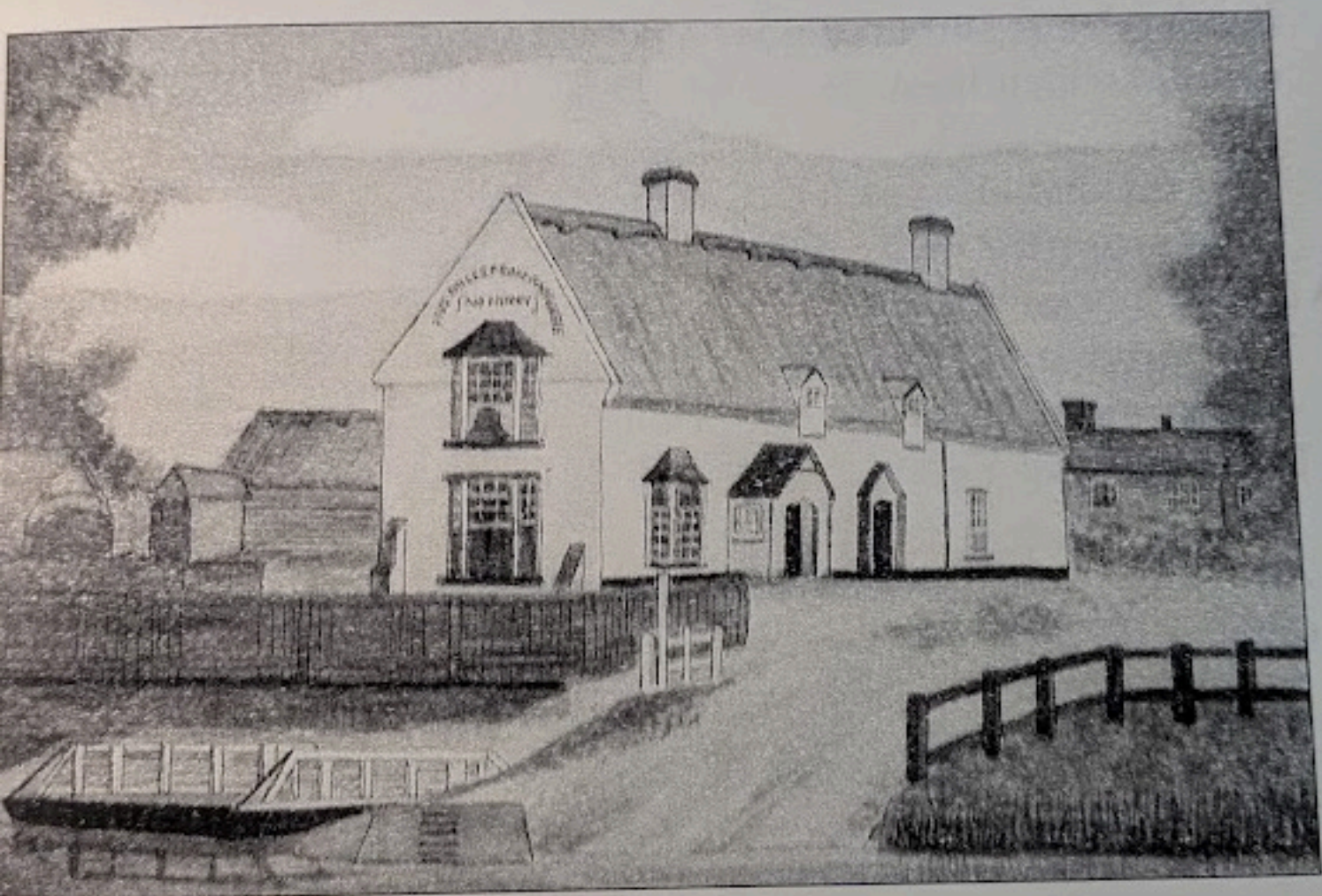


# One, Two, Three...



A collection of memories  
from the area around Ely  
compiled by **Lorna and Maureen**

**This is the third “FEN WORDS” publication compiled by two OLD GIRLS of Ely High School, Lorna Delanoy (nee Freeman) and Maureen Scott (nee Gent). They would like to thank friends and family for contributions in prose and verse without which Book Three would not have been completed.**

**It is divided into the following sections:**

- 1...Words used in the Fen Country (a follow-up of 1 and 2)**
- 2...Memories of Earlier Days**
- 3...Countryside Matters**
- 4...Recollections of the War Years**
- 5...Childhood Verses**

