

Reflections of a Country Woman:  
Mabel Demaine

Life in a Cambridgeshire Fen Village  
over 60 years ago

50 High Street  
Haddenham  
January 1989

During the seventies Mabel Demaine (née Freeman) 1908-80 wrote down her recollections of a village childhood here in Haddenham. She also did interviews on tape for the Farmland Museum, Oral History Collection. So much interest has been taken in the latter that I decided to publish Aunt Mabel's "writings", in booklet form and all proceeds from their sale will be given to Haddenham Methodist Church (which played so great a part in her life) and the Farmland Museum (about which she was so enthusiastic).

Lorna Delanoy (née Freeman).

Ely Weekly  
3 mths later

## Aunt Mabel will still be heard

THE childhood memories of a Fenland woman are helping her home village, long after her death.

For the recollections of life in Haddenham, near Ely, carefully compiled in the 1970's by Mabel Demaine have been published, with the proceeds going to help the village Methodist Church.

Before her death in 1980 at the age of 72, she wrote down her memories and did a series of interviews on tape for the Haddenham Farmland Museum.

The tapes aroused so much interest among visi-

tors that her niece, Mrs Lorna Delanoy, whose family started the museum, decided to publish "Aunt Mabel's Writings" in booklet form.

Mrs Delanoy, of High Street, Haddenham, said she had decided that proceeds from the sale should be given to the church which played a great part in her life, and to the museum, about which she was so enthusiastic.

"The local methodist church has had roofing repairs costing £4,000 and so everyone is trying to raise funds," she explained. The book, entitled *Reflections of a Country Woman*, costs £1.20.

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175 Standard Feb 89

# MEMORIE ROOFING



RUTH will be nosing help the appeal.

REFLECTIONS of a Country Woman, a new booklet chronicling the 20th Century life of Haddenham and its long-time resident Mabel Demaine, will be sold to raise money for the village methodist church.

In the last years of her life — while a patient in Papworth Hospital — Mrs Demaine wrote down all her reminiscences of her childhood in the village and was interviewed on tape for the museum's oral history collection.

So much interest was generated by the latter that her niece Lorna Delanoy, who with husband Michael runs the museum, decided to publish the writings and give all the proceeds to the two bodies — appropriately enough as the church played a great part in her life, being married to Ely Circuit Minister, the Rev George Demaine.

## CUSTOMS

Mrs Demaine was a mine of local information and wrote the Haddenham column for this newspaper for many years and the new booklet contains some fascinating stories about village life and customs, memories of Christmases and the war years, and studies of relatives, friends and such village characters as Granny Grounds and Eggy the milkman.

The booklet, available by post from John Freeman, 52 High Street, for £1.20, or from Haddenham Pharmacy, is already selling fast and Mrs Delanoy is confident of selling out the first print of 200 copies.

Every penny is important — the church is trying to raise over £4,000 for its roof fund.

'Live'  
Coubs Radio  
CN - FM  
Both in April

## lives in Fenland village

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## Funds

Mrs Delanoy, of High Street, Haddenham, said proceeds from the sale would go to the church and to the museum.

"The local Methodist Church has had roofing repairs costing £4,000 and so everyone is trying to raise funds," she said.

The book, "Reflections of a Country Woman", costs £1.20.

# 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 by 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 and other good

me  
from  
here!

causes. I remember one year the young people had a Barrel Organ and dressed themselves in the most comical clothes, wearing masks and false noses and wigs and paraded the streets collecting money for charity and enjoying themselves very much and causing much amusement. On the Village Green during Feast Week, visiting showmen were allowed to erect their swings, roundabouts, coconut shies, weight testing machines and winkle and rock stalls.

There was in our village a very flourishing and alive Tennis Club, but the members were always from the 'so called' upper class and it was almost a sign of high social status to belong to that club. However, as time went on the ordinary village youth took an interest in tennis and so we got together and how we worked and planned, holding whist drives and dances to raise funds. One lad's father offered the use of his field and we worked to prepare those two courts, the land sloped, it was rolled out and enclosed with high wire netting and the necessary equipment bought. Every fine evening, excepting Sundays, we met there for some of the pleasantest times of our lives. We played in matches and we did matchmaking, for several couples who met there eventually married. Children in those far off days were never bored, saying 'what can we do?'. There were fields with high hedges to play in, even the poorest child owned a hoop, a skipping rope, tops to spin, a pair of stilts or marbles, these were all popular playthings and imagination could invent all other sorts of pleasant pastimes. Picnics in the summer and slides and skating on the ponds in the winter. I believe the summers were always hotter and the winters colder than they are today. No, life in a Cambridge village in those far off days was never dull for a child, so often one could get a ride on a farm cart and at haymaking and harvest time it was always fun to help with the work. Living near to nature, seeing pigs born or a cow calving made matters of sex just normal happenings and created no problems like those today among the young. It may be that distance leads to enchantment, but it seems to me that those far off days were happy and contented ones, dullness and boredom did not exist and all the modern inventions, amenities, welfare state and improved education does not always create happiness.

## 50 Years Ago

To remember half a century ago! I must be getting quite an old lady as this fact was confirmed yesterday when my young great nephew James came to do my errands. He did shout and when I told him about it he said "I talk loud to all old people to make them hear". Yes, it is a shattering thought!

In 1920 I was twelve years old a scholar at the village girls school - the old school in the High Street. I passed the scholarship exam, but that year there was no place available at Ely High School for me and so I remained at the local school. I was Head Girl. I filled inkwells, did errands for Miss Williams the Headmistress, by then I had really finished my school learning. I was a skinny, delicate child. I had a flat chest

(some bone deformity) and every day I had to lie on the kitchen table for half an hour, flat on my back. I also wore webbing braces to help to correct the deformity. One day I went to Addenbrooke's Hospital to have my tonsils removed; there were few cars about in those days, but a local farmer friend of my father's owned an old black Ford car and he agreed to take my mother and I to Cambridge for the hospital appointment. I can still vividly remember the discomfort and pain and the blood after that operation. I was laid on a hard form to sleep it off before being bundled into the car and taken home to bed. Nowadays patients are put to bed straight away in the hospital ward and cared for there for a few days. My home in Haddenham village was in a rambling old house which had previously been a Quakers meeting house, then converted to a public house and when my father bought it it became a private \* dwelling house. I knew everyone in the village which was like one big family. We cared for each other, we knew everyone's business. We all attended either chapel or church and all three\* were well attended and filled on Sundays in those days. No washing on the lines or 'gallivanting about'. We wore our best clothes and spent a quiet, peaceful day on a Sunday. It was indeed a day of rest and yet in the 1920's there was creeping into our lives a change - wireless with the old cats' whiskers sets. Modern invention, the Tractor, was taking the place of the horse on our farms. Piped water was brought to our village and then an even more wonderful thing - electricity. After I had my tonsils removed I went to the Childrens Convalescent Home at Hunstanton to re-cuperate and it was there I suffered a very humiliating experience. For the train journey my mother had packed me a large packet of sandwiches and a large bottle of Masons - a kind of home made non-intoxicating beer. I ate the sandwiches but did not drink the Masons as this was in a bag hung with my coat etc., in the lobby of the Convalescent Home. Well, what with the shaking up of the journey it began to ferment so much that after a few days it burst with a great bang and the frothy, swelling drink went all over the floor, and oh dear, how humiliated I felt when I was traced as the owner! After this I never had another holiday in the 1920's. The Methodist Sunday School where I attended provided me with my treats - a day at the seaside in the summer and a tea party in the winter. Sometimes I went to Ely Market - my father had a horse and high cart and later I had a bicycle for this journey. There was a weekly bus service the first bus to run was a lorry with wooden forms to sit on. The train service ceased to run and then a more frequent and improved bus service began. Life in the village was never dull, children invented all sorts of exciting games, we raced each other on stilts or on treacle tins held by strings. The fields and hedges were full of interest for us country children. Spinning tops, marbles, balls or a skipping rope were among our play things: tennis, cricket and football clubs flourished. The local men found it pleasant to spend an hour or so in the evenings in the public houses, no women. Now there are only two public houses in the village but in those days there were at least 20.

Until the water was laid on we had no bathrooms, a tin bath in front of the fire was a nice way to have a good wash. I can remember big families with 8-10 children living in four roomed cottages, which were always clean and tidy. Their mums were always

at home, always there when they came home from school, always there to hear their conversations, the Home life was sound and stable. Since those days we have had wonderful inventions - labour saving devices, the motor car, T.V., holidays abroad, grant for this and grants for that, the welfare state, Social Security benefits. But I doubt if we have achieved more happiness than was found in the 1920's in spite of the hard life and lack of money.

Nationally there came a period of depression following the First World War: discontent and strikes began.

*\*destroyed by fire in 1923 and present house build by local firm, Feasts*

*\*Anglican, Baptist & Methodist*

## Our Village

How did it all begin - our village - long before the days of Town and Country planning. Like many other villages it was like Topsy - it just grew! I often stand at the very centre of the village where the four cross roads meet. The Village Green is there, this Green has been the cause of much controversy in the past, gradually the roads have encroached on that precious bit of grass and through the years irate ratepayers have protested to the Parish Council on this matter. Now it is neatly kerbed and it looks like remaining in its present size - the War Memorial is there and recently two seats have been provided and it is good to see the elderly worthies sitting there discussing local and national affairs, all the exciting and interesting bits of gossip and news is talked over on those seats. In time there will be trees growing, if only the shameful vandals will allow their growth. In our village now we have many new houses and bungalows and new estates springing up where once there were fruit orchards and fields. Fortunately a few very old and interesting buildings are being preserved, including the Porch House in Hillrow built in 1657.

**Changes** Old cottages are being restored or pulled down. Oil lamps and coal fires are being replaced by electricity. We have water from a tap, gone are the pumps and wells from our backyard and village streets. I often wonder what happened to those wells. We had a pump just outside our back door, even in the hottest and driest summer never failing to release for us lovely, sparkling, clear spring water. In my young days I spent hours lifting that pump handle up and down each day to supply our farm animals with water and when the threshing engine paid us a visit I had longer spells at the pump. Now where are these old pumps? In the cause of progress, gone. But underneath those pumps were wells, carefully and skilfully made brick wells. Were they filled in or just covered over? Are they still there, just hidden away, not only in our backyards and gardens but in our village streets? I can still remember the public pumps, one opposite the Parish Church, another further down in Station Road and another in Hillrow and one I knew best of all that never did go dry in Froize End. In future days I expect they

will occasionally come to light. Perhaps they still hold clear, spring water, like the one that workmen found when demolishing some property in High Street recently, holding 6ft of water: careless and inquisitive children had to be warned away until it was filled in and made safe. When the council brought service water to our village, for a while, we kept our pump. But as time went on it was removed, but the spring underneath must still be there and there must be pipes too, winding about underground. And, also, what about the old ponds. During a particularly wet spell in 1974 I heard one of our villagers talking in the Post Office, recalling memories of the old ponds of the village which are now filled in. This set me thinking, the rain was pouring down non-stop, puddles everywhere, sodden and waterlogged land all around, the road to Earith cut off by the floods - all this in spite of modern drainage systems. Drainage - now I am off in my thoughts of years ago when we had a spell of unpleasant feeling among the local Fen farmers, who complained bitterly about their high drainage rates, while the "highland" farmers were exempt and got off scot free - their land certainly drained down to the Fens into the dykes, it seemed so unfair and the Fen men maintained it was unjust and their usual placid natures were up in arms. Protest meetings were held and they refused to pay and several distress sales were held to secure payment.

(See  
Bester  
Story)

### Old Customs

When I was a child there were three old customs kept up in the village, they were the means of raising small sums of money, they were "Goodening", "Ploughboying" and "Mayladying." Widows went around on "Goodening" day. I do not know how it originated, but on the 21st of December, the shortest day of the year, widows in ones and twos went around knocking on doors where they were given small sums of money or a packet of tea or sugar. Only widows were allowed to take part in this and one year, old Jinny Croxen joined the collectors. We all knew she wasn't a widow, it was true her husband was often ill and unable to work, when she came to our house, her right to join the widows was challenged and she promptly replied "I'm wors'en a widow woman"! Widows were really poor in those days and had a hard life, there were no pensions and often their poverty was acute. Sometimes they got some small "Parish relief", a mere pittance, and it meant pleading poverty and almost begging and these women had their pride. I can remember one woman who was left a widow with an invalid daughter to keep. She went out washing and became bent almost double through bending over the wash tub, there was the hard scrubbing to be done and then the ironing, a full hard day, several times a week - no washing machine or electric irons in those days. We used to see her going home, her stooping figure looking so tired and weary after these wash days. Goodening Day, coming just before Christmas provided them with a little extra for the festive season. Then in January there was "Plough Monday" which was called Ploughboy's day. I think this was originally meant for ploughboys only and they carried a decorated plough around when they did their

collecting. Boys always wore heavy hobnailed boots with heel and toe plates and studded with hobnails. What a noise they made, you could hear them coming a long way off and they ran around from door to door, sometimes they came after dark and would carry a "Rabbi" lantern tied to a long pole, it was made by making a big hollow in a Rabbi worsel and cutting a window in the side where the light from the lighted candle shone through. On May 1st it was the girls' turn to go around Mayladying\*, all carrying dolls, there was great competition with the dolls, they all had a pretty and as well dressed doll as possible. The girls knocked on the doors and greeted everyone with "Please can you spare a copper for a Maylady?" My mother would not let me go Mayladying. She said it was only a form of begging and how I envied the other girls who were able to take part in this activity, especially when they told me of their financial results. This collecting was supposed to end at midday and so the little girls often stayed away from school in the morning going from door to door. There was another old custom, it was Tolling the Church Bell for any death in the village. The bell tolled three times for a man, twice for a woman and once for a child, with short intervals in between. This custom had to end at the outbreak of World War I because the order went out that Church bells were to be used as a warning of enemy invasion only.

