Oak Country

In the course of the interview with George and Fred in 1977, the interviewer, then a young student, was asked by Fred, "Do you know why there is so much unemployment these days, Sonny?" "No", replied Kevin. "Well, it's cos George and I did all the work there was to be dun' when we were young'uns".



*Trees at field-boundaries are now an uncommon sight, described by one farmer as "unpaying guests" Fields need to be large nowadays to accommodate modern machines, so hundreds of miles of hedges have been grubbed up making parts of East Anglia look like prairies.*

## *Ewart Drake recalls life in Ely*

### Ely as a Fishing Centre

"The spring of 1914 was very busy. The Great Central Railway brought Sheffield fishermen each weekend for five shillings (25p) per head. Five to six hundred would come Saturday evening, fish Sunday and Monday and return home Monday evening. They paid eight shillings (40p) each for lodgings. People came from the Sheffield Victoria Hall Methodist Church with their minister, Reverend Cecil Parker who took Sunday services at Chapel Street. The newsagent, Mr. C. J. Nicholson, found lodgings for the Methodist fishermen. We had five of them to stay at 3, Station Road. Two of the Sheffields went with my father at 5 am to Sutton to look around the chaff factory and back at 8 am for breakfast. I went too and saw bags of chaff being loaded onto a lorry with an old Staffordshire trademark of three hoops. Legend says that it's something about three men being hanged."

### Cricket at Ely and Cambridge

"Some of us boys at the Silver Street Boys School in Ely used to go out on the common at Prickwillow Road and play cricket. One would supply wickets, another a ball, another a bat, not a school boy's bat but a full-sized bat with the bottom cut off. One evening in 1912 about 8 o'clock a clergyman saw us and stopped to play with us, giving advice. He stayed until we packed up. He told one of the boys to go to Hereward Hall at the King's School the next day at 4.30 pm. The boy, Albert Waller, received a full-sized cricket bat which he brought to the common that night for us to play with. The clergyman was Reverend T. J. Kirkland, who later was Head Master of the King's School and a Canon of Ely Cathedral. He was Chairman of Ely District Council and a benefactor of the cricket competition, known as the Kirkland Cup. I always say that that's when it all started. The Kirkland Cup is between village teams and is still competed for each year. That's my first recollection of his playing on the common.

I also remember on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914, Needham's (where I had been since September, 1913) cricket team played Hargrave School on Parker's Piece in Cambridge. I played my very first game, went in at number 10 and made 8, not out! How, I don't know! Of course, we lost!"

### Driving for the Jam Factory

“I left school at Easter 1915, because the man who worked for my father had joined the Forces. I soon learned to stoke a steam wagon, to drive the overtime farm tractor and to plough, especially how to keep straight. I didn't need a licence to drive a traction engine on the highway. When we had a little Ford van chassis converted to a one-ton truck, we sold it to Ely Fruit Preserving Company in Brays Lane (no longer there). I was its first driver, taking many tons of sugar from the station to the factory. From July to September, 1917, I got £1.5s a week (125p) from 6 am to 8 am, 8.30 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 6 pm. I learned to carry two hundred weights of sugar on my back, and I really enjoyed my first driving job. This was just before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I was allowed to drive a whole week before I got my licence. The superintendent, Mr. Roy Thorne, who was the police officer in charge, knew all the sugar had to be shifted from the station, so he said, “Well, I know your son, Mr. Drake, and I know you. Providing he drives from the jam factory to the station and does nothing else, he can drive a week early.” So I did!”

### The First Motor Car Rides

“Father gave many people their first motor car ride. I've heard him say that he went to Little Downham on the feast in June for tuppence a time (Feasts were important days in village life pre WWII). He drove eight people a time round the village. You work that out, tuppence a time. You divide 8 into 120. How many loads do you have to have to make £1? He left about 6:30 am and be home between 7 and 9 pm. These rides were all done in a Daimler EB17. This car had wooden wheels, and my grandfather was one of the first to own this type of car in the area. Someone else did have another car when we lived down the Brook at Sutton and I was a baby. They came into a building with their motor; it was more or less a garage under the house. Someone went in there, sniffing petrol, so they took a match to see where the smell was coming from!” No comment!

1866

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*Mr. J. Roads Fouton*



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Bill heading for the factory at the top of Aldreth Hill; it is thought that "Etheldreda's Well" on old maps, was situated on the opposite side of the road, and that it was a welcome stopping point for travellers coming from Cambridge across the Old West River up onto the Isle of Ely.

## George Amory – a Hill Row character who had plenty of yarns to tell

### Fights on Feast Days

"It was usually a Feast Sunday, and there'd be stalls, lots of stalls, coconut stalls, flying horses, swinging, like a little fair. Sutton and Haddenham come in different rotation because Sutton and Haddenham never liked each other. There were three or four brothers from Sutton, and a handy gang at Haddenham, and I tell you they used to fight like, oh dear! Blood everywhere and all on top of each other. If you went to Sutton, you had to look about you all the time, and the same if they came here!! And it weren't just Feast Days; we used to go in them days on the 7o'clock train on Saturday nights, the last one, to the cinema in Sutton, about fifteen of us young fellows. They showed two part serials to draw people. When we used to come out at night, ten to half past, we didn't walk on the road; we walked on the line (the track from Sutton to Haddenham station). They'd be waiting for us, they used to see us and of course you know there'd be more of them than us. But, when they came to Haddenham, we outnumbered them. Oh dear, I remember coming home one night, and we were walking towards Sutton station, minding our own business. Someone said, "There ain't no one coming after us

tonight." No sooner had he said it than there they were, hiding in a gateway. Bang! They hit one of us in the ear, but they run us up the line. God Almighty, he never did see him, but, Bang! He really felt it! Sutton was a rum terrible place, terrible, but so was Haddenham!" (Rivalry between Sutton and Haddenham lads continued into the nineties at Witchford Village College, when I was on the staff there. LD).

### Peewit Poaching

There weren't so much shooting of pheasants and woodpigeons, but plenty of rabbits. Good meat, but not much on them, nine pence; anyone would buy a rabbit. But I'll tell you what used to be a nice bird, course you mustn't shoot them now, a peewit; you know what a peewit is? Well, some people call them lapwings or plovers. I remember a farmer I were working for once. He had taters in a field and some fallow beside it with cows in it. The peewits were making nests there, and he were scuffling them. When they got up, it were like a cloud was getting up, thousands of them. So he went and got his gun, and I carried it down to where he reckoned they were. I give him his gun, he loaded it up and he crept through the wheat, you see, to where he thought they were. When he got through to within about a yard or two, he just put his head out and they went straight for him. He went, 'Bang!' and they got up, like a cloud; 'Bang!' and he cut a tunnel through them, a tunnel. I've never seen a man do that; sixty he picked out in one go! That's as true as I'm here. We had some string and we tied them in bunches, ten in a bunch. He had a bunch in each hand, and he put a bunch on his haywain and gave me two bunches to hang over me shoulder. We picked up sixty, and God knows how many we couldn't find. I've never seen a man shoot so many peewits in me life! He told me to take two, so I went home with twenty birds, and Mother said, 'What have you got?' Of course, eight or nine were of use, but not very big. Mother and one or two of the girls were plucking 'em and burning the feathers, then Mother drawed and done 'em, and we had three or four dinners. They were beautiful, yeah! But when I went down the next morning, he went, "You took two lots of them bloody birds!" I said, "You told me to." "I meant two birds, not two bunches!" They were lovely, one of the richest birds you can eat. But you can't now; they're on the preserve list. You know, people are still talking about them sixty birds, even people who weren't born then.

### Tricks with Taters

Me and Tom Peters, we used to work together on Player's farm and we were sent up one winter to sort Edwards taters and do odd jobs. So me and Tom had a little game! Got a fag box which we filled with small, rotten taters, put paper round and rubber bands. We laid it across the path in the snow and waited. So up from the station came a fellow called Titch Wheeler and he saw this, but he couldn't see us. He bent down, picked it up, looked up and down the road and into his pocket it goes. Course he took it home, he thought he had a find, course he did, and,

when he opened it, there was little rotten taters! Well, in the meantime, when he'd gone home, we'd put another one out because, as Tom said, "No, we won't play football. We shall have another goose, won't we?" So we did another one with a big rotten tater, wrapped it up nice, tucked the bands in and laid it across the path. Who should come out of the house to come up to Haddenham but Mrs Hopher, Cecil's mother and Eric Drake's grandmother? Tom were beaming, she's here, she picks it up, she looks up and down the street, behind her back and in it goes to her shopping bag. Course up the town she went and we knew no more, so Tom said, "We ought to have one more go," or I did to Tom, yeah, so we got a real big tater, how rotten you know when you put your finger in. We did it up nice, laid it on the path. I'd just stood back when Tom said, "There's Charlie Pope coming", and he used to live down Lode Way, Nelson's Way, whatever it is, along Sam Jackson's, so course we were peeping. Charlie wheeled his bike up the path, sees the parcel and picked it up. He looked that way, he looked back, nobody about, in his shopping bag it went. So course end of the week we went up town on Saturday night and we were looking in, well it's Wright's shop now, (Butcher's in 2003) and who should come up but Charlie Pope, you see him that picked up the last tater. Tom said to him, "Oi, what were in that parcel you found the other day?" He said, "I never found a parcel." Tom said, "You did." "Yes, you pair of sods were what put it there, weren't you?" He said he'd put it on the table at mealtime and there it was, not a present, but a big rotten tater! That was fun, that was me and Tom!" (Innocent humour and fun from nearly a century ago, vividly recorded on tape, but more difficult to relate in written words!)



Here a binder is pulled by a tractor to cut and tie the corn in bunches (or sheaves). This task, together with threshing, has been taken over by the combine harvester: see Haddock's account of harvesting in the fen.

Charlie Ashton recalled stories from his childhood spent travelling the counties of England, settled with his young family in the village in the seventies

"When I was about seventeen we were in our caravans in Devonshire when, late one night, my mother awoke us all with her shouting and commotion, "I can see young Marie (Dad's brother's daughter) thrashing about and waving her arms." Dad and the rest of us were not amused and told her to get back to sleep.

About 10 o'clock the next morning, when we boys were harnessing the horses ready to move on, a telegram boy came up to the wagon. (Remember this was in pre-mobile phone days!) The message was that our cousin had drowned herself. Apparently she had had a row with her Dad, run off in a temper and jumped into a pond; although she was a good swimmer, her feet had become entangled in an old submerged bed and the springs had caught her, holding her fast;" hence the "picture" that Charlie's mother had seen in her "dream" the night before – that of her niece, Marie, frantically waving her arms in the air. How can this be explained?"



Red brick barn at Linden Farm; thatched roof was replaced with corrugated iron. Now a large domestic dwelling as part of the Rickyard Development in 2003. Note "free-range" hens in the fore ground.....No factory farming in those days!

**Len Burton, member of a well-known family of Shire Horse breeders whose cousin Cecil is a judge at Horse Shows throughout the Britain.**

#### Care of Horses after a Hard Day's Work

"You'd get home about 3pm depending how far away you was working, and you'd take off the harness, hang it up, give the horses a drink of water and run them out in the yard and let them have a little bit of hay while you had your dinner. Then you'd give them another two hours feed from four until six. While they was feeding you'd probably just wash their shoulders down and pat the sweat marks off because they very easily chafe, you know, when they're pulling all day on the shoulders, (the withers). If they chafed, it was bad horsekeeping, unless the collar lining was bad, because you wasn't doing your job by keeping them clean. If you got a little lump come in the shoulder sometimes, what you did was to get a stocking and you filled it up with straw or hay. You tied that in the collar, just above the swelling, or just below it, so that took the pressure off the sore point. If they got really bad, there was a special collar called a breaching collar. That didn't go actually round the neck, they pulled more from the chest. You've seen them in the Lord Mayor's Show, I reckon. All these collars were kept in the harness room and on a wet day you'd oil them and keep them in good condition. It was a special oil for leather. You watched your horses all the time, you know, to see if they wanted shoeing. On wet days you'd take them up to the blacksmith to have them shoed up.

It was a good time when the stallions came to visit the farms and mate your mares. They used to walk round. I remember in Haddenham alone, there'd be perhaps eight to ten stallions, the Percherons, the Suffolks, the Shires, you took your choice. The fee was about £1.50 (thirty shillings) per mare. The horses lodged at the local pub and moved on next day. We arranged our own cross breeds. A lot of people put the Percheron on the Shire so it did away with the hair on the Shire's legs and made it lighter and less muddy. Others kept old-time breeds. Suffolks weren't so popular in this area. Chivers & Sons of Aldreth had all French Percherons and a lot of people used their stallions for crossing. They had larger legs and were less clumsy.

Horse and carts carrying a ton were used to go to the station or to the next village, and the horses wore brasses to show how proud the owners were. Sugar beet, potatoes, corn, in eighteen stone sacks, were taken, a man carrying eighteen stone wheat himself, or nineteen stone of beans, or sixteen stone of barley or twelve stone of oats. (old measurements – coombs) After unloading the carts at the station, they brought back

artificial manure, coal, seed, fertiliser etc. It made a lot of work for the station. I remember the brickyards nearby and I think they were built there purposely. There's still a lot of bricks around that say Haddenham Brick Company. Do you realise that the ballast hole, where they used to play tennis near the old cemetery in Church Lane, was dug out to help make the rail line between Haddenham and Sutton? (See account of Haddenham Station in Book II, 'Bog Oak Country'.)

I remember the bull-nosed Morris car and there was a story going round of a big fen farmer (I won't say his name because the family still farms in there) who came up the road one day, and the road man was working on the road because horses were still fouling the streets, and the farmer said, "George, what do you think to my car?"

"Very nice, sir," he said.

"Would you like a ride in it?"

"I should very much, sir."

So he took the chap out and brought him back.

"What did you think to it, George?"

"Well it's very nice, sir, but if you'd had to work for the sod, you'd a never had it." I think they took it in good humour! (Note the respect the farmer was paid by the road sweeper!)

After cars came, horses soon lost their uses, and many were kept just for sentimental reasons. Life became much easier, but people were less fit, of course. It was tractors and trailers that changed it all, because they went to the station faster and carrying heavier loads. They were quite primitive at first, with no mudguards, only cleats, but improved greatly after the Second War and could carry three or four tons. Gravens at Ely, a very old established firm, used to make steam engines and moved on to tractors, being the Ford agents. F.T. Ruston and Sons of St. Ives were the international agents. These two did most of the business round this area. The horseman at first argued that a tractor can't breed a foal like a horse can; the answer was that tractors don't eat when they're not working! The turning-point was about 1932/3. (Radio 4 recently featured 'Iron Horses' – the change from horse power to tractor power in farming.)

In the war, no country folk really starved because they weren't affected so much by rationing. No one knew how many eggs the hens laid, or how many potatoes grew, or how much milk the cows gave! We were never short of pig meat, mainly salted and not always nice in the summer! Petrol was tight, sure, but we were much more fortunate than the people in the town, for food anyway.

## Memories of Boyhood

When I was a boy we made our own entertainment; there were lots of things to do. We used to go along with the nets catching the birds, that was called 'tooting'. The net had two poles on it with a hinge at the top; so we used to shake it up the roofs of the stacks, which was all loose straw in those days, and we used to catch the sparrows. We also spun our tops and ran our hoops on the road with no danger of cars running you down. You'd not get more than one car an hour perhaps. You'd hear them coming a mile away, about 25m.p.h! The boys played marbles, and there were over twenty pubs for the grownups. The men would go up for a drink in the evening. The women had the worse end of the stick in those days because they had to stay at home (No equality of the sexes!) with the children. There were no clubs, and anyway it was a very long day, six days of every week for every one, especially horsekeepers, who worked often until 6.30pm or 7pm and Sundays as well. There wasn't much money either for more than a glass of beer; I remember the agricultural wage of £1.50 per week and ninepence of that was stopped for insurance. Horsekeepers got a bit more for their twelve hour day. Most men worked from 7am to 4pm. We were all in the same boat and had more satisfaction than there is today. People were family-orientated and not restless. The only holidays were Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Good Friday and, if they were lucky, half a day on Feast Tuesday. There used to be a cricket match in Haddenham on Feast Tuesday and a gala and some sports. Everyone attended, and the Haddenham Band played on the Green on the Sunday, with decorated floats, usually with horses pulling them, it all looked very nice. On Monday night and Tuesday there'd be crowds of people, and you'd meet people you probably hadn't seen since the previous feast. A few people would get drunk and there'd be several fights! It was all most enjoyable. (In the present day, many families "get together" for the Annual Blossoms & Bygones Events each May.)

There was an active Home Guard in Haddenham in the war, with Mr Miles and Mr Starkey as lieutenants in charge of quite a big contingent of chaps. A lot of farm workers who didn't get called up had to join the Home Guard or N.F.S., The National Fire Service, or the Ambulance Service; so usually everyone who was available did something toward the war effort, which was only right as they weren't fighting. I was in the N.F.S. myself; we had a hut on the recreation field and we had a big Humber motorcar and a Coventry Climax touring-engine. We did two full twelve-hour nights each week. I don't know what the Home Guard did, but they definitely did exercises and training on Sunday mornings,

and they looked quite a formidable force with their guns. In the war we were never short of butter, cheese and eggs and never really hungry. The bread was darker than it is now, made from all English wheat and delivered daily by pony and trap by Mr Steel (Frank's Dad) and Mr Reg and Mr George Salmon, from the High Street. We were allowed to kill a pig every six months, and we obviously chose the biggest, about twenty four stone each. Mr Arthur Palmer, the butcher, used to come down and kill it, scrub it in a tub and hang it up in the shed. Next day, when it got cold, he cut it up in joints and put it in pork pots with salt. We used to take the hams and a side of the bacon to Mr Ralph Prime of Aldreth Road, (See bill heading) who used to cure it and smoke it with bog oak out of the Fen. It smelled lovely. We used to treat the meat beforehand with juniper berries, brown sugar etc. We could kill as many chickens as we liked because they didn't know how many we had got, did they?

When I was five I went to the Infants' School in the High Street and to the Arkenstall School until I was fourteen. My teachers at big school were Mr Bert Miles and Mr George Chapman, who came from Earith each day. One year, the year the New Town houses were built, it rained hellish hard early and froze badly. Mr Chapman skated to Haddenham from Earith on the High Road. (See Norman's account of this event in 'Bog Oak Country'.)

We skated a lot as lads on local ponds and then on Bury Fen at Earith on the Washes, but I did badly because I had weak ankles. Mr Don Pearson from Mepal was champion of England, and Mr Albert Tebbit from Wentworth was also a champion, my father said. A lot of champion skaters came from round the Welney area because they got more practice. (See Alan Bloom's book 'The Skaters of the Fens'.)

We fished a lot in local drains, but now the spray cans have got in the ditches and there's hardly any fish about.

### Country Pursuits

I've been shooting all my life since I was about twelve. I started off with a small air gun, then I used a 12-bore. Very seldom did we get pheasant then, but rabbit, hare, pigeon, partridge, duck etc. There were always a lot of rabbits along the sandy side of the hill between Hill Row and Haddenham Church. We gave them away because a rabbit was only worth nine pence (3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>p) and a hare half-a-crown (12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p). I saw hares make £1.65 in Cambridge market last year (1977). We used to walk them up or rough shoot them. I got my cartridges from Mr Woolstenholmes in his shop in Hill Row. I think we used to pay 3/6 (17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p) for 25; called Killem, I believe, and say they were for your father!

I often went tooting when I was a lad and I went around with Arthur Hawkins, whose mother made us a blackbird pie one day and a sparrow

pie another time. We caught the birds for her and she made them up. We thought they were very nice at the time, not much meat, but lovely gravy. Tooting was two canes tied together at the top by a piece of leather to make a workable joint. The net was down each side. If you was tooting on stacks, you went along rustling the net. If the bird flew out, you clapped the sticks together. Some people bit the necks to kill the birds; we just gave them a tap on the back of the head. If we went tooting along hedges, one of us would be on one side, with a stick. You'd walk along and see the bird set in the moonlight; you'd say, 'Touch', and hand touch it with the stick and the bird would fly out the opposite side, straight into the net. The poachers used another way in those days, called "tranelling", which is now against the law. They used to go out with a large net, twenty to thirty yards long, and a pole each end. They spread it out about three feet from the ground, into a piece trailing at the back. They used to try to catch larks and partridges. Then a man used to come round from Willingham called Charlie Barton, selling groceries from a horse and cart, a bit like a van that you could walk in. He would buy the larks for less than one penny each. (The Good Old Days?)

### School Boy Pranks

We used to place a tree trunk against someone's door; then tap the door and run away like hell. The trunk would fall in when the door was opened!

We also used to go in the Cross Key Row, where the houses were side by side, tie a piece of string to one door and then to the next door, leaving about a foot of slack. We then tapped both doors and ran away. When one person undid it, he'd undo it a foot, and, when the other undid it, he'd pull it to again! We had to make ourselves pretty scarce, or we'd get a hammering!

The men used to take at least a gallon of beer down the fields in stone jars to keep it cool while they were mowing or something all day for twelve hours. I never saw a horse-drawn reaper at work, but I did see binders just coming in. I remember Mr Henry Carman and his son-in-law mowing with scythes a field of oats for us because it was so flat we couldn't cut it with a binder. They mowed the whole field, tied it with a straw band and shocked it. They did nearly an acre a day. The farm labourers also hoed one acre a day for half a crown (12½p).

### Local Shopping – no Tesco's!

There was a little hut in Hill Row, about 16' x 4', with darts, sweets, cigarettes, getting about fifteen to twenty men there every night. Quite a

little place in those days with George Amory, Fred Holmes, and others there every night, exchanging opinions and putting the world to rights, sometimes getting quite heated. Poor old Mr Walter Holmes, Fred's father, was up there six nights a week, not Sundays, from six until eleven. They also sold carbine for the old carbine cycle lamps. You could get your lamp filled up for a penny. Don't ask me what you had to do if you ran out of water sometimes on the way home!

#### Cars – a rare sight!

As a boy, my cousin and I were playing on the side of the road, when I clearly recall my first car drawing up, and the gentleman asking directions. We volunteered to show him the way in order to get the ride. It was a Morris Cowley, a two seater, and we looked at his speedo. He was doing 30 m.p.h., and we thought, "God, he's flying!" We talked about that for weeks, and it's stuck in my memory ever since.

We used to catch eels in the Cut, that's the small drain that runs by the Two Pot Public House round to Aldreth, that catches all the water from the hills round Haddenham. When it used to dry up in the summer sometimes, just before it got completely dry, we would go along and find eels then for our parents to cook. I'm not keen on them at all. I've seen people eel-gleaving where a bubble comes up in a drain. I suppose blacksmiths made the gleaves; they go back centuries, don't they? It has a very long handle. The Bishop of Ely used to be paid (for part of his rent) so much in eels that were caught in these Fens and taken into Ely. That's where the name came from. Remember about three years ago (1975) the Bishop came to Hill Row, and the farmers presented him with five eels. He handed them back to be put back in the river, but I'm afraid someone had different ideas. (Food for Free! Fen folk had to be thrifty in order to survive.)"

**Eric Drake was born at Sutton-in-the-Isle, but spent a lot of his childhood at Haddenham where his father kept a cycle shop and his maternal grandparents lived at York Villa.**

#### In a letter of 2000 Eric recalls 'scenes of childhood'

"Many of our pastimes were seasonal, for example birds nesting; this was a spring/early summer activity. In small gangs we boys searched the hedges and ponds for eggs, cruelly stolen from the nests. My collection was housed in cotton wool in boxes. The eggs were 'blown' by being pierced at both ends with a thorn and the contents sucked out (Ugh!); the eggs whose contents were resistant were abandoned as addles; robins' eggs were never touched because it was believed that the miscreant's eyes would drop out! (Egg collecting is now illegal although the museum

was given a huge collection in the seventies) Wild duck and moorhens eggs were scrambled or fried at home and eaten.

Another early activity was whip tops. There were two types – the body was made of wood with a cobbler's stud at the spinning point; moggies were for the inexperienced only and were scorned by the sophisticated! Spinning was caused by a leather or woven lace attached to the end of a cane about thirteen inches long, and wound round the top. A flick of the wrist sent it off and further flicks reactivated it if it faltered.

Marbles were for summer only. They could be made of glazed earthenware or glass; there were two types of glass, the common being the clear which began as integral parts of mineral water bottles and were obtained by smashing the bottle. The others had coloured stripes in the glass and were highly prized by their owners. A small circular depression was made in the ground and each competitor launched his marbles towards it. Those landing in the hole were retrieved by the owner and the others were left.

A winter and summer physical activity was tag which took many forms but always involved touching "him". Many could take part but as I was rather plump I was a watcher rather than a chaser!

On summer evenings we were allowed out to do as we pleased as long as we returned before the time laid down and we explained where we had been. I spent many evenings fishing on the New Bedford River at Sutton Gault, near the Anchor Public House which is now a smart restaurant, I believe. We went when the tide was right as that river is tidal from the Wash to Earith.

We gathered brown mushrooms found on the newly-cut stubble ..... we followed the binder and found a rich harvest. Mother made some into ketchup but huge quantities were bagged for a pub in Coveney whose landlord paid the going rate by weight. The profits were perks for us lads; so you can imagine our enthusiasm for that task. I understand that a firm making dyes bought the mushrooms from the publican. You must realise that I am not talking about pounds but stones of mushrooms! (What contrast with the amounts one buys at the Supermarket these days!)

Plum and strawberry picking also involved us in the summer. We helped to pick the latter at Hinton Hall for Charlie Morris and they were transported to Haddenham Station in hand-woven wooden baskets with metal handles, called "chips"; they were covered with cardboard and fastened with string. Plum picking was more dangerous as that involved ladder work. We started to pick on August Bank Holiday Monday, then the first weekend in the month, and we worked through Rivers to Victorias (varieties of plums) and were paid for the number of skips filled. Hard-won money, I think!

Hooping was an exclusive winter activity for boys. The hoops, of wood

or iron, were shaped to a circle of about two feet in diameter. The wood ones were launched and kept in motion by a short stick but the iron ones had a handle trapped in the ring during welding. This meant that the operator had to run at the speed of the hoop. Owners of iron hoops made by the local blacksmith, Charlie Dove, regarded wooden hoops as sissy and themselves as far superior!

The exclusive winter activity for girls was skipping which no self-respecting young blood would associate himself with. I recall that girls with a short-handled rope or in a group with a no-handled rope had a really exciting time with numerous rhymes such as "Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper". As the condiments were shouted, the pace accelerated; my sister Betty, had a sophisticated rope with ball bearings where the rope entered the handle, allowing much easier rotation; she was much envied by her friends. (Skipping at the Farmland Museum Forties Fete was extremely popular recently as so many children had never skipped!). Family Games such as cards (whist) and dominoes were popular as were jig-saw puzzles, many of which I made by sticking a picture on plywood and fret-sawing the pieces myself.

We were all allowed to contribute to a pegged rug which seemed always to be "on the go". Strips of fabric from old garments were pegged through a backing of hessian; finished rugs served us all over the house and they cost nothing. They certainly let me get out of bed and dress without placing my feet on the old lino. Who said recycling is new?

On Sunday evenings all the year round we would gather round the piano and mother would play accompanied by father on his fiddle; our entertainment was home-made and we were very content with our lot."

### **George Green recalled pre-World War I life in the village, and then his war experiences**

"After a few weeks' work I had six sixpences (fifteen modern pence) in my pocket and I thought I was a millionaire. Things were cheap, but there weren't much money about. We did not get paid overtime rates on the farm – just a half pint of beer for an evening's work at haytime. (Some of the beer was brewed at the Maltings in Station Road: most came by train in barrels and had to be collected at Haddenham station.) I worked for Camps and then for your Great Grandad, Will Freeman. Pay was less than ten shillings (50p) a week. When I worked for Gotobed, the coal merchant, I'd chuck a ton of coal out of the rail trucks for a shilling (five pence).

#### First World War

I biked to Newmarket by Ely (No road across via Wicken until after the war) and volunteered for service; I got half a crown and signed up.

I was told to report to Bury St. Edmunds and in my training went to the Polo Stables at Putney, Richmond Park, Hertford and Wellington Barracks. (What an adventure for a Fen teenager whose contemporaries had not even been to Cambridge!)

I joined the East Africa King's Rifles and was sent abroad. Two years ten months in the Uganda area, wonderful country, wonderful animals. Could not travel at night because of the wild animals. Saw Lake Victoria and the source of the Nile. (Interesting to note that George's interviewer, Kevin Delanoy, some twenty years later, worked on the film tracing the Nile from its source to the Mediterranean.) Wonderful views, my boy, a marvellous place. One of the crops there was sisal which was used to make twine for binders. There were big factories for cotton and rice, and all the machines were made in Manchester and shipped out there (The greatness of Britain?).

One day I was sent to a Bush village where they made whips from rhinoceros skin: I brought one home with me, and it was stolen from my stable in Church Lane. (Who said burglaries are more common in 2003?) I went a year and ten months without receiving news from home, and when my post caught up with me, it was a complete sack full!"

### **Joe Haddock, a life-long resident of Haddenham and fen farmer; in retirement he organised the advertising in the local magazine**

"My first year at school was all right. I remember Miss Farthing used to teach me at the school opposite the Post Office. (Now converted to domestic dwellings.) The girls were separated from the boys at seven and we went to the Arkenstall Boys' School next to the Parish Church. I remember walking along – I was very nervous at this time. I lived right down Haddenham Fen on a farm, well it is more like towards Cottenham and we walked to school, backwards and forwards every day; we used to take our dokey (mid-day meal) with us. (No school dinners in the nineteen twenties!) I should say we walked two miles each way in rain and sun and we had to go to Sunday school as well at Holy Trinity Church.

All the churches were full when I was young, the Baptist on the Green was full, so was the Methodist as well as the Parish Church (How full are the pews these days?) you see, that's deteriorated these days. We had our ups and downs, we used to fight, one thing and another but we got on all right really. We used to play in the Arkenstall car park as it is now – there were houses and gardens there when I was a boy – it has all been altered so much. After school we used to sit and read – there was no television or wireless in my young day ... we had an oil lamp, no electricity. There were three bedrooms, Mum and Dad's room, one for

the girls (I had three sisters) and one for us boys; cuz there were no having your room on your own then, you shared with your brothers. At fourteen I left school and went straight to work with my Dad on the land and my two brothers joined us as soon as they were old enough; he really needed us to help him. He used to give us half a crown (twelve and a half pence) a week and I said to him, "Half a crown ain't much," but he said, "Well, I'll have to keep you and clothe you, you know, and that costs me a lot more than half a crown" (In those days children never argued with what their parents said!). We worked for Dad until he retired and then we took the land over; we started with thirty acres and we had two hundred and fifty when we finished farming, most of it was hired land. We didn't change much over the years – we farmed bullocks and kept pigs but we changed from horses to tractors quite late because my Dad didn't believe in tractors, he liked the ole hosses. (Joe's tape was used for a Radio 4 Archive programme entitled "Iron Horses"). Our land was scattered about the Fen and we never left it fallow as they do today with 'set aside'. There were no spraying ya know, and no chemicals – all the hoeing was done by hand. On our rare day off we used to go to the pictures and one thing and another, in the Church Hall (Now a private house in Church Lane) where they'd put a screen on the door and show silent films; I'm not gonna say we were all silent!

I remember the first bus coming to Haddenham, Parnell from Stretham owned a thirty hundred weight lorry and he used to have seats round the sides and take people to Ely market, and then the buses proper used to run to Ely Market on Thursdays every half hour; a better service than there is today and the buses were full to standing. Well, you see, there were no cars about in them days.

I went to Hunstanton on the train from Haddenham station ..... everything went on there years ago; you used to cart all the corn and sugar beet and there was just one track coming from Sutton and going across Grunty Fen to Ely. There was a siding and a waiting room with a porter and a station master dressed in all his uniform: the trains used to take everything – fruit to the town markets the next morning, milk to the creamery, bring coal to the coalyard and so on.

Our work days were long; you'd be packed up in the morning and leave home by six; you'd get back for dinner about four and then you'd have another couple of hours of work to do afterwards. You see, in the mornings you'd got to have two hours to feed the hosses - that took two hours to fill a working hosses stomach because a horse won't eat anything that's warmed up so you always had to feed them a little at a time (See Burton's account in Book 1). And as soon as they'd cleared one lot up, you'd give them some more and every small holding had five or six cows which you would milk by hand each morning and each evening while the hosses were feeding. (Who says they were the Good Old Days?)"

## Pat Norman, when living in Germany, sent this memory of his Haddenham childhood

### A Child's View from a Window

A farm which worked daily in front of our living room window was a natural focus of attention and interest. In fact there was an endearing close proximity. My first reference to this arrives from my early impressions as a three-year-old, before we moved to Linden Farm. It was in the time of my grandparents living there and this was the purpose of our visit – to see them, but I was far more fascinated by the steam threshing engine at work in the Freemans' stack-yard at Stone Cross Farm. Mind you, it was a hive of activity as any threshing scene was, but it was this powerful machine, a steam engine with its varying pulsating beats due to the load of every sheaf being fed into the drum (the machine which beat out the corn from the straw). I had never seen anything like it before and the impression can still be put into words over seventy years of time. It was a scene to be repeated countless times; it was always a difficult manoeuvre to get that three-item threshing tackle round the sharp turn, off the road and into the yard and then get it set .... There was always a lot of noise and communications had to be shouted above the commotion. (Perhaps this is why Fen farmers often shout rather than talk!)

It was customary at the time of harvest for an old man from Willingham Fen to walk to Linden Farm (crossing the Old West River at High Bridge) just to keep in touch with our family which had been his neighbour at Queenholme before moving up into Haddenham in 1917. It was nearly always a very hot day when he chose to visit us; I remember so well the interest he took in the harvest-carting of the Freeman Family. A rural scene like none other, in the horse and cart days of that long ago. The loads on each cart were beautifully made, and this caught his eye. Even more, he made a very penetrating remark, "Your neighbours are very clean farmers, not a single bit of rubbish (weeds) in the butt-ends of the sheaves." (All had been hand-hoed – no weed killers) This indeed was so and remained in my knowledge and the fact of this 'clean farmer' was evident in my extending knowledge and experience of my farming days. Whenever Grandad Freeman (His grandson, Robert, now owns Stone Cross Farm) stepped into a field and by chance was to see a root of "twitch" (couch grass), he would pick it up and put it in his pocket to get it off the land. That is some reputation to be proud of and was much quoted.

### No Flush Toilets and Water at the Turn of a Tap!

Two other note-worthy facts of Haddenham pumps and wells. With most villages there was this need of "convenience". So in many situations the domestic pump had to be as near to the back door of the farmhouse as possible. So too had the household 'privy', though the needs were vastly different and so were the effects! Sense of hygiene was difficult to maintain, especially in high summer. It provided a rich ground work for the studies of entomology (The rat-railed maggot about three feet long comes to mind) and the discomfort of enteritis and other diseases. For the second fact, that of the village pumps, we pumped Freemans' well dry when Spencer's house was on fire. (Later was the Head Quarters of Jack Richard's transport, now at Fakenham) Farm fires were often a long way from any pond and the liquid mud of the pond bottom would block the intake pipe and spell the proud end of the fire engine's life, as happened at both the Hinton Hall and Haddenham Pumping Engine blazes."



Leeds University did a "dig" on the site of the old Hinton Hall in 1969. The Victorian replacement was the country home of A. C. Benson, Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge and author of the patriotic song "Land of Hope and Glory".

**Jean Richards spent her retirement years in Haddenham where she was responsible for the monthly village magazine; she was interviewed in the mid-eighties.**

The Village Magazine became known as Village Voice when Jean was responsible

"It was decided that the village magazine was "too churchy" and we wanted to get it more community based. I was asked to take it on. I tell people that there's a deadline and if they don't meet the deadline the article doesn't go in the magazine. I have to be quite ruthless. Very often

I get a piece in about some activity in the village and I have to edit it because when people write a piece, if they are not experienced, they will write an account; they know what they are trying to say, but they don't realise that perhaps they haven't quite succeeded in saying what they intended to say, so I may have to cut it in order to get it in the space .....

But I made a declaration at the very beginning when I became editor that I would cut as required; there's no good complaining! I've lived in villages most of my life and I know there is no way in which you can avoid upsetting somebody some of the time so I'm fairly careful and that is just something one has to live with.

We've got a lot of activities going on in Haddenham – we've got the Farmland Museum which is featured every month, the Parish Council, the three churches, the Conservation Society, the Arts Society and the Ballet School. You name it, you know, there's a tremendous lot of activities going on in this village and if people want them written up, if they want to pass information on, then I am only too pleased to publish it for them.

I want to get children from the local school to make contributions and I want it to become much more a group community thing rather than individuals firing things off at me. At the moment we have eight sides of A4 but, you know, it could have more in it."

(A tree is planted in the churchyard in memory of Jean and a piano given in her memory is in Holy Trinity Church; her magazine has progressed through Gina Keene and is now produced with photos and extras by Chris and Tom at Globe House).

### Bee-keeping as a Hobby

Here I am making use of natural power, the sun, to do some work for me. That dirty old bees wax comb there which is finished with, I can't put it in the hives again ..... so I am letting the sun shine through those double panes of glass, it is melting the wax down and at the top of the extractors you've got those dirty old combs and at the bottom if you look, you'll see there's some nice yellow clean bees wax which has melted and dripped down. As an ex-Land Army person and experienced farmer, I have many skills at my finger tips. In my days of farming, you knew perfectly well that if you didn't do what was needed, you were not going to survive; I mean, it was as straight forward as that – we needed food so there was no question of going on strike or not working all day until ten or eleven at night if that was what was needed to get the harvest in."

**Frank Steel, born 1908, moved to Haddenham 1910 to a more or less agricultural self-sufficient community**

In his Interview of 1970 he recalls Village Life of his Youth

"We had one cheese-maker at Aldreth and one at Station Road, Haddenham. They used to cut straws in lengths of about nine inches and take them to the women who sewed them together. They were placed in the bottom of the troughs so that the cheese was sold with straw underneath and sent by rail daily to London.

Next door to the Haddenham cheese-maker lived the town-crier who rang his bell for news especially when there was likelihood of floods. This is when he asked for scradgers to go to raise the banks a bit in the low parts of the rivers to stop the flooding. I've often been on that job in the middle of the night, and we were always very grateful for tea provided by the Salvation Army from Cottenham. (Cottenham is the other side of the Old West River.)

Over the railway bridge in Haddenham on the left hand side were brick pits, where the bricks were hand-made in a small kiln. Later this kiln was pulled down and rebuilt in a bigger style with a new pump. The pits were given up because the clays had too much salt-petre. There were lots of willows in these pits, making it an ideal place for us boys to play. There was a bit of the old kiln left when I was a boy. Jewson was the name of the owner of the pits, which is the name now adopted by a national firm of Builders Merchants. Frank Jewson was 'Liberal' and 'Chapel' and refused to pay rates for the upkeep of 'Church' schools.

On the crest of the Wilburton road was Sally Dimmock's Corner which was a very sharp bend. (Junction of Rampart/Perry Close/Wilburton Road now.) There were lots of crashes there in the early days of motor cars and cycles, especially when it was frosty. One day the local chimney-sweep was cycling along when the doctor (Doctor Howe who lived at St. Ovens, High Street) came flying by in his new model T-Ford car. The sweep fell onto the grass, to the great amusement of the doctor. The sweep soon got his own back. One day, when driving his steam engine, he held back the doctor, hooting madly, as long as he dared. The next week, however, the sweep, cum engine driver, cut his thumb, and the doctor had to treat him, much to his annoyance. (A humorous story which Frank often told.)

At Haddenham Station we had two signalmen, two porters, two clerks and a station master. The trains ran from St. Ives to Ely in the morning and vice versa at night. The sad part was that it was the wrong way for the mail to come to Haddenham; so it came and went by pony and trap. There was a fair bit of rail traffic in those days, particularly of cattle. On the north side was a pen, and the trucks were run up to it and converted into cattle floats and journeyed to local markets. There was still one

horse-drawn carriage to Ely on Thursdays and to Cambridge on Saturdays.

In spite of the railway, most cattle was still driven. (A driven herd was a common sight in those days.) There was a dealer, Jacobs, in Stretham, who employed two drovers to go round buying and driving to Ely or St. Ives market. He kept a hired field in Haddenham so that he could keep cattle there on Sundays for Mondays when coming or going from Ely or St. Ives through the village. Once, when a herd was going through, a bullock decided to walk back up our yard, down our passage and into our pantry (Frank lived at the cross-roads). We had to break the perforated zinc off the window (a device for keeping flies out) and poke him with a stick to get him out. He came out of our front door! Imagine a bullock coming out of a front door! My mother said she was the only woman in Haddenham who had had a live bullock in her pantry, which was only eight to ten feet square!

### Water in Haddenham

There were no pipes before the First World War and there were lots of public meetings for and against, before it was eventually decided to have pumped water. It was put in by a firm called F.W. Shanks & Co from Hunstanton. All the water came from wells or pumps. Some of the wells were said to be as deep as the height of Haddenham Church. (See note at end) A local villager called Watts was our well-digger. I helped him dig a couple up the Wilburton Road. They used to make the trestle on the spot and get a piece of round wood with a handle driven in it. You had a rope with a couple of catches in it and two pails going up, empty and full, like a see-saw. They made what they called a drum in a circular shape that looked like a barrel with a four inch rim at the top and bottom. When the digger got near the water coming up, he put down that barrel shape, put the bricks inside it on the bottom shelf and built up to the top shelf with bricks. As he dug down into the well and into the water, the water seeped through the sides and held the sand so that it was not washed into it. It formed a support to put bricks on to make the inside of the well. Occasionally some people pulled the stunt of using two cart wheels of different sizes and bricked up on that, but that was a riskier business. We had only four or five houses with roof water tanks, one of them next to the Three Kings Pub, owned by A. E. Wright, while Aldreth had stand pipes in the village where they could draw water, as well as a supply from the hills. We did have a gas generator in the Station Road area before my time. After the First World War with its blackouts, we got oil lamps in the streets and Harry Fuller was our last lamp lighter. There are still a lot of neglected wells in Haddenham, which have been filled in to prevent dangers to people. We found one in the High Street, where we'd had a

traction engine each side of it and then a lorry went in the middle and he fell in with his front wheel. The only place that we had a natural supply in the farms was down at the Elms, where there was a spring in the hill which ran through the bullock yard, the cow sheds, the stables and even flowed into the pond and ran down the hill. This was the only supply here, just before the First World War. (The farmyard is now Metcalfe Way.) You could dig a well almost anywhere on the top of Haddenham hill in the sand and, as the clay held water, you could get water anywhere. That's why there was so much fuss and protest about piped water, and why we were so late getting it. (I have researched the sites of over eighty wells in the parish – editor).

#### People still come back

Before the First World War the village of Haddenham consisted of all the trades needed to survive. As a baker, my father started the Jubilee Tea Rooms by joining our house with the Old Windmill Public House, on the corner of Station Road. (Other bakeries included Setchells/Sykes – now the butcher's shop: George Salmon's bakery was further down the High Street opposite the Hare and Hounds. Now our bread arrives by van from Littleport or Bluntisham – Progress?). The people who had left farm labouring here to find work in the industrial Midlands, always came back to see relations at holiday times. They lodged at The Three Kings, but ate at the Tea Rooms. Some of the girls had left to go into service or shops in London, and it was a laugh to see some of the high-heeled shoes and such fashions that they paraded in. It is still accepted that North Country people come to our coasts, like Hunstanton and Yarmouth, for their holidays.

#### Three Cars in the Village – often three cars in one house today

Before the war (1914-18), the road from Haddenham to Wilburton was tarmacked, and we had three cars! After the war, H.T. Setchell who was the leading miller, bought our very first lorry. At the same time Doctor Howe got his model Ford car, and road life began to be very dangerous! Later we got a tractor, and I myself drove the fourth tractor we had. The horses then began to get used for light work and fewer horses were used. Occasionally steam ploughs cultivated very heavy soil. These were owned by a man called Hepher and driven by the chimney sweep by the name of Watts. Sometimes Chivers, who had a farm in Aldreth; brought their tackle over, and it was quite a sight to go over the fields and see the two engines and to hear them whistle for the water when they were short of it. We loved to stand on the engine while they were working. (Now only available to be seen at Rallies.)

Down the Aldreth Road stands the Great Mill owned by John Lawrence, who only retired at the end of World War Two. On the other side was another mill, and it was a saying of Charlie Bester that there wasn't enough wind for two mills so that one had to be pulled down. (Now the site of the large house, Herewake)

Also on the Aldreth Road, after the mill, was a big house left unfurnished for a long time, so that the owner didn't have to pay the rates. That belonged to old Bill Burkett and it was the last house where the bricks were made on the site. Two men from Doddington came over, dug the clay and burnt the bricks. Bill built the house and I had the job in later years of fitting it all out with picture rails. That was one of the first houses using cement in the brickwork.

#### A Factory in the Village!

Opposite one of the many gardens Chivers had in the Aldreth Road was the slaughter-house, really an old factory, and the place where they took all the dead animals of Haddenham and they cut them up and boiled them up for the fat and for the hooves, skinned them and sold the skins to Cambridge.

After the slaughter-house in the Aldreth Road was the black half mile of Hereward the Wake and the waterway called the Canal, which used to carry the river traffic before my time up to the hamlet all the way from the Old West River.

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**Fred Woolstenholmes spent his entire life in Hill Row where his brother Sid had a fleet of lorries for collecting milk from farms; later it was taken over by the Milk Marketing Board**

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#### The Goat at North Fen

I worked on Pete Day's farm, and he had a goat, a lovely nanny goat and she had some young 'uns that were a pair of billies. Me and George took one of the billies. He were a wonderful goat with long horns. Well, he wouldn't hurt us that worked on the farm, but anybody else he'd have a go at them. We used to get hold of his horns, and he'd be up on his hind legs, but he'd leave us alone, not come at us. One day we was about the farm, and a man named Charlie Bullman, a young fellow, a hedger, got spotted by the goat. Charlie, about sixteen, see him coming and ran to this 'ere gate. He jumped on the top and wouldn't get down! George went across and got the goat. Another day he 'ad a go at the tater-pickers, knocked them over and then knocked the pile of taters over! He'd go anywhere, but his mother were an exceptional, wonderful goat. (Goats' milk was used by smallholders who could not afford to keep a cow; nowadays it is used for people on certain diets.)

### Rotten Eggs

"I remember that terrible, terrible smell of rotten eggs that lasted more than a fortnight. It were in about 1921 when nearly all the Haddenham and Hill Row farmers came to the sale in George Amory's farmyard. He had to sell a haystack, and the auctioneer came from Cambridge, name Mr. Love, but they wouldn't let him in the yard, so he stood across the road in front of all the people. We had about 200 rotten eggs that Mr. Cecil Hefher brought down the night before. When the sale begun, the eggs began to fly, and one fellow, George Newell, he hit Mr. Love in the ear and another egg fell on his shoulder. The haystack was never sold, it was covered over and there it was. I don't know how many, about six or seven, got summons over it and had to go to Ely. I can name some, Walter Player, Cecil Heffer, George Day, Harry Newman, Fred Searle and Bill Leach. I think the fine were somewhere about £1 apiece which was a lot of money. All this were because people wouldn't pay rates to the River Board. (A similar account by Charles Bester in Book I.)

### Some Fen Flood Memories

A lot of people must've told about the 1947 floods. I got a few memories myself. I see lots of snakes and things up on the higher land, and there was pigs running, slitting their throats with their trotters. I also one dark night looked across the Fen and saw Fred Palmer's four big haystacks moving towards me and my mates. The stacks come right across the farm by the Fen. One of them swum until it landed on the high road! Very odd. I remember hearing the bank blow as you go along the viaduct, twenty or thirty feet of hole with water pouring out, roaring and burying everything in the Fen, about four miles round, like a sea from Hill Row to Sutton to Stretham. Thousands of people came to see it all, bunged up with traffic it were! The only animal that I recall shot was Herbert the bull. They couldn't manage him, too big; he'd either perish or be drowned, so they shot him. He laid buried where he was shot, that's how deep the water was. There was hundreds of hens that couldn't get caught; they just died. Ain't it true that floods are like the sea? You can do what you like, but you can't stop it, can you?"



Cattle were a common sight in most farms; bullocks were fattened in straw yards, having grazed the river banks through the summer months; only one farm in the centre of the village keeps cattle today.

# ARCHIVES

Their lives, now gone, we all can share-  
The future, for the past, should care.  
Hard they toiled, little did they earn  
But from their memories, we can learn.

They knew both times of peace and strife:  
And lived a very simple life.  
But they made the world that now we see,  
Their memories left to you and me.