**All photos are from the Farmland Museum Archives  
(1969 – 1992)**

*FRONT COVER IMAGE: The Old Inn (Five Miles from Anywhere) on the River Cam at Upware*

One

Words used in  
the Fen Country

## Expressions used in the Fen Country

- Fair to middlin – describes how one feels...getting on reasonably well  
As old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth – reply to a child who asks how old an adult is  
All fur and no knickers – a woman who dresses “for show”  
Red hat, no drawers – similar meaning!  
You could ride bare-arse to London on that! - describes a blunt knife/scythe  
As crafty as a wagon-load of monkeys – playing tricks on one’s elders  
Too late to lock the stable door after the horse has bolted – delay in action  
Don’t look a gift-horse in the mouth – accept gracefully!  
See a pin and pick it up and all the day you’ll have good luck!  
No good to hold your light under a bushel – let it be seen!  
Mad as a March hare – self-explanatory!  
Making a right pig’s ear of it – a mess.  
Tarred with the same brush – alike  
Putting all your eggs in one basket – not spreading the items/ideas  
Putting the cart before the horse – doing things in wrong order  
As you sow, so shall you reap – results follow effort  
Flash in the pan – new idea  
Two left feet – cannot dance properly  
Get what you can while you can – do not miss an opportunity  
Give an inch and he takes a mile – greedy  
Gotta goo –time to leave  
Good ole du – partying/entertainment  
Hold you hard – wait a min ute  
Horse instructions: wooch, holdye, coopee, hubback  
Bit atween ma teeth - determination  
Louse in the ashes – lazy, good-for-nothing!  
Tolling of the church bell – for number of years of dead person  
Trouble with eating it takes your appetite away  
Make do and mend – cliché meaning, use what you have  
Mi ole duck – term of endearment  
Nab the rust – take offence  
Pigs may fly – improbable happening  
On the sosh/ on the huh – slanting, not parallel  
Can’t stop a pig in an alley – a bow-legged person  
Close shave – a narrow escape  
Rack up for the night – check animals last thing

Rule the roost – be the boss, as cockerels are in the chicken run  
 Sky's the limit/world's your oyster – all things are possible!  
 Scuttle off/scurry off – leave abruptly  
 Two faced and no guts – weak  
 Time and tide wait for no man – how true!  
 Tell them just enough to get rid of them – a Fenman's quote to get rid of an enquirer( ie do not give details to strangers!)  
 Finders keepers – if something is found, keep it!  
 You never hear a mouthful that's got a pocketful – braggers are never rich  
 Turn over your money when you see a new moon –will bring you luck  
 Get what you can while you can – advice to young workers  
 Don't make a pig of yourself – over-eat  
 Six of one and half a dozen of the other – equally matched  
 Count sheep if your can't sleep – advice to poor sleepers  
 Up the wooden steps/hill to Bedfordshire – go to bed  
 Jigger, dash, blow and bother - in place of swearing!  
 Like a yard of pump water – description of a thin person  
 Ditton Treacle Mines – for a far-away place  
 My Ole Beauty – term of endearment (real Fen!)  
 "House of Parliament" was a reference to the toilet/lavatory and not to the government building in London!  
 Knee high to a grasshopper – not very tall  
 Put wood in hole – close the door  
 Make hay while the sun shines – get on with the job in hand  
 Looking for a needle in a hay stack – difficult to find  
 Straight from the horse's mouth –not gossip  
 I've known him since he were a pup – all his life  
 Bet you a pound to a penny – certain of facts  
 Whisperers tell lies and Fools listen – ignore gossip!  
 Up the wooden stairs/get some shut-eye – sleep  
 Kick the bucket/peg out – to die  
 Hang you on a minute – please be patient  
 Mind your Ps and Qs –originally pints and quarts; be accurate!  
 (printing type can be confusing)

Other observations in local speech include:

WENT in place of GONE is often used in local speech and use of double negatives is a common pattern too; Fen Folk often "drop" the double T so

butter become baer; the letter H is often dropped (eg 'osses for horses, come you on 'ere) and then added where it is not needed (eg heducation for education, hit his helbow ) how annoying it is to hear the letter H referred to as HAITCH in the media.