\* Years ago we also had a Town Crier, and he went around the village with his bell and announced all important functions, sales and public meetings and lost property. Whenever we heard his bell - usually in the evenings, we rushed to the door to hear the Crier slowly shout his news. This custom ended at the outbreak of World War II - until then for many years it was carried out by George Chapman\*, he was a little man with a big voice, and he still lives in the village with his wife who are lovable country people - and his bell is one of his most treasured possessions.

\* *a few girls went Mayladying in late forties*

\* *George died in early eighties*

## Our Shops

Nowadays we have walk around shops in the village with trollies and wire baskets to collect our goods from the well laden shelves before lining up to pay at the cash desk. Everything nowadays is packed in tins or packets or plastic bags. How different in my young days when sugar - brown and white, was weighed up in thick blue paper sugar bags, lard and butter and cheese cut and wrapped to our order, vinegar was measured into your own bottle, as was paraffin into your can. Spices, rice, cornflour, dried fruit, all the everyday groceries were measured out and weighed in the shop, salt was never in a packet, just a lump of salt. The grocer made most of his paper bags, he was quite expert at twirling a square of paper into a cone shape and with a twist and a push the end was made secure before holding your goods. Slabs of toffee were broken up with a little steel mallet: elastic, lace and ribbon were measured to your required length. The

village grocers delivered the goods, his grocer boy coming round to your door with a long pencil tucked behind his ear - his long white apron flapping between his legs and a big notebook in his pocket to take your order. I can remember Sid Carter doing the round for Doyleys, he would run over a long list, sugar, tea, lard, salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper on and on he would go, chewing his pencil and dotting down the order, later in the week the goods would be delivered. Tebbutts at the Top Shop, had a pony and cart to deliver their goods and the bakers also had a pony and cart. Tebbutts shop is now an Internation Supermarket.\* How different: and Doyleys\* is a first class Drapery Shop well stocked with the latest fashions in ladies, children and mens wear, as well as wools, materials, wall paper, boots and shoes and fancy goods. The butchers now have to cater for the owners of deep freezers and also sell poultry and all kinds of cooked meat and meat pies. The bakers and confectioners shop is filled with crusty loaves and fancy bread and mouth watering iced and cream cakes. The present Hardware Shop is a mine of goods: it is unbelievably full of such a selection of china, glass, plastic, stainless steel goods, pots and pans ironmongery, paint and fancy goods household gadgets of all kinds. Haddenham is an extremely good shopping centre, people from the surrounding villages are often found among the local shoppers. We are fortunate in having a good chemist, who not only dispenses our doctors prescriptions but sells all kinds of patent medicines, toiletry requirements etc. Now we have a Take-away\* Chinese food shop. The Post Office and newsagents not only supply stationery, but also books, fancy goods, sweets and smokers needs.

But I have a nostalgic feeling for two shops, which in my young days gave me so much pleasure - the Basket makers and the Blacksmiths - perhaps shop isn't the right word. Although Johnny Burton at the Basket makers did make our baskets and wicker wear. How I loved to run home from school and on the way stand on that little ledge and lean over the 'half door' at Johnny Burtons\* shop. The smell of damp willows is something I shall never forget and how quickly and deftly he could weave those baskets, he was such good company too and always had an interesting tale to tell. The blacksmiths\* shop was also an interesting place to watch a horse being shod. I stood well back out of the way of flying sparks from the anvil and from the horses' feet and there was another smell I shall never forget, the sizzling burning of the horses' hoof and the smell of burnt hair made when Walter Miller fixed that horse shoe. There was also a saddlers shop and the cobblers, both kept busy with plenty of customers.

*\*now the Spar Shop*

*\*now closed*

*\*now a Fish & Chip shop*

*\*3 properties up from the Museum*

*\*opposite Stone Cross Farm*

## Spring Cleaning

I can remember in our farmhouse kitchen we had a stone sink and a large copper which was heated by a stick fire for wash days and baths. There was a 'low hearth' where the pots and pans and kettles boiled and how black and sooty they got from the open fire. We had a large Dutch oven, we lit a fire under this twice a week - on Sundays the only day in the week when my father was in for a midday dinner - when we always had a roast joint and Yorkshire pudding with plenty of vegetables, then rice pudding. This meal on a Sunday never varied and it was the only day when we had the sweet course last - other days we always began with the pudding, usually a suet crust, jam roll, apple pudding or spotted dick. One day during the week my mother had the oven going for baking day, she made lovely bread and cakes, tarts and scones and ginger biscuits. She always had a big tin of ginger biscuits. (Mabel herself captured

egged  
rugs  
There was a strip of coco matting on the tiled floor and a pegged rug at the fireside. We had most of our meals in the kitchen and all the work of washing, washing up and cooking was done there. What a change there is in that kitchen today - gone is the low hearth, stone sink and dutch oven and old fashioned copper and in their place a modern sink unit, electric cooker, washer, fridge, mixer, kettles, all electric, gone is the coco matting and rag rug, all over that farmhouse there is change, what difference in spring cleaning there is today! I remember what a major operation it was to have the chimney swept, especially in that low hearth. Will Watts was our local chimney sweep, we had to book him up weeks ahead he covered a wide area and as he did the chimney sweeping only in the evenings, doing a full days job during the day, he got well booked up, especially in the spring time - he had a donkey and cart for his brushes, etc. I think he knew every chimney in the village, some twisted and crooked taking some understanding. He was a great talker and we learned not to keep in the room with him during operations because he would get the brushes half-way up and then begin a story, about other chimneys other jobs, and other people, and on and on he would talk with the job half done and so we found it best to leave him on his own. going outside to watch the brush come out of the top of the chimney pot. Watty, as we called him, was supposed to be a good sweep, but oh the soot we had to clear up after he had left. He has been dead many years, but I wonder what he would think of the electric sweepers and the sweep wearing a white coat of today. I am sure he would say the job was only half done under such conditions. Feather Beds for Farmers!

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

\* a fashion that has recently resumed

## Christmas Memories

Peeping through the curtains to see the village Bandsmen clustered around a lighted lamp tied to a pole and hearing, 'Hark the Herald' and 'O come, all ye faithful' played with great gusto - and joining with other young people as soon as darkness fell to tour the village to sing these same well loved Christmas hymns are two of my earliest recollections, deep snow and sparkling frost added to these pleasures. Why did we never feel the cold in those days? There were no luxuries in those bygone days, home made paper chains and holly decorated our rooms and a pile of logs filled our hearth, home made cakes and puddings and mincemeat filled the pantry shelves. A box of dates, a dish of nuts, oranges and apples and a bottle of ginger wine were included in our Christmas fare. Christmas Eve was always a busy time for my mother, stuffing the goose, preparing the vegetables, getting the children off to bed early - this was no trouble on Christmas Eve - the night when Father Christmas came. I can remember trying to keep awake, waiting to see him arrive, at the same time being somewhat fearful of some stranger filling that long stocking of my father's which hung at the foot of my bed. I can still recall the rustling sound that stocking made when I awoke next morning and pushed my feet down the bed towards its bulging sides - an orange in the toe, a few nuts and sweets, handkerchief - just a few simple things were all it contained and yet what a joy and thrill they gave me. For several years my younger brother and I had our Christmas day tea with some elderly relatives\* who lived two miles away. I wish I could make a ground rice cake like the one we always had for tea - no rich iced Christmas cake could compare with that rice cake, with its sugary, buttery, mouth-watering taste and how I would have liked a second slice!

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

I can well remember those walks over 50 years ago. It was always moonlight and frosty, and how the frost did sparkle - and the stars - I watched the stars, they were so bright and a shooting star gave me a shiver down my spine, it seemed such a fearful and frightening thing. I never see a shooting star now without being reminded of those walks home on Christmas nights. *No central heating*

Looking back on those bygone Christmases, why did I enjoy a walk in the frost and snow then and now I hate to even step out of the door or leave the fireside for a short while. Does the cold get colder as we get older or do our likes and dislikes change? We roasted chestnuts and almost roasted ourselves by our open fires and then hugging a hot brick wrapped in flannel we went to bed contented with simple pleasures finding time to think of the real message of Christmas, of peace on earth, goodwill to all men. For the Methodist Overseas Missions during the holiday period I went around collecting from various people, mostly a 1d. or 2d. to get 6d. was a great help. I had an old Aunt in the next village of Wilburton who always gave me 2d. for the Missions - but as I was scared of the Wilburton children I put off this collection until finally I plucked up courage - got the 2d. and then ran until I was well on the way home.

\*

During the Christmas holiday we usually had the Sunday School Treat, a real highlight and Red Letter day!

I can remember one year after the usual tea of bread and butter and plain and fruit cake, we had a magic lantern show given by an old gentleman with a smoky oil lantern and glass slides which he kept showing upside down and I can remember how the rows of children cheered when the old man did manage to get a picture the right way up the first time!

*\*Edward Ivatt, Hill Row, who always gave 1/10 farm income to Haddenham Methodist Church each year*

### Salt Pork

\* There were two short periods during the year which I disliked. they were when we had the pig killed. Almost everyone fattened up a pig for home consumption. We had two very large porkers, one in the autumn and the other in the spring.

My mother was an expert at making the most of every scrap of those pigs. We used to say the only part she didn't use was the squeal. How I hated the smell of melting fat and the sight of great hunks of raw meat. It meant two or three days of really hard work to salt the pork, cure the hams and bacon, make the lard and sausages\* and the pork cheeses and clean the chitterlings. And oh the endless washing up of greasy pots and pans. We all had to help. I hated it all, but my mother never let me off, she believed that life wasn't for always doing the easy and pleasant things. She was always generous to our neighbours and friends at these times and a pork cheese and a few sausages or a piece of pork were handed around. We all enjoyed the end project, those slices of pink and white succulent ham, the sausages and pork cheeses and the chitterlings and sizzling bacon. No wonder we always had plenty of visitors to share in this rich food. I think the hams were the choicest of all, there is no comparison to the so called ham we get served up today. There were many women who were shown how to cure hams and bacon by my mother, she was always willing to instruct and help in this task. How wonderful it would have been if we had had a deep freeze in those days.

*\*the sausage-making machine is now in the Farmland Museum Bygones Display.*

## School Nits

All the girls in the village school in my young days wore long hair tied with bows of black ribbon. We were a clean family and if ever a flea found its way into our house there was no peace until it was found and so whenever I brought home the news from school that there were some dirty heads about or if ever I was seen scratching my head, my mother was on the warpath, armed with a little tooth comb and with a newspaper spread on the table the battle began. I rather enjoyed being the centre of attention - the only girl in the family - with all the rest gathered around and I felt disappointed if there was no result and the head scratching a false alarm, a few nits were some compensation for all this activity. However, if the exercise did result in some casualties we kept it a dreadful secret, not daring to make it known. A dirty head was a terrible disgrace and no self respecting family would admit such a shameful state of affairs. When I see the scruffy long hair on some heads today I cannot but wonder if they hold a guilty secret, do they have to use a little tooth comb hunting down the little creatures. On the whole my school days were happy and uneventful.

## War Comes to Haddenham

Village Voice  
2002

During World War Two 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 the men and under the training of two old soldiers, William Rushbrooke and Albert Gutkaes, they were put through their paces, what a difficult task for these two elderly, but active officers. My brother George reached the position of Corporal and he often recounted some amusing stories, some of these new recruits hardly knew their left leg from their right. One dark winter's night the company had a special exercise which involved blacking their faces and 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 this spectacle promptly passed out in a dead faint. An outstanding member of the Home Guard was the village fishmonger, Frank Bristow, a big, burley man with a loud voice, who could often be heard from a long distance at his post outside the local Post Office challenging those who came anywhere near by, "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 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 coachloads to arrive on a Sunday afternoon, they were a number of expectant mothers with young children,

with their gas masks 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. 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 made friends among the village children.

Another worldly scheme in operation during the war was run by a willing band of volunteers, it was the "Pie Scheme". with the restrictions of 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 Adam's clubroom to make and bake these turnovers and we really enjoyed this very worthwhile job.

The Air Raid Wardens looked far smarter in navy blue suits and peaked 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 policeman made sure that even key-hole lights were not visible. At the outbreak of war, the local policeman, Sergeant Lees, who was on the Reserve List was called up. Sgt. Lees was a likeable, pleasant man, who married a teacher from the village school and was happily settled in the Police House, only a 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 the war, he was P.C. Alfred Hudson.

Early on a very enthusiastic branch of the Red Cross was formed, run by Dr. and Mrs. Fairweather, who organized 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 the big business of organizing homes for 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 organizing 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 choc a block full of blankets, gas masks, first aid equipment, stretchers, clothing and food for the evacuees.

Apart from the weekly collections made from door to door for the Red Cross funds, we had several public auctions - any saleable 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 specially remember was held on a lovely summer's day in the Doctor's paddock at The Lodge, and George Green was the Auctioneer, 'Greeny'\* 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 Greeny 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 for sale again 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 £1 and kept the pram. One of these auction sales raised £1000 and although they entailed a great deal of voluntary hard work they were very enjoyable.

With the great help of the local schoolmaster Mr. Bert Miles and his assistant teacher Mrs. Collen. Mrs. Fairweather also organized War savings collections and thousands of pounds were raised, and many people were persuaded to turn out their hoards of money for the War Effort.

Collections were made weekly throughout the village, which was split up into districts, again by voluntary collectors, it was amazing. Special weeks were set apart, like War Weapons Week, when extra efforts were made to meet tremendously high targets.

Several Army units were stationed in the village during the War and many of the men were billeted with local families. A Yorkshire Regiment, the R.A.M.C. and an American searchlight party, all stayed quite a while. We ran a canteen for the men and provided snacks and a few home comforts for them, they made friends and received real Fenland hospitality. As time went on there were several weddings of local girls and these men and some still live in the village, and others went to America to settle.

Searchlights were used a great deal during the war, moving across the sky at night to search for the enemy planes. I remember when they were first used, my father went down to the Fen early one morning to find a number of frightened and excited gypsies on the Cut Bridge, who could not understand what was happening to the "Heavens". They knew all about the Moon and stars, but these frightening glaring lights flashing about the sky caused them much alarm and kept them awake all night. It took my father some time to explain to them and calm their fears.

Farmers had land army girls and prisoners of War to help on the farms and grass fields were ploughed up and every bit of land was used to grow more food. We had Ration Books for food -there were shortages of sugar, fats and tinned goods from abroad were in short supply - chocolates and sweets, ice cream and lollies were just not obtainable,- children's teeth must have improved.

Iron railings from the front of the local churches and houses were taken up to use in ammunition works for the War Effort. Some of these railings had been hand-made by local blacksmiths and it seemed a shame for them to be removed.

\* *Greeny worked for Mabel's father at Stone X Farm before World War 1. A tape of his memories is held at the museum.*

# Life at Stone Cross Farm

## Mostly Arthur

On the whole I had a very happy childhood. I think this was largely due to the fact that I had a happy home life. My parents never made any show of their deep affection for each other, but I remember whenever my father came into the house, his first words - if he could not see her - were - where's your mother?

She was behind him in all that he did, helping all she could, meals always ready, money matters always attended to - she was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, although my father always did the buying and selling and planning of the farm. My eldest brother \*- Arthur - did his share early in life and taking a pride in the work, being especially good with animals I often thought what a fine veterinary surgeon he would have made. He had a way with animals, it was largely due to his loving care and attention that a lovely young horse recovered from a badly injured foot, he watched by that horse with devotion - bathing and dressing a nasty wound, not a very pleasant or easy task. This brother always seemed grown up to me - he had two special friends, Fred Holmes and Bob Sulman, all of them attended the Wesleyan Chapel. When they were in their teens it became the fashion to have a walking stick, and I can remember my brother and Fred bought one each, they cost 6d. and were proudly used. I can see them in my imagination now - walking up the village street stepping out briskly and swinging these sticks they took them everywhere on their walks. I expect they set the fashion among the youth of the village. My brother often spent his evenings cleaning and polishing horse brasses, to see them shine and sparkling was his pride and joy. Some times he went tooting, he owned a 'Tooting' net, which he shared with the other lads, going around the hedges armed with sticks as soon as darkness fell. The plan was for one to hold the net in such a way as to catch as many sparrows and sometimes a blackbird as possible. I expect we would now call this a cruel sport, but in those far off days it was a pleasant pastime - and anyway nowadays there are no hedges and the young folk find more exciting and interesting things to do. A highlight of the year for my brother and his friends was a day in London, the first time they went on this trip they didn't think much to the London Transport. In our village in those days the local bus would stop anywhere to pick up a passenger who held up his hand. However, in London this method didn't work, no matter if all three of these country boys waved their hands aloft and shouted no bus would stop. Finally the London policeman helped them out with instructions about their travels. What changes since those days, now very young girls and boys travel abroad on their own with every confidence.

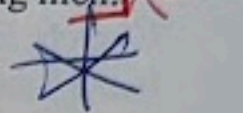
*\* one of his grandsons started the Farmland Museum Collection in 1969.*

One of the greatest trials of my childhood was my very young brother George\*, he was a small pale faced little boy with black eyes that were always on the lookout for mischief, and to this day he bears the scars of some of his escapades. He was forever tormenting me, calling me names was a favourite form of torture. In spite of all this I felt responsible for him, and was always dreading that something dreadful would happen to him and that he would come to an untimely end unless I had him constantly in sight and this annoyed him, he did not want his sister always hanging around. His playmates were far more friendly towards me, George Palmer, Wiff Mackwell and Fred Hitch treated me with far more respect. Having a small pale face and being able to look so innocent and angelic was a great advantage for my brother, one could never suspect him of taking live mice to school, he looked too timid for such a crime. He wasn't very fond of school, and quite often he could even deceive my mother by putting on that pathetic expression and holding his stomach and looking sick he got away with it and was able to get many mornings away from school. It became noticeable how quickly he recovered when the school bell ceased to ring and it turned 9 a.m. - his appetite returned and he took an interest in all around - in time this was his downfall and my mother became heartless to his aches and pains and he was ordered off to school in no uncertain manner. We all loved the days when the Threshing Tackle came to our yard, how we ran home from school on those days and all other children became friendly and trooped home with us, there was such fun to be had in our yard.

→ The puffing steam engine, with 'Pakey' at the wheel - my father giving orders - so many jobs to be done. Three men sent to the cornstack - three on the straw stack - another feeding the 'Drum', another minding the chaff, and one or two strong men carrying those big sacks of corn into the Barn for storage. One job my father gave us children - some thought it great fun, but I was a skinny child and not very strong and I didn't care very much for this job, it was chaff treading. We had a "chaff house" and it was our job to pack into it as much chaff as possible. Round and round we stamped, falling over and rolling about in the chaff, we got chaff in our hair, down our necks even in our mouths. Another job we were expected to do was to keep the tub of water which fed that steam engine, full. Up and down we worked the pump handle, it wasn't hard work, but it was monotonous. I remember my brother sat on the edge of that tub of water dangling his legs on its sides, he had been cautioned about the danger of falling backwards, but as usual he never heeded caution and back he fell with such a splash. He was soon pulled out spluttering and gasping and soaking wet. Children have queer likes and dislikes, what we liked best of all was to be armed with long sticks, spits they were called, to kill the rats and mice which were usually to be found at the bottom of any stack. We waved out sticks about, shouted and screamed, many a time we were late for school because we stayed too long in the dinner hour taking part in this enjoyable sport. When the Threshing was done during school holidays we had the extra pleasure in joining the men for "Dockey". We had a big kitchen and my mother always had the

"Dockey" ready in good time with plates of ham or fat pork and pickles, and hunks of bread and butter, finishing with a large slice of cake or jam tart, all washed down with cups of cocoa. Some of the men preferred to have their "Dockey" in the Barn, and I would take jugs of cocoa to them. The chief topic of conversation was, how the corn was 'turning out.' How many coombs per acre compared with Norman's, Rouane's, Hillrow Fen and other parts of the neighbourhood. Pakey was the last to come in for his 'Dockey' and the first to go back to work stoking up his engine and getting 'steam up' again. It was all hard and dirty work, but they were tough hard working men.

*\*George's son Robert and his family, now live at Stone X farm*



## Names

As I have said before my young brother liked to call me names, he gave everyone a nickname. There was the old relative he didn't like and he called he "gooseberry pudding", he said it was the sourest thing he could think of. I remember an old man, whose name was Charlie Murfitt of Stretham, he used to bring a stallion to our yard, whatever for we never knew, us children were always sent indoors when he came. My brother called the man "Charlie Huckle" in a sing song voice he would repeat, "Old Charlie Huckle, picked up a buckle on a muckle", repeating this over and over again. As time went on we began to believe his name really was Huckle.

I remember one night when he was in our yard, the sky became black with thundery looking clouds, my mother, thinking we were in for a bad storm, called across the yard, "There seems to be a storm coming, you should be getting home Mr. Huckle". When my dad came in, he said "Whatever made you call that man Huckle? His name is Charlie Murfitt!"

Many people in our village had nicknames, Buzzy Newman; Rocky Ladson; Cherry Green; Ticky Alsop; Piffy Watts; Revy Clements; Bloshy Alsop and one unfortunate man called "Satan". Visitors to the village were always amused by some of the real names like John Thomas Gotobed - who was our coalman and B.Easey and Willie Hitch. I think the strangest name of all was Fresh Salmon and strange as it may seem this was the man's real name and when he was born he may have been 'Fresh', but when I knew him it was a most unsuitable name. He was a simple, hard working man, earning a poor living from a smallholding and he had an unkempt appearance and ended his life by drowning in 6 inches of water in a dyke just outside his cottage. His death was quite a shock to everyone.

We had other amusing names like Haddock, Salmon, Fox, Peacock, Taylor, Porter, Baker, Plummer - who was also the Plumber, Brown, Green White and Grey.

## Victor

In our village we have always had so many interesting characters, making it such a fascinating place to live in and I have never wished to live anywhere else. I like people, and having a sense of humour has helped me to be content with a simple way of life. There was Victor Wright, he was born in Haddenham and although he went to the local school and had a very intelligent father\*, he was mentally deficient and only capable of a few manual jobs. He pumped the organ for some years at the Baptist Church. He would do errands and as he had an enormous appetite and was always hungry some people paid him with food. There is a story about him that one lady used to leave bits of food on the kitchen table in payment for her errands. One day Victor did her shopping and returned to find a bowl of starch on the table, thinking it was some kind of milk pudding left for him, promptly ate it all, only to be marched off to the Doctor's by a worried housewife who feared that Victor's stomach might suffer from its stiffening contents. Victor was always at his best on Feast Sunday, when the Band played - he loved that village Band - and no one could refuse Victor's appeal for money and his collecting box for the Hospital or some other good cause would always be full: his appeal for support was always irresistible. In the later years when he was cared for in Tower Hospital, Ely he would always return for Feast Sunday, proudly walking in front of the usual procession around the village. He always smoked a little clay pipe and a match and a little tobacco were always forthcoming. People were kind to Victor - he was so friendly and amusing and talkative, he knew everyone and was always calling on the Doctor, the Schoolmaster and many other people in the village. Village boys sometimes teased him, but as he was on such friendly terms with the policeman and all the important people he could always seek their protection. On two occasions Victor disappeared, he had saved his pocket money and gone to London. It was so surprising to everyone that Victor with his low mentality could cope with the journey and the traffic problems in the rush and bustle of the metropolis. The police were informed of his disappearance and he was soon found and brought home. He was well known to the police, not because of any criminal activity, but because of his peculiarities and tendency to wander. After his father and stepmother died Victor became neglected and dirty, he was admitted to Tower Hospital, Ely but he could not settle. He hated the restriction, the other patients were not interested in his endless chatter. He used to say "They" were mental and he could not have an intelligent conversation with them! He was always running away and returning to his native village where he could be sure of a meal and a friendly chat.

As time went on Victor's mental state became much worse and he was finally transferred to the Mental Hospital at Fulbourn where he stayed for a few years until he died. He was brought back to the village to be buried and it was noticeable that among those present at his funeral were several members of the Tower Hospital and Fulbourn staff, who had evidently had a soft spot for Victor. And so came the end of Victor's life, we cared for him as we do all who are afflicted through no fault of their own. In past

years our village was like one big happy family but now it is changing, with hundreds of new people moving into the hundreds of new bungalows and houses, they have no roots and it will take time for them to be a real part of the village.

*\* who wrote a booklet entitled 'My life at Hadden Hall'.*

### Granny Grounds

A little old lady living alone in the High Street gave me one of my first well paid jobs. We called her Granny Grounds. She had 1/2pt. of milk each day and 1/4lb. of butter a week from my mother and it was my job to deliver these on my way to school, but this was not all I did for the princely sum of 2d. a week. Any other errands or jobs in the house were included. I remember once having to help paper the kitchen and what a mess it looked - odd bits of paper stuck on in all directions. Granny Grounds was not my Granny, as far as I knew she never had any children. She rode a tricycle and anyone that thinks riding a tricycle is easy is making a big mistake, to balance and steer is quite a skill.

Every Friday evening Granny Grounds rode her trike to our house to pay my mother, leaving her steed outside.

Now I had two friends Mitt Peters and Lil Norman, they were both older than I, but I somehow felt honoured by having older girls for my friends. We met after tea for games and talks and we envied Granny her trike, it would have been wonderful if we could own such a marvellous means of transport. We watched her sailing on the street and when she alighted it, was safely indoors and settled for her weekly chat with my mother, we took our chance. In turn we had the thrill of a ride. Lil and Mitt always went first, they were older and so it was their privilege, they had their rides and then I climbed the seat and with a good push from my friends I went off down the slope to little 'stile'. I had been taught "be sure your sins will find you out" and this proved true one night. There was I perched on Granny's trike when she appeared and those two who professed to be my friends disappeared leaving me to face the music.

### Eggy

For many years with unfailing regularity the correct amount of milk was left on our doorsteps by Eggy. He was our village milkman, for 40 years. He not only delivered the milk, he brought us the news, he knew everyone. So often it was difficult to sort out fact from fiction for Eggy was forever leg pulling, telling the most fantastic yarns in such a serious and convincing manner and quite often false rumours were spread around the village before we realized that Eggy had been at it again - just leading us on with his imagination. There was another side of Eggy, he could always be relied upon to take a message or deliver a parcel to anyone on his rounds, he was entirely

reliable in this and could be depended on in these matters. He was always bright and cheerful whatever the weather, rain, hail or snow - he was always his cheerful self. His real name was Eric Burkett, one of a large family and he remained a bachelor - although once he spread the rumour that he was to marry a widow with 6 children. He was very fond of children and often handed out sweets to them or gave them a ride in his van. He was a great sportsman, football and cricket played a large part in his life. He was a first class cricketer and captained the village team for many years and he was one of the best players in the local Rovers football team. He followed with keen interest the games on a national level and his one weeks holiday a year was always spent at Canterbury with his elder brother, watching Test matches held there during the Cricket week, these were real "Red Letter" days for him. Eggy was a heavy smoker and as time went on he developed a persistent cough which gradually got worse causing chest pains. He struggled bravely on, a very sick man for some time before he finally gave in and went for medical treatment. He spent some weeks in Papworth Hospital but alas cancer of the lungs had a firm hold and nothing could be done, he returned home where he suffered intense, terrible pain with great courage like the true sportsman that he was. After several weeks he passed away in the room where there were on display a large array of silver cups and trophies won at sport. The whole village mourned the loss of Eggy and the Methodist Church was filled to capacity for the funeral service by many of his sportsmen friends and customers of his milk round who had got to love and admire this courageous little sportsman.

### Connie

There came to live in our village a retired butcher and his wife. They had previously lived in the nearby village of Stretham where they had carried on their business. This elderly couple had a spastic daughter, her name was Connie. I had met her many times before she came to live here, the Methodist people used to fetch her in her wheelchair to their services and that is where we met. She was sorry to leave her old friends, but they lost no time in transferring her to our care and to the church here. I have never seen such a deformed or afflicted person. To some people she was frightening and repulsive, her limbs were twisted and helpless and her face distorted and her speech was blurred and indistinct and when she got excited was almost impossible to understand.

In spite of all this she was a remarkable character and very intelligent. She had never been to school, but through the kindness and patience of one of our lay preachers she quickly learned to read - although as she could not hold a book or turn over the pages her reading was limited. We brought her to our services, concerts, weddings and funerals and any event in the village, she got to know many people and soon made new friends.

We took her out to tea, she had to be fed like a baby, it was worse than feeding a baby as her head was continually twisting and jerking backwards and forwards. She loved to hear all the village news and took a keen interest in all around. She was a

member of our Women's meeting and her favourite hymn was "Count your many blessings' Poor Connie, what a lesson she did teach us, with her quivering, spluttering voice singing. 'Count your blessings' was a revelation and put many of us who were active and in good health to shame. Connie was cared for by her father, she was washed, dressed and fed by him, he had endless patience, seven days a week, everyday of the year without a break, he never complained or grumbled. I was deeply impressed by his loving care and devotion, and one day I said to him, "Mr. Driver, I do admire the way you look after Connie, her friends just come and take her out now and again, but you care for her every day and always". He looked at me so surprised and was quite taken aback, he never thought there was anything special about his devoted attention and this is what he said. "Connie was the first child of the family of 6, and when she was born I saw what a helpless deformed little mite she was and I realised there was no hope of her becoming a normal, healthy child". She would always need attention and care and so, he said, he knew he had to do one of two things, either become bitter and rebel, or to accept the position and make the best of it, and he said - "I have always tried to do just that". I felt full of admiration for this humble, kindly, patient man. We were all thankful that, although he got to be an old man, he was able to continue in this loving care until the end came for Connie when after a short illness she passed on. We all learned many lessons through knowing Connie and her devoted father.

### More Village Characters

In my young days so many interesting village characters were constantly providing me with interest, amusement and wisdom. People with strong characters, completely trustworthy, hard working, ever ready to lend a hand, uneducated but so wise and knowledgeable about country ways. How poor they were and how expert at making ends meet and always keeping out of debt. I think of Jane Adams a wiry, wrinkled little old lady, who had been a widow for many years when I first knew her. She had a deformed son.

They lived together in a big, rambling public house, The Vine. Jane was the publican, she scrubbed those brick floors, table\*, settles, she polished the glasses and kept everywhere spotless. She had a regular, very respectable number of customers, mostly landworkers, who came for their evening pint and to chat over the village and national news. In those days everyone knew everyone else in the village, and their business. On summer evenings the door of that pub was always wide open and Jane's voice could be heard joining in the discussions, passing on news items and in between filling up the beer mugs, she presided over the chatter. No unruly or disturbing element was ever allowed in and even the roughest men showed respect for Jane. Although she never used bad language, she had a broad voice and her conversation was not genteel or even polite.

John Holden must be included in my list of interesting village characters, and what a character he was. He lived with his wife and five daughters and a son in a tiny spotless cottage. Was it because they were so crowded in that cottage that John was always out and about in the village attending all public meetings and functions and never missing any event at the Methodist Church where he was loved and respected. He never took any part vocally in a meeting, but he was the best listener and sermon taster a preacher could ever wish to have. John sat silent - never moving, perfectly still. He had a class of boys in Sunday School and I remember how those boys played him up. - One Sunday they all got under the table in their classroom and they would not budge - finally John came to me in another room and enlisted my help.

For many years he worked for a local builder, who was also a staunch Methodist, then he became a jobbing bricklayer,\* never a very well paid job, but he had a careful and thrifty wife who helped out by fruit picking in the summer months. He was a great story teller and could recite long poems, one lengthy one about a pack of cards, he was for ever giving at socials and parties. He was entirely dependable and trustworthy with a dry sense of humour.

*\*Jane's washtub is now in the museum's kitchen.*

*\*John repaired farm walls adjacent to museum in early fifties at 1/6 per hour (7 1/2p)*

Cambs. life  
June 90.

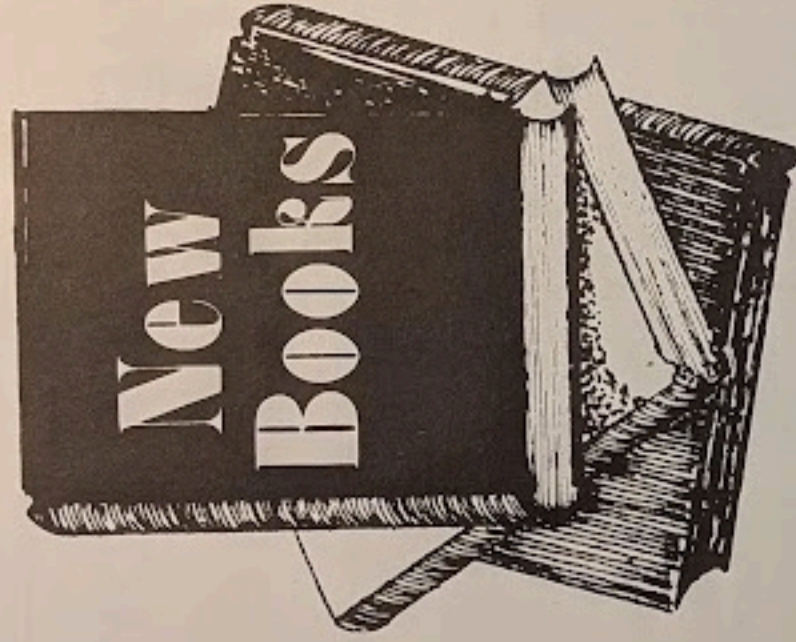
Museum, 50 High Street, Haddenham,  
Cambs. £1.20 (inc p & P)

Lorna Delanoy decided to publish her Aunt Mabel's "writings" because so much interest was shown in interviews taped for The Farmland Museum. This fascinating booklet vividly recalls life in a village as it was in Mabel Demaine's childhood - reminiscences of an age that could all too soon be lost in the mists of time. Born in 1908 and living until 1980, it is obvious that the changes which took place over her life-span were not always to her liking, although she has to

**REFLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY  
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Cambridgeshire Fen Village over 60  
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Reviews in  
Cambs.  
Life  
Magazine,  
June 1990.

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admit that a deep-freeze would have been a real boon!

Written in two parts, the first concerning the village, Haddenham-on-the-Hill, and the second the life and characters remembered at Stone Cross Farm in particular, these reflections are colourful and intimate. They form a lively record and are well worth reading, not least because all proceeds from their sale will be given to Haddenham Methodist Church, which played so great a part in Mabel Demaine's life.

Another 20  
Copies need  
to be sold  
to raise £500  
for Roof Fund.

Names in Rebels Recollections

JAMES

Miss Williams  
Jimmy Coxer  
George Chapman  
Sid Carter  
Johnny Butler  
Walter Miller  
Willy Watts  
Frank Bristow  
George Freeman  
Sergeant Lees  
P.C. Hudson  
Doctor & Mrs Fairweather  
George Green  
Bob Miles  
Mrs Celler  
Arthur Freeman  
Fred Holmes  
Bob Sulman  
George Palmer  
Will Maxwell  
Fred Hitch  
George Lake  
Robert Freeman  
Dorrie Hunt

Nicknames - 8  
John T Gatebed  
B. Eassey  
Willie Hitch  
Fred Sahner  
Annie Jones - 12  
Vic. Wright  
Granny Grands  
Mill Petes  
Lil Naman  
Eric Burkitt  
Carrie Driver  
Jane Adams  
John Helder

Wells 870492.

Havenhead,  
Easton,  
Wells,  
Somerset.

19.2.96.

Dear Mrs. Delaney,

Thank you very much for sending me the Booklet of your Aunt's memoirs and for the Booklet on the Farmland Museum (enclosed is a cheque for £2). I did not reply immediately as I wanted to read them both so that I could comment on them. I was fascinated by the story of how the museum was built up and am really sorry that it has closed but presumably the exhibits have been dispersed to other appropriate museums or kept so that they are there if it is ever possible to re-open. The important point is that they were saved.

we used a square glass curtain and  
I was born and grew up in  
Derbyshire even though I have spent  
all of my married life = Somerset  
(I am now 53!!) My father has a  
farm and was the last farmer  
= the area to use cart-horses. I went  
to University when I was 19 and I  
remember working the horse drawn  
hay rake = the summer before I went.  
The horses were used until they had  
to be pensioned off. I always  
consider myself very lucky to have  
seen the very end of that type  
of farming power. I can also remember  
the end of hand milking and the  
excitement when Alfa-Laval installed  
the first milking machines and the  
cows had to be persuaded to be  
milked by machine. Hens were still  
free range (e laid away given half  
a chance.) I was interested in the  
up and over butter churn. In Derbyshire

we used a square glass churn and I can remember turning away for Granny. In Somerset they do seem to have used the 'up and over'. When I left home - 1961 farmers there still used cowsheds where all the cows had their own individual stalls so I was astonished when I came to Somerset and heard people talking about 'milking rails'. Farmers actually went out into the fields with a mobile milking parlour. I had never seen anything like it. Now it is like a milk factory with several cows being milked at any ~~one~~ one time and harvesting being done on a scale undreamt of when I was small. As I don't consider myself to be very old it always surprises me that these great changes have come about in such a short time!

your aunt's memoirs. Her questioning of the whereabouts of disused wells fascinated me as I have often wondered about them myself. I know that our well was filled in and a tarmac drive laid over it so I hope the filling was solid otherwise we might have a shock one day. My memory was also jogged by her recollection of the tolling of the Church bell for any death in the village. However, my memory is that it tolled once for every year of the person's life but perhaps my memory is wrong. I also remember that the church bells always rang in the New Year but I never hear this now.

I think that you live in a very interesting part of the country. We have a boat and spent a month exploring the Fens fifteen

years ago. We started off at Bedford  
and went to Cambridge, Ely, Denver,  
Upwell, Peterborough and up the Nene  
to Northampton. As we had folding  
bikes with us we also cycled around  
a lot. We have had the boat for  
over twenty <sup>years</sup> and I have only fallen  
in once but that once was at  
Denver sluice. As we prepared to  
go out through the lock into the  
river at high tide strong winds  
were gusting down the Bedford river.  
As we left the lock a very strong  
gust started blowing us on to a  
dredger which the Anglian water  
authority had moored nearby. Always  
trying to be useful I seized a  
mooring rope and leapt for the  
bank. Unfortunately the bank was  
yards away and I went in  
with a full complement of  
tourists on the bank! My husband



hearing the power of swans flying  
immediately over the boat. We also  
visited the gyimes Gyaves and the  
Breakland but I think that we must  
Crave cycled or travelled by car. I  
can't remember. Altogether we found  
the Fens endlessly interesting and one day  
we hope to return. My ambition is to  
fly in a helicopter over the great  
rivers, especially - the Denver area,  
to get a birds-eye view of the  
great drainage system. I think  
that the twenty mile river and  
the great sluices are quite mind  
boggling (I suppose that I feel that  
I know one of them personally since I  
fell in.) I would also like to visit  
the abbeys (I have only visited Broulad  
so far) as life must have been  
damp and hard but they all became  
large and powerful.

I think that I had better



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great drainage system. I think  
that the twenty mile river and  
the great sluices are quite mind  
boggling (I suppose that I feel that  
I know one of them personally since I  
fell in.) I would also like to visit  
the abbeys (I have only visited Crowland  
so far) as life must have been  
damp and hard but they all became  
large and powerful.

I think that I had better

please now but again ~~thank~~ <sup>but not</sup> you  
for the booklets and for your  
interesting letter,

Best wishes

from  
Anne Pate,

April 29<sup>th</sup>

# Aunt Mabel will still be heard

THE childhood memories of a Fenland woman are helping her home village, long after her death.

For the recollections of life in Haddenham, near Ely, carefully compiled in the 1970's by Mabel Demaine have been published, with the proceeds going to help the village Methodist Church.

Before her death in 1980 at the age of 72, she wrote down her memories and did a series of interviews on tape for the Haddenham Farmland Museum.

The tapes aroused so much interest among visi-

tors that her niece, Mrs Lorna Delanoy, whose family started the museum, decided to publish "Aunt Mabel's Writings" in booklet form.

Mrs Delanoy, of High Street, Haddenham, said she had decided that proceeds from the sale should be given to the church which played a great part in her life, and to the museum, about which she was so enthusiastic.

"The local methodist church has had roofing repairs costing £4,000 and so everyone is trying to raise funds," she explained.

The book, entitled Reflections of a Country Woman, costs £1.20.

admit that a deep-freeze would have been a real boon!

Written in two parts, the first concerning the village, Haddenham-on-the-Hill, and the second the life and characters remembered at Stone Cross Farm in particular, these reflections are colourful and intimate. They form a lively record and are well worth reading, not least because all proceeds from their sale will be given to Haddenham Methodist Church, which played so great a part in Mabel Demaine's life.