

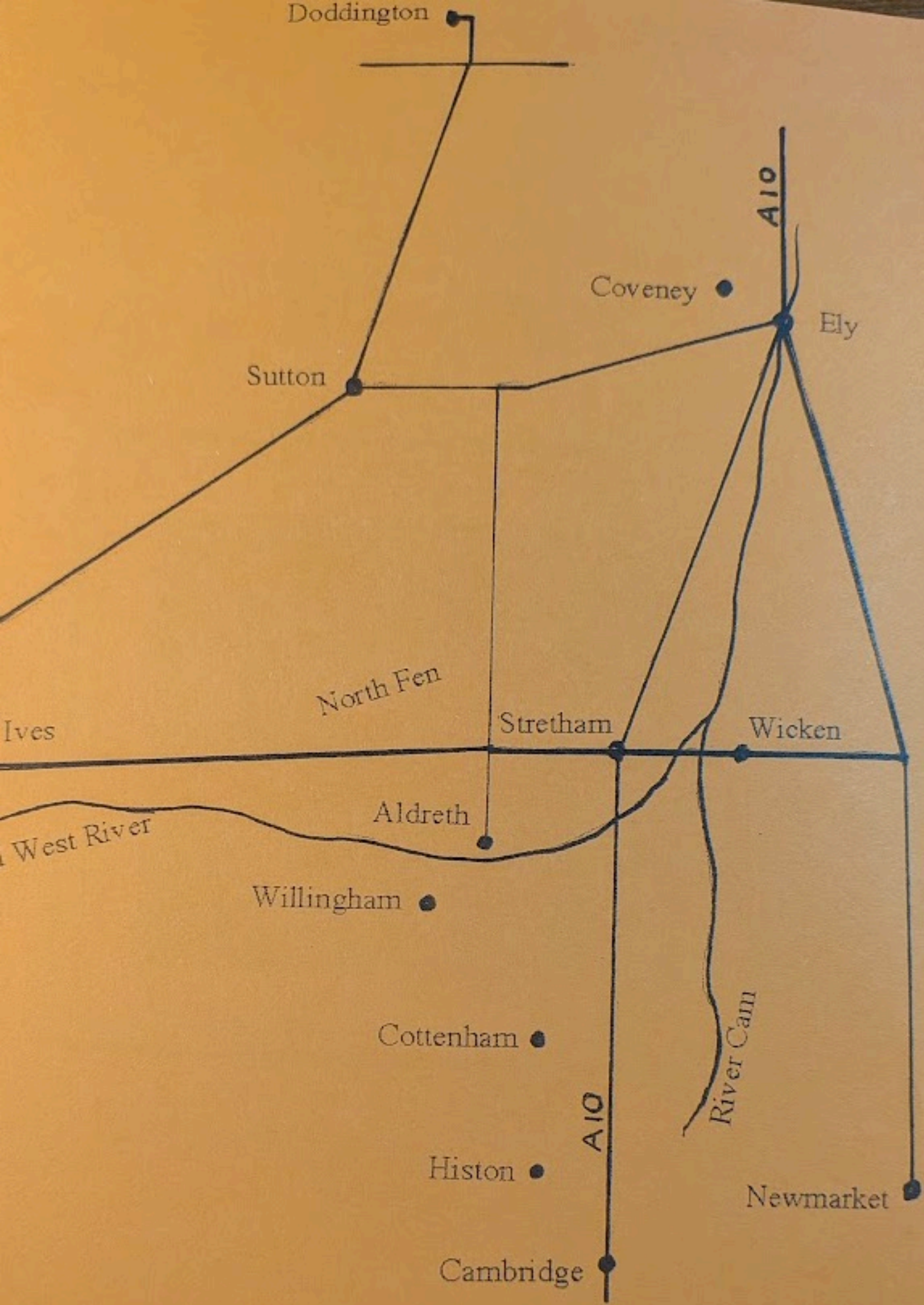
Village Voices

Compiled by
Lorna Delanoy & Valerie Bloye



More stories from around the
Fens

Book Three



SOME OF THE PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT (not to scale)

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INTRODUCTION

This is the third booklet which has made use of interviews carried out during the years 1975 - 1995 by Paul Melton and Kevin de la Noy (other titles are "Ten Miles from Ely" and "Bog Oak Country") Transcriptions have been made by Anne deBondt and Valerie Bloye: the text follows the speech as closely as possible (hence the title "Village Voices"); information in brackets has been added for explanation/updating; photos are from Pat Norman's Collection taken in the sixties. Copyright of both tapes and photos is held by Trustees of the Farmland Museum, Denny Abbey. Interviewees lived in Haddenham where the Farmland Museum was part of the village scene from 1969 - 1992.

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 for you and me.

Lorna Delanoy. Autumn 2003

Charles Bester - local historian and great raconteur.

Pest House and Pond

"Near the junction of New Road and Wilburton Road is the water tower, built on the site of an ancient pest house, which was no doubt once a medieval isolation hospital. Before the site was levelled, there was a slight mound and in this elevation were found traces of brick piers or supports of soft red brick used from the 15th to 19th century. A wooden structure supported by these piers would act as a pest house in time of need. There is also a mound surviving on the nearby recreation field. Some locals suggest that it is a burial mound, but experts who have studied it say that it was a prospect mound from which watch could be kept for the medieval Hinton Hall. Standing as it does on the highest part of the parish, it would give a clear view of any intruders approaching across the Fens to warn the lord of the manor. There was a deep ditch at first, which made the mound seem much higher, but it is less imposing after levelling. (On a clear day, Newmarket Heath and Kings' College can be seen from this viewpoint, together with the trees at Monks' Wood to the west).

"Climb the hill to Haddenham Village, come and learn of Haddenham folk".

Down Station Road we find the site of Madingley Way pond, still owned by the Parish Council, filled in after the war and now occupied by two weeping willows, planted in 1949. On the right is the site of the disused brick works now owned by Mr Nicholas Guppy, worldwide traveller and conservationist, who has established a wonderful sanctuary for wildlife, birds, beasts and plants in the four or five acres of water-filled clay pits and the surrounding land. The house occupied by Mr Guppy and now called The Pond was earlier the site of Haddenham Gas Company, which operated in the parish from about 1870 to 1900. Next door is another old brickworks that was worked until the 1930's. (Since the interview, Guppy's site has been developed executive homes enjoying water-side views and known as The Pond).

Local Building Firm: Local Argument!

The Baptist Chapel is a splendid example of early 20th century non-conformist building. It was built by Mr Harry Feast, whose yard was almost opposite, and opened in 1905 by Mrs John Chivers of the Histon family of jam manufacturers, who had contributed generously to the cost. The spire is in memory of William Chivers. The memorial window above the pulpit was dedicated to Mr and Mrs James Biddall, whose relations farmed in Hill Row. The sundial in the south transept or organ chamber was originally built into the large chimney block, which served

an ancient house and shop on this site, and it is claimed that it was a condition of sale that it should be preserved and placed in the new building. But how an ancient sundial with a Greek inscription arrived in Haddenham remains a mystery still (A similar dial is on the South side of Ely Cathedral). Harry Feast told a very interesting story about the stone steps which lead to the vestry door where the incline from the path was very steep. These were not included in the specification, and the chapel trustees refused to pay the price. The architect, therefore, had to adopt drastic measures to enforce payment. He invited the trustees and deacons to meet him on the day before the opening ceremony and also ordered men to attend with a horse and a cart. He then issued an ultimatum: "These stone steps are mine, and I require them for another building. If you do not pay, they will be removed at once!" Realising that access was impossible without steps, the trustees agreed to pay!"

1866

BONE AND MANURE WORKS
HADDENHAM.

Mr. J. Roads Factor



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<i>Dec 19</i>					

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 Hepher, 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!)

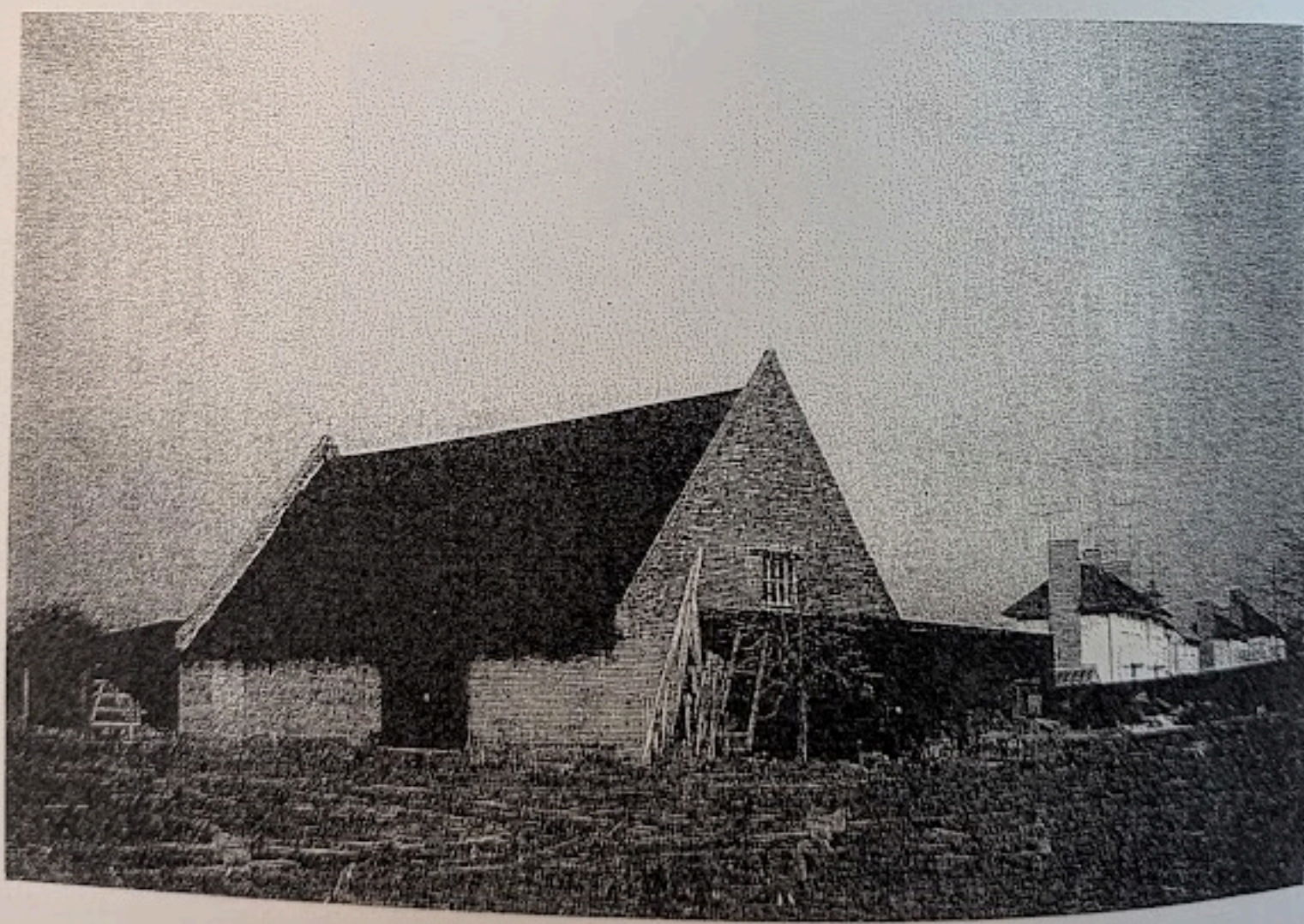


Here a binder is pulled by a tractor to cut and tie the corn in bunches (or sheaves). This task, together with threshing, has been taken over by the combine harvester: see Haddock's account of harvesting in the fen.

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,

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.)"

Mabel Demaine – Reflections of a Countrywoman

The Village: Haddenham on the Hill

“It does not seem possible that I can look back over fifty years to the days when I was a teenager in our village and I can recall the happy, full and contented days we had. There was no radio or television, occasionally we went to the nearest town on market days, making the journey by carrier’s cart or bicycle. We had no cinema, except for a short period when a travelling cinema, which more often than not broke down half way through a show, was put on in the Church Hall. It must be true to say that the local Sunday Schools provided us with our very special Red Letter days.

During the winter we had the “Treat”, a tea served on long trestle tables put up in our schoolroom, with plates, not filled with dainty sandwiches, but with large slices of bread and butter and plates of plain and fruit cake, nothing fancy. How we tucked in and enjoyed it all. Then after clearing the tables and putting the seats around the room, the fun began – blind man’s buff, postman’s knock, trencher and dummy were played. We acted charades, sang and recited and as a special treat now and again we sat in darkness and had the great excitement of a magic lantern show; this was a real thrill and joy. We usually were given an orange to take home after eating up any leftovers from the tea.

In the summer we had a tea in the fields and races for everyone. Handfuls of sweets were thrown around and sweets in those days were not paper wrapped and so as we scrambled for them they were often covered in grass. The Sunday School also provided another special treat – a day by the sea – the only time we ever saw the sea. How we looked forward to that day; for weeks we saved our pocket money for that day’s spending. No child was any trouble to get to bed the night before this great day, for our mothers there were sandwiches to pack and preparations to make almost as great as for a trip abroad today.

What else did we do in those far off days besides eat and sleep? We gave concerts, spending weeks practising and planning an entertainment, we always dressed up for these performances and one year there was a Pierrot show, quite an elaborate affair. There was also the Village Band. We have always been justly proud of our village band and on Feast Sunday it was a great attraction. Our Feast Week began on Trinity Sunday. It was the day when families and friends from far and near returned to the village, no other day in the year except Christmas brought families together like Feast Sunday and grand re-unions. A tea party in the old home, a drink in the local pub and meeting around the Village Green to listen to the band and chat with friends. During Feast Week there was a gala atmosphere, time was taken off work, there were Cricket

and Bowls matches, and tennis tournaments and on Tuesday a sports day with Fancy Dress parades and teas with our Band playing throughout. We were always in a generous mood during Feast Week, raising money for the Hospital (Addenbrooke's) and other good causes."



The drainage mill at Wicken Fen was restored and repositioned under the guidance of Pat Norman; his drawings of Stretham Old Engine (open to the public) are still in use; his knowledge of the Fen drainage and Fen Farming was considerable.

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.

The Village Green

The Village Green at Haddenham had a history of trouble from before my time as a lot of people wanted to enclose it so they put a fence round it. Rumour says that one of the local boys drove an engine across it, straight through the fence. There were lots of nice old buildings on the Green, shops and houses. One of the shops was a hairdresser, or barber as we called them then, and I had the pleasure of throwing a stink bomb in there one day to clear them all out quick! There was also a pub yard where the farmers used to bring their mares to be sired by visiting stallions, for breeding, and the local travellers used to bring their stallions once a week in the spring time. As children, we liked to see all these horses coming up.

Building Firm of Regional Importance

Not far from the Village Green was the local builder whose houses are distinctive all over Haddenham. His name was Harry Feast, who employed three or four bricklayers and three or four carpenters. In 1927 he built for my father an eight-roomed house with a bathroom, at a cost of £843! It was one of last houses where all the doors and all the windows

were made in the village. They also plastered it with lime plaster and horse or cow hair mixed with it. Next to the old Baptist chapel, (now the surgery) which was used as a school room and a general meeting place, was an interesting place for us children because it was a disused sand pit planted round with elms, making the local rookery. Each year as the young ones began to fly they used to have a shoot. We used to stand and watch that and fetch the birds up in the hope of getting a shilling or so.

A house mentioned in the Victoria County History

Porch House is worth mentioning in Hill Row because it is the oldest building having been built in the Dutch style around 1657 or thereabouts at the time of the drainage of the Fens. It was built of old Haddenham bricks, which are burnt from the top surface of the clay, and, when burnt, there is so much sand in them that they appear red.

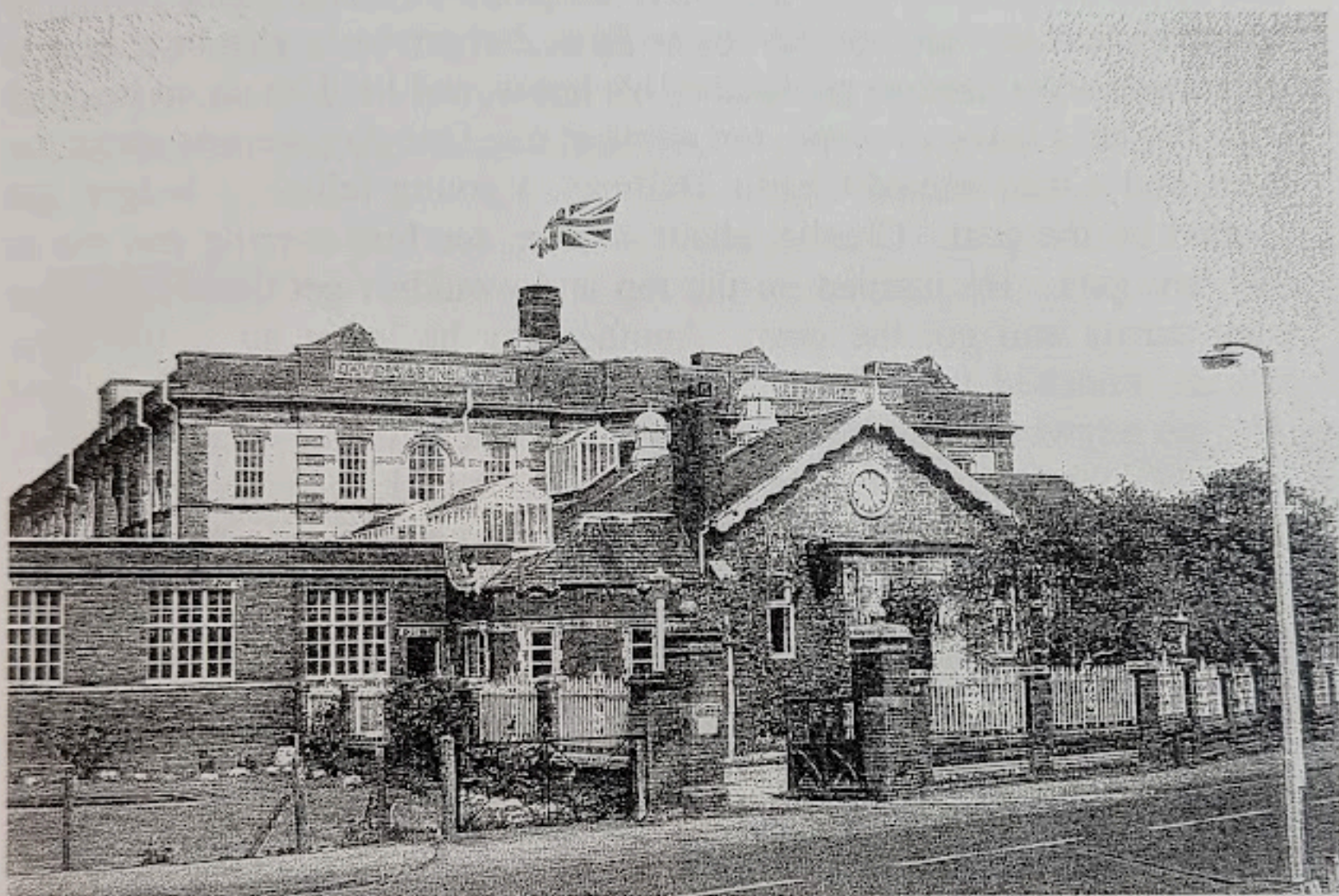
At the lowest part of the fen you get the drain and it leads to what we call Haddenham Engine. (Haddenham Level Drainage board was the first in the country to be formed by government approval in 1727.) In the 1800's this engine was a steam one from the Midlands, driven by a man from the Midlands. It's since been changed to diesel because we don't know which quantity of electricity is needed to pump the water out. In my day we had only one bridge over the Old West and that's called the High Bridge built about 1900. The road was never connected to it. The Earith way was altered by the drainage of the Fens, and we knew that as a suspension bridge (over The Bedfords), a very narrow bridge, and you could only go over one vehicle at a time. I passed there one day with a load of fruit, got on top of the bridge and met a man with a pony and cart. I sat looking at him, wondering if he was going to back down, as I daren't go back. Luckily he did!" (The narrow Earith Bridge has been replaced with a modern one and traffic islands.) Chewells farm at the top of Station Road was owned by a man called Coatman. During the war he was a salesman for hay and straw, but one day he took the wrong case and when he went to take out samples of straw to show a buyer, he found he'd got his son's football kit!

"The 'hoss-doctor' lived up Station Road (Merrick House) and practised the early type of veterinary work. He had a paddock for his pony and trap, which was his means of getting about. He had a very large umbrella to cover it, called a gig umbrella and us lads wasted no time to be asked to go for a ride with him."

Note:

Public wells were situated at the top of Lodge Way (pump still there in early 1950's); opposite the east gates of the Parish Church; at the top of West End (a small plot of land opposite Stone Croft Terrace is still Parish

property); near the Cross Keys Public House in Hill Row, just beyond
Porch House; and most of the larger domestic dwellings had their own
pump supply.



Fruit grown on Chivers' Farm at Aldreth (and elsewhere) was processed into jams and jellies at the Histon Factory; many local people worked both on the farms and in the factory (see both Bester's and Steele's accounts)

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

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 Hephher 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.

Charles Bester was very popular as the first County Organiser of the Young Farmers Clubs for the Isle of Ely.

Chapel and Burial Ground

Mr Harry Feast, born in 1864, had a remarkably retentive memory and told me many note-worthy facts. He had helped build the Methodist Chapel and said that the stone inscribed "Wesleyan", originally on the front of the first chapel in 1843, could not nicely be placed in front of an 1891 building and yet was too nice a relic to be discarded. So Mr Feast built it into the back wall of the chapel where it still stands today. Another small brick inscribed "1843" is built into the north wall of the chapel above and to the right of the side door.

The chestnut tree in the yard at the back of the chapel was planted by Mr Sidney Feast when part of the premises was let to his father, Harry, for a garden. Sadly the tree, with a council preservation order on it was destroyed after a serious fire in the adjacent property. Behind the chapel and the Rose and Crown garden (now Haddenham Gallery) was a long narrow pit that Mr Harry Feast said was the Manor fishpond. It served as a watering place for the pasture owned by the Manor. It was filled in about 1875 with soil taken from the churchyard when the parish church was restored. The continual burying of bodies in the confined space of the churchyard had caused the ground level around the church to rise so much that this high level was the chief cause of the dampness that caused weakness in the walls of the church. At the restoration the architects and surveyors decreed that the level of yard must be lowered by several feet. The enormous amount of soil was deposited in the now redundant Manor fishpond. Mr Feast remembered that he and his young friends often found human bones which had been overlooked by the carters. All the bones discovered were of course re-buried and memorials replaced. It is interesting to note that reference to the fish pond was made in the wills of William de Lyon and Faulksney, both of whom left sixty pickerels from the pond to beneficiaries. What a bequest!

A Feature of the High Street

The walnut tree which is now a feature in the small area of grass on the corner of High Street and Camping Close was planted by Jack Cockle in his father's garden. This young man was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in W.W.II. He related how, when employed by Mr E.J. Burton in Hill Row Fen, he found the young walnut tree in a potato field with the nutshell attached, brought it home and planted it beside the garden path. When the site was cleared to build Camping Close, the District Council

was persuaded to preserve the tree, and the Friends of Haddenham were given permission to place a seat round its base, which has proved a very acceptable feature for parents waiting to collect their children from the local primary school.

Down Mill End - or Aldreth Road Nowadays.

Down Aldreth Road is Quakers Close, the site of a 17th Century Quaker burial ground. Opposite is the windmill erected in 1803. On the right of the site of a house called HEREWAKE was another brick towered windmill. Photographs have survived of an interesting picture showing the two windmills complete with sails on the Aldreth Skyline - most outstanding. Nearby is the last of the houses to be built of the soft red brick which were made from clay excavated and baked in a temporary kiln on the site. It was built by the Burkitt family around 1860.

On this property, the "Covent Garden" at the top of Aldreth Hill, also stood an interesting corn mill erected by the Burkitts in 1890. The maker and inventor of the mill was Mr Gothard Kidd who had a workshop put in the yard of the Hare and Hounds in the High Street. Mr Kidd had erected over twenty similar mills in different parts of the country. The Burkitt brothers made a steam engine to provide driving power if the weather was quiet and calm, so it had an advantage over the two large wind-driven mills nearby. This mill was constructed on iron girders, for, in the "Wisbech Standard", we read the sad story of its destruction in a severe gale in September, 1897. The mill is described as "the high iron Eiffel Tower Mill of Mr Burkitt", so we can assume its shape and design. Mr Wilfred Markwell, a grandson of Mr Arthur Burkitt, remembers playing around the ruin of the mill when a child in the early years of the twentieth century."



"In 1974 the "new" county of Cambridgeshire was made up of four areas, the Isle of Ely, Huntingdonshire, the Soke of Peterborough and the old county of Cambs; one visitor to the Farmland Museum, then in Haddenham, commented "Ain't that remarkable that four counties should meet in this garden".....no comment!!!!"



Printed by Neaves & Neat of Ely
Photo's Scanned by Mepal Access Point

Cover Design by Denise Meale