Names sometimes replace the action (nationally we say "to Hoover through" when what we intend to do is "vacuum the carpets)...here are two or three fen expressions

JIM CRABB was the name given by workers at the Great Ouse River Board to a hand tool (invented by a Hilgay man) which enabled the rail tracks to be brought round a curve on the banks (gault, the local name for clay, was transported in trucks along the banks to repair damage after floods) In fact it was a specially-shaped piece of iron.

The Victorian vicar at Haddenham was renowned for spending funds on the building before they had been raised; the term HADDENHAMING means spending money before you have it....a trait that perhaps could be well-used in the Twenty-first century!

A retired farm-worker now living in Mepal uses the phrase: Yu don't do nuthin for nuthin....meaning, you expect payment for the task done

Queen Etheldreda was celebrated at local fairs at which little trivialities such as snippets of lace, cheap jewellery etc were sold; her shortened pet-name was Audrey and the term TAWDRY was adopted to describe these trivialities and the term is now nation-wide.

Dockey, always regarded as a real Fen word, is thought to have derived from the term "dock your pay" for the time it would take to eat your snack.

Perhaps the favourite Fen Word is SLUB....the watery winter mud

## I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE....AT Denny!

A...allotment near DVC planted with vegetables each year by Friends of the Farmland Museum, complete with modern digester to make mulch/humus to improve soil.  
'and tools: aitches are so often dropped and so when power is achieved by human force they are known as 'and tools (flails, spades, pitch forks etc)  
Abbey kitchen set out as for the Dimmock Family in the 1920's....climb stairs to get views of Abbey lands; plenty of hands-on ACTIVITIES in each room

B...butter-making: excess milk was churned into butter to be sold locally in the olden days....and is now made for school parties to enjoy!  
Beet equipment: the museum owns a wide range of beet harvesting equipment, much of which was given by the East of England Agricultural Show exhibitors  
Basket-making : baskets etc made by the firm of Harrisons of St. Ives for the TV programme BYGONES.

C...cow with multiple births (long before IVF treatment!); see photo in dairy of a farmer from Wilburton.  
Cart lodge contains a very small combine harvester awaiting restoration given by a farmer from Chettisham  
Cattle trough in concrete at end of allotment is now recycled as a useful herb-bed.

D...Delanoy Visitor Centre where activities for schools/groups are held together with a Book Corner and archaeological finds.  
Dockey, the mid-morning meal for Ag Workers (bread/cheese/fat pork) see example in Basket-makers display  
Dairy at end of Pig Sheds where a big variety of milk bottles is housed....now all obsolete, together with churns and even a cow which can be "milked"

E...elevator ex Fossey Collection from Eversden, which lifted sheaves up onto stacks, powered by a stationary engine.  
English Oak, a tree planted near the farm yard entrance to commemorate half a century of the Cambs Association of Local History.  
'en 'ouse where there were bantam fowls on the Denny site before Fred Fox caught the lot; cared for by Bob the retired farm worker.

F...Farm Sale Room where items are listed in catalogue by number and can be identified by number as in a real farm auction  
Fen Man's Hut; look over the reed bed to the distant horizon where the Ship of the Fens sails (Ely Cathedral)  
Fruit growing was important in the fens; what fruit can you find in the Stone Barn? The Fossey cart was the transport used to carry apples etc from Eversden to CB Market.

G...Ginger; can you find him? Do you know what breed of horse he is?horses were the POWER on the farms before tractors arrived in the early years of last CENTURY.  
Gate made by blacksmith in iron....usually field gates were made in wood with five bars

Grinder for fresh coffee beans in village shop; came from a store in CB; beans were ground to requirement and not packaged as today...hence aroma in old grocery stores!

H...Harness made of leather and metal to enable horses to be attached to implements; the saddler's shop from Haddenham Museum is re-housed at Iron Bridge Gorge.

Hay-making implements outside Stone Barn were given by Haddenham farmers...."all flesh is grass" a quote from the Bible.

Horse works – power on the farm activated by a horse walking round in circles; discovered buried in nettles on a Sutton farm.

I...Ice-cream maker in dairy is from the Fossey Collection at Great Eversden  
Inch and yard brass rule on counter in Village Shop was used for measuring tapes, material etc in drapery stores....now all done in continental measures!

Ink bottles for use in schools when Dip Pens were in use, long before ball-point pens...who remembers being the Ink Monitor?

J...Jam making, both in the home and at Chivers Factory at Histon; fruit was grown here at Denny and gathered by gangs of women.

Journals of a variety of topics are available to browse in at shop...early ones in black and white only....we take colour print so much for granted these days!

Jam tarts in glass case epitomise use to which homemade preserves were put; these were made in 1997 for the opening of the museum at Denny.

K...Kiosk at entrance offers info./souvenir goods to buy, as well as drinks and ice creams  
Kettle as featured in Anglia TV Bygones programme is made of copper; often described as being big enough for a WI party!

Kitchen in cottage has been furnished with old equipment showing how we used to live before electricity was available....for some as late as the Fifties.

L...Lavatory/loo/privy is "down the garden path" and it fascinates small children who have never seen anything other than a flush toilet.

Lanterns; farm work relied on paraffin lighting ...cows were milked by hand and horses fed and groomed by their glimmering light.

Ladders made of wood by the local wheelwright were needed to reach tops of corn stacks

M...Mole traps in great variety were written about in the book "Moles and their control"  
Maps in CB room show where objects were made in the county and also the importance of drainage channels in the Fen Country.

Modern Farming: look over the five-barred gate and see how big the tractor-pulled machines are in the 21 century!

N...Notches on the inside wall of the Stone Barn are initials of former workers as well as circles near windows to deter witches.

Numbered items for auction are in the Comins Auction room; a catalogue is there with saleable things named.

Natural flora is in the corner near the barn and also at the entrance to farm-yard (cowslips, dandelions etc) together with buddleia bushes to attract butterflies.

O...Oral history: the spoken word from interviews made with local PEOPLE are available in all the "Pig sheds" on entering.

Orange cart – who owned it? Who restored it? Built by a wheelwright from Little Downham...the colour is characteristic of Fen products in wood.

'osses, the local word for the POWER on the farms pre-tractors; dropped aitches are very common in the fens.

P...Ploughs, of varying design may be seen around the museum; some made by the Cole Family of Witchford and Ely....all pulled by horses.

Pond in Education Paddock used for school projects; there would be ponds (for animals to drink from ) and pumps from wells for people....can you find some?

Potatoes, a real Fen crop, known locally as SPUDS or TATERS, are featured in the "Meat and potatoes" display in the barn.

Q...Quilt on bed in cottage gave the woman of the house work to stitch in the evenings...patch-work quilting is now a popular craft.

Queen Alexandra's portrait in silk is on the mantle-piece together with a certificate signed by King George on the wall.

Quoits was a very popular pub game and at Haddenham there was a quoit bed made of clay; the game is still played in Suffolk on warm summer evenings.

R...Reaper is the biggest horse-drawn implement in the collection; needed three horses to pull it; last used at Littleport in 1947; belonged to Jack Kerridge, Caves Farm.

Refectory for the nuns; the floor tiles here are the best example of medieval ones in Western Europe; new patterns may be made using new samples in the education box.

Reading matter in the corner cupboard of the living room looks so boring compared with publications of today; given by Friends of the Museum

S...Sugar-beet equipment was once regarded as the most comprehensive in the UK....a lot of it was given to the museum by growers at East of England Show 1980s.

Steam power came to farms in Victorian Times....can you find a model engine in barn?

Seat given in memory of John Dickerson who owned what is now Amey Cespa and was a great help to the museum at Denny in the nineties.

T...Tools made for use by hand were much in evidence before electricity came...see those used by blacksmith, wheelwright, gardener and of course the house-wife.  
Temporary displays in the cottage extension have included art, models and those from the reserve collections.  
Tea room: whose portrait hangs there? What is special about the little house in the corner? Who painted the big landscapes?

U...unusual plants in the cottage garden include such ones as WOAD (a dye grown in the Parson Drove area of the Fens)  
Umbrella, big ones used by travellers in the gig were the only "covering"; modern ones may be borrowed from the office by visitors on wet days.  
Under the eaves of barn and refectory may be seen birds building nest....can you identify any of them? Some are migratory and can only be seen in warmer months.

V...Village Shop sold everything from cakes to wellie boots; note the large collection of enamel items hanging up (in use before the days of plastic)  
Vinegar bottle behind counter; buyers brought in their own glass bottles to be refilled; who says recycling is NEW?  
Violets grow in the cottage garden....have they always been there? Other plants have been introduced by Farmland Friends who look after the garden and allotment.

W...Wheelwrights Shop complete with boy-operated lathe tools and samples, is a recreation of the Watts shop at Stow-cum-Quy.

Walnut Tree Cottage is the name given to the former custodian's residