

BOG OAK

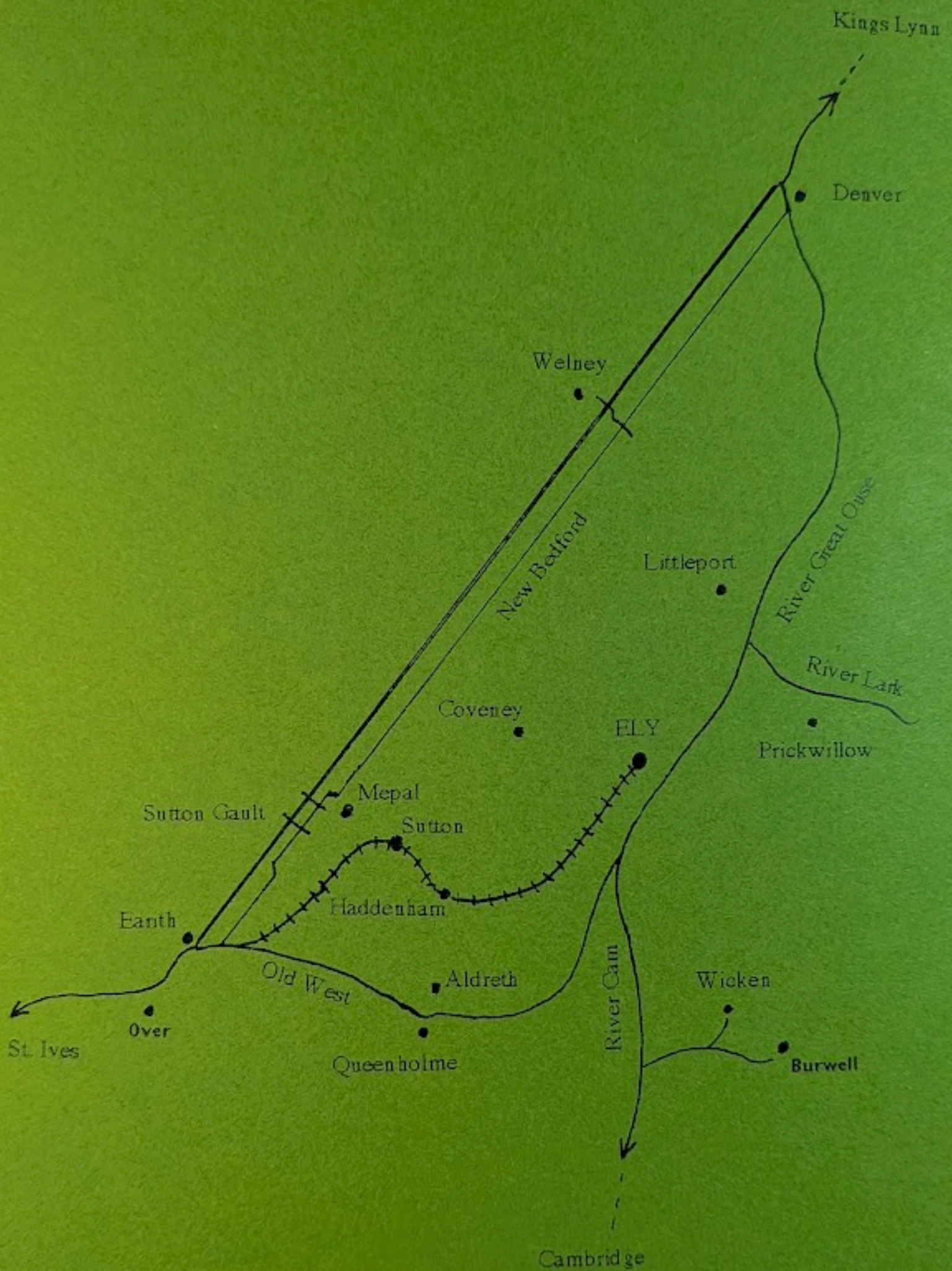
COUNTRY

Compiled by

Lorna & Kevin Delaney



*More stories to tell from villages
around Ely*



Sketch map to show the rivers around Ely and the rail line of the Grunty Fen Express.

BOG OAK

COUNTRY

They call them "bog oaks", but it's not always true

Sometimes they're ash or fir or yew.

But one thing is fact, so it now appears,

They've lain buried there for four thousand years.

As the fens were drained, so they dried out.

They began to shrink and to blow about

Exposing these great trunks of wet black wood-

They didn't, by the way do the ploughs much good!

So when from the fields they had to go,

Blown up, with explosives, by Tom, Dick or Joe,

To the roadside verge they were then dragged away

To dry out, where many remain to this day.

More stories to tell from villages

around Ely

Foreword



It is a privilege to have the foreword of this booklet written by Alan Bloom, who had vast experience with Bog Oak at Burwell before developing his nursery at Bressingham which is of world-wide significance. Here is what he wrote for this booklet:

"The Dutchman, Vermuyden, who was commissioned by the 'Gentleman Adventurers' to drain the Fens in the 17th Century, began embankments at Over, ten miles northwest of Cambridge. I was born there in 1906 and became quickly fascinated and even proud to be a Fen man. But I was also a gardener and, as explained in my first book, "The Farm in the Fen", I took on a 200 acre farm at Burwell, mainly to compete with the Dutch exporters of plants.

Bog Oak had always fascinated me, but I'd not found any till I began reclaiming the land for crops, where it had been dug for peat fuel. This process, along with natural shrinkage through modern drainage, had led to more trees (bog oaks) being found and lodes (waterways) to be confined within raised banks. It had been over 4000 years ago a forest of mainly oak trees. Then a flood came and gradually the dead trunks fell and remained submerged; they were not lying as if blown down together by a fierce gale, as had been supposed. Evidence of other life was also fen dug, antlers and boar's teeth, but the most interesting was a human skull. This had a hole, which archaeologists at Cambridge said was the result of the man being trepanned when alive, 4,000 years ago.

Using explosives on some large trunks, we had to pile the excavated trunks as best we could with crawler tractors, and I reckoned that at one stage a total of two acres was covered. It was not good firewood and attempts to saw it to make 'sleepers' for a narrow gauge railway were futile, so, from thinking bog oak as a kind of treasure when aged fourteen, at forty I thought quite the opposite!

My book of 1944 brought a request from a specialist furniture maker, and I was glad to let him take two lorry loads of bog oak away. He made two jars, which remain on my mantelpiece as reminders of hard labours as well as hard, ancient wood."

Alan Bloom, Bressingham Hall, Norfolk
February 2003

Acknowledgements



This is the second booklet of transcribed oral history tapes (the first was entitled "Ten miles from Ely") held by the Farmland Museum: profits from the sales will be given to local charities.

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Valerie Bloye who edited some stories into more readable form and kindly proof-read the script.

Jenny Wallace who financed the printing of this booklet in memory of her father, Ewart Drake.

The tape archive and its copyright is held by the trustees of the Farmland Museum; excerpts have been used by authors (e.g. Sadie Ward, 'War in the Countryside'), Radio Programmes ('Archive Hour' on Radio 4) and TV ('Look East' and 'Bygones').

Interviews from which these stories were taken were made by Kevin Delanoy in the seventies and eighties: excerpts from letters are included from Eric Drake and Pat Norman, both old Soham Grammarians.

Copies of photos were made at the Mepal Access Point and are from the personal collection of the Delanoy Family.

Ewart Drake, grandson of the Chaff Factory owner, Richard, and director, with his father, of the haulage firm H. L. Drake & Son of Ely was a life long Methodist and member of the Royal British Legion.

War-Time Memories

"I remember the Suffolk Reserves going to Ely Station to join their regiment at Bury St. Edmunds on August 5th, 1914. Men who had joined the Cambridgeshire Territorial Army 'H' Company at Ely reported to Silver Street Barracks and soon went away. At school one of our masters, Mr. Benjifield, joined up. In September the Head Master got a group of artistic boys to make the Roll of Honour of old boys joining up. I also recall permits for driving and petrol coupons for our pickups. After the war I called in to Lyon's Corner House in Manchester and saw, seated at a table, a man I was with in Bologna!"

A Royal Air Force Recruit

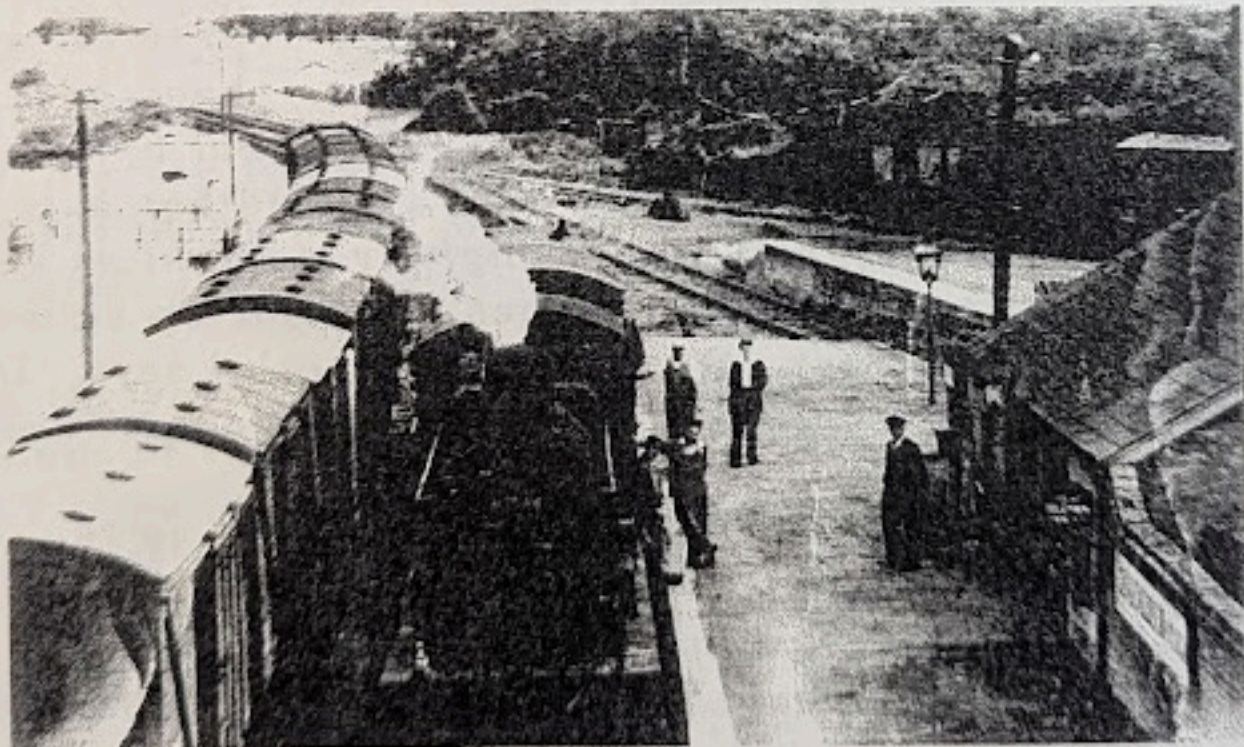
"When I was nearing my 18th birthday, not wanting to be called up, myself and another Ely boy, Reg Lake, went to Cambridge to enquire about joining the Royal Air Force, which had been formed in April 1918, by the Royal Flying Corps merging with the Royal Railway Service. The Recruiting Officer gave us rail passes to London, and we left on Friday, June 7th, to go to Westminster. Friday, Saturday and Sunday were spent waiting and interviewing. Friday we stayed at Buckingham Palace Hotel run by the Church Army. I went to the Methodist Central Hall on Sunday night and heard Rev. Young. On Monday afternoon about 300 young men marched to Waterloo Station. Remarks made by some of the passers-by were, 'Where do they find you'? This was by some of the older men. The train took us to Blandford, partly on the Somerset and Dorset Railway, nicknamed 'slowing down for joy-riding'.

We arrived and marched up to camp, were put in receiving stations, dished out with two blankets and put ten per bell tent. Next morning we were given our number (194222 RAF) and uniform, which was infantry khakis, putties, kick back irons and two suits. On the Saturday some of us were marched to Blandford Station and put on a train for Reading to the Rigging School of Technical Training.

This was like going back to school. We lived in tents and slept on hard boards. Reveille was at 6 am, followed by square bashing until breakfast at 8 am. Lectures lasted from 9 am until 1 pm. More lectures came after lunch until 5 pm. After dinner we marched to camp at 6 pm and were free until 10 pm. After eight weeks some of us went to Stonehenge to work on Handley Page machines for two weeks and then back to Blandford in the overseas section.

I had six days draft leave (the only leave I ever had!) before going back and having my name called out for draft on Sunday, 22nd September at 9.30 am. Served out with a tropical kit, I left for Southern Italy from Southampton to Le Havre on a River Clyde Steamer. We boarded a train which went through France via the Mont Cenis tunnel and arrived at Taranto in early October. We crossed the Adriatic to Verona, hearing rumours that the war was about to finish. On November 11th at 7 pm we were told it had ended. Our planes, single-seater fighters, were sent to Greece. When we came back to Taranto where we spent Christmas, I put in for demob as I had a job to go to.

On February 1st I left on the troop train through Northern France. I met Thomas Priest of Manea on the train; he knew Frank Giddens, and I knew his brother, George, at Sutton. The demob centre was at Thetford where we arrived on February 14th 1919. It was so cold that my mother had to give me three blankets in the bed, no sheets!"



Steam Power on the Grunty Fen line; built in 1866, it ran from Ely, crossing the A10 at Little Thetford, with stations to serve Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham and Sutton; the track was then extended across Hill Row Fen to Earith and on to St. Ives where a market was held every Monday

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 tunnight.*" 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 tunnight.*" 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."

Driving With Single Rein. Such Technicality!

"It was quite easy when you got used to it. You'd put the horse in the middle - what you called your line mare or line horse and you got one on the offside and one on the nearside. You'd tie the one on the offside from the bridle to the one in the middle, to the line mare's collar and you'd do the same the other side. There was a line placed on the offside horses bit, comes over its head and attached to

the line mare's traces. That was to stop them getting too forward – and opposite way on the nearside one. And then you got the horse trees, that was the wooden thing to attach the traces to, and they'd be attached to the implement. You could drive them quite easily with one rein when you got used to it. You usually had the elder horse what was more used to it – you called them the line. And if you wanted them to turn right you gave the line a jerks and said, "*Wutch gee'o, wutch gee'o, wutch*", and they'd turn right. If you wanted them to come left you gave the line a slight pull on the other side and said, "*Come ere*", and then they'd turn left. It's most fascinating how the horses knew what you was talking about."



This photo, taken in 1970, shows small-holder Harry Leach with his cart horses, Beauty and Depper; the wooden tumbrel cart, top right, was a common sight in the Fens; deep wheels could cope better with the "slubby" drove ways before the concrete roads were built during World War 2.

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."

Red Cross Sales

"Apart from the weekly collections made from door to door for the Red Cross funds, we had several public auctions; any salable gift was brought to the sale – such a variety of goods, live and dead articles. Everyone contributed something. The farmers and gardeners gave produce and livestock. Housewives made gifts and turned out their cupboards, and anything they could spare from their homes was given. An auction sale I can remember especially was held on a lovely summer's day in the Doctor's paddock at the Lodge (now developed into Paddock Way housing estate). And George Green was the auctioneer. Greenie, as we called him, was well known for his ability in auctioneering. He had plenty of cheek and a quick wit and sense of humour. One hardly dare move a finger or nod a head in case Greenie took it for a bid. He also had a habit of knocking down some odd lot to anyone time and time again and then putting them up again for sale to good natured and generous bidders. In this way large sums of money were made. I can remember that old pram; it was sold over and over again before he finally knocked it down to me. And to everyone's surprise, including the cheeky auctioneer, I paid the pound and kept the pram! One of these auction sales realised over a £1,000. And, although they entailed a great deal of voluntary hard work, they were very enjoyable."

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 30th 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!”



Milk being delivered by hand-cart in 1926; door-to-door delivery by pony and cart continued in Strettham until the early sixties; the milk man's name was Geoff Beasley. This photo, like so many others, was donated by Elsie Wright, a regular museum helper at Haddenham

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 dokey, 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 Al, penny a packet. We thought that was marvellous, Al 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!

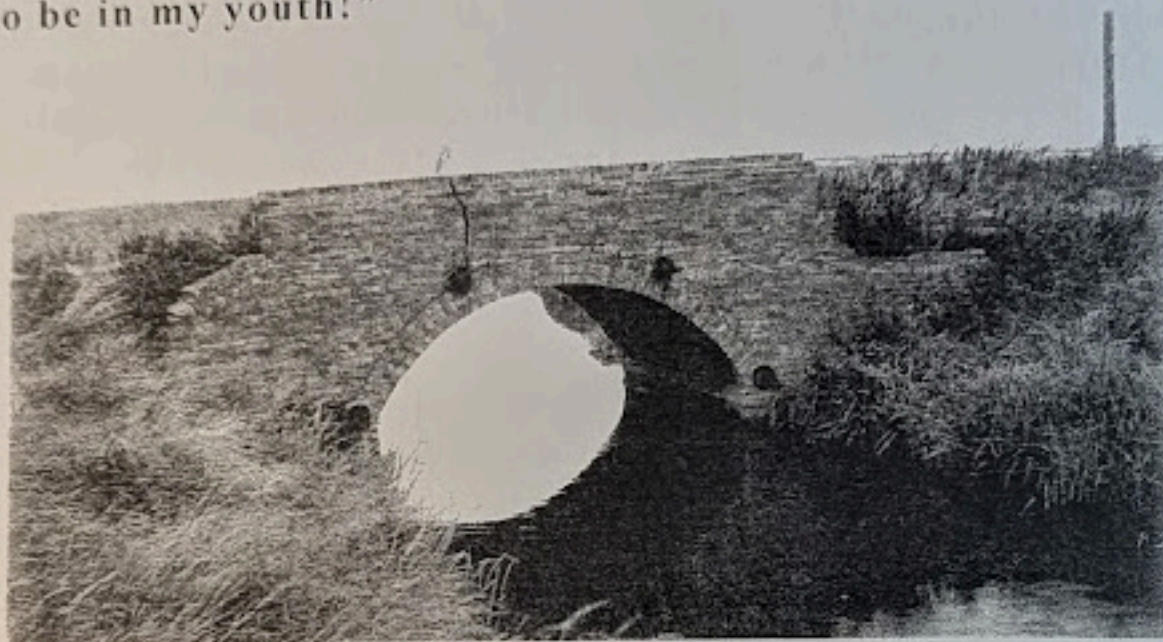
One great achievement of my Grandfather's skating, and that too I never emulated, was to "skate round the Isle". A little misleading, perhaps, but it entailed skating down the Old West to join the Cam South of Ely and then the Ouse as far as Denver and returning up the New Bedford River to rejoin the 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).

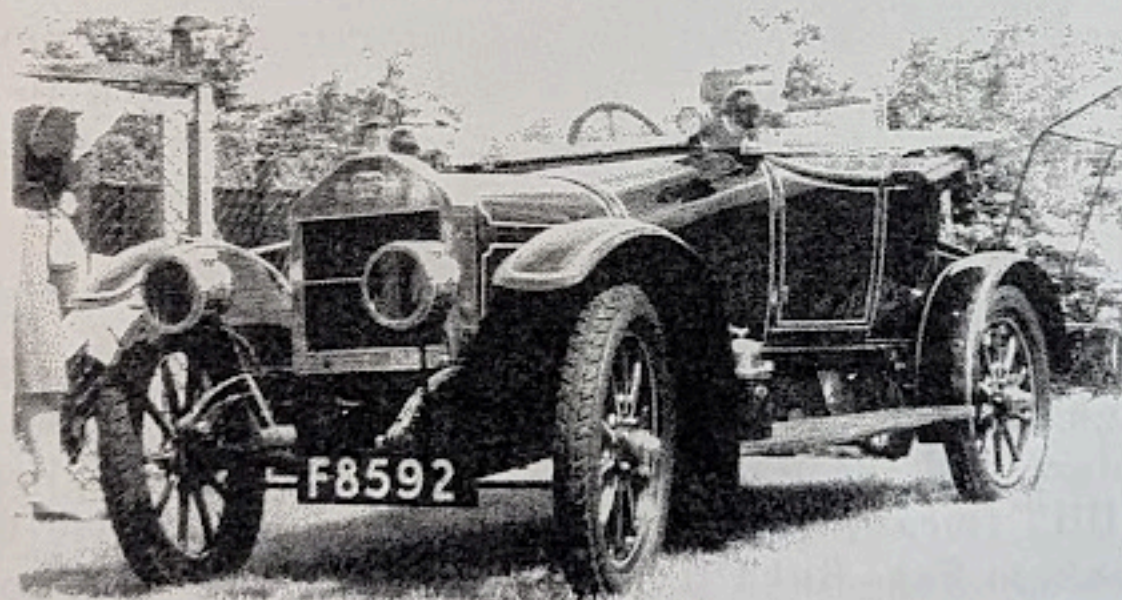
Butchers, bakers, carpenters and basket makers

“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.”)”

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 Sheffielders 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.

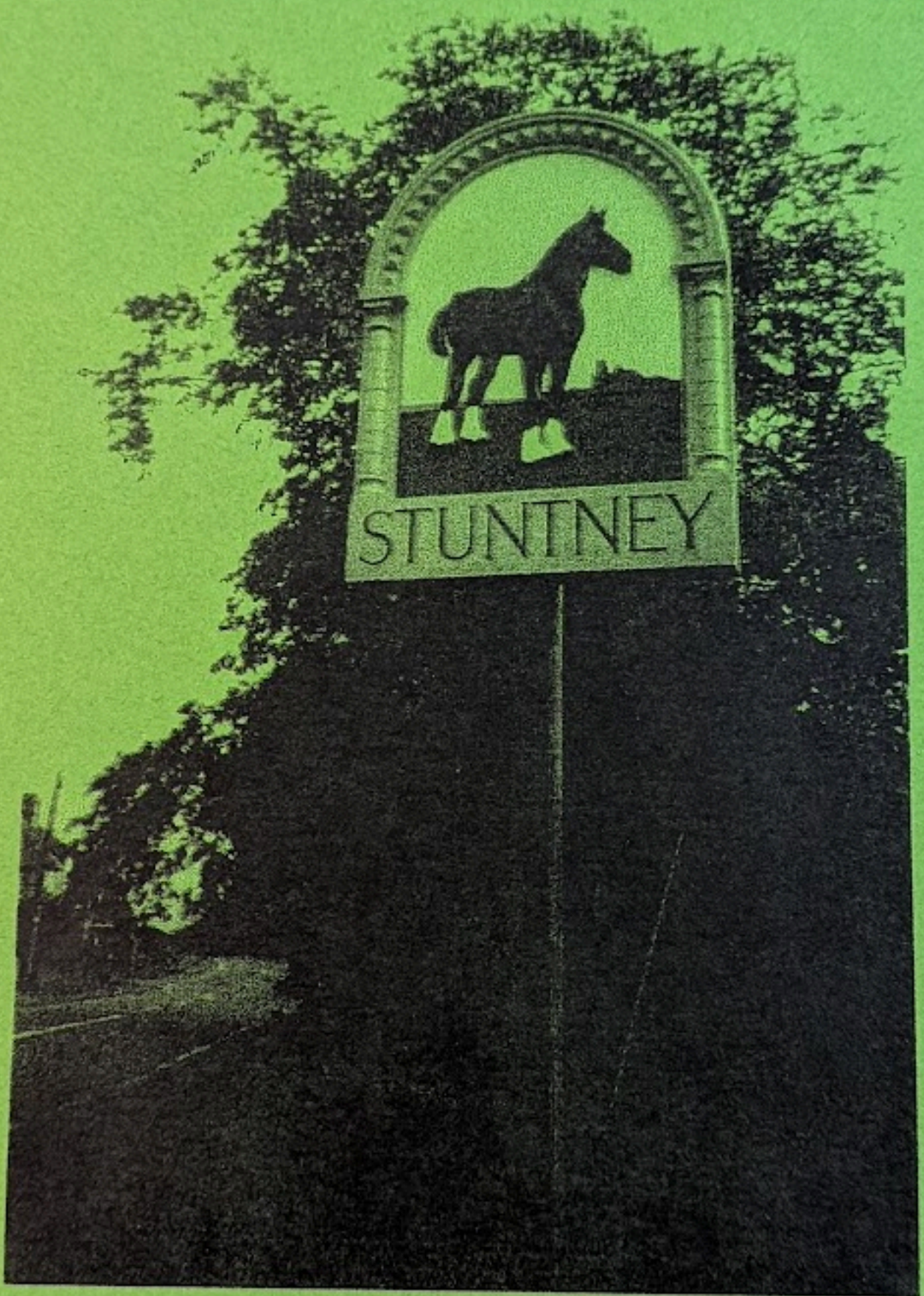
I also remember on May 14th, 1914, Needham's (where I had been since September, 1913) cricket team played Hargrave School on Parker's Piece in Cambridge. I played my very first game, went in at number 10 and made 8, not out! How, I don't know! Of course, we lost!"

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 17th 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!



This village sign recalls the power of the horse. We are told by Doug Murfitt that there were over two hundred horses at Cole Ambrose farms there and even today there are eight left; the cover photo was taken of bog oaks on the Ely Road with Ely Cathedral in the distance.



East Cambs
On-Line

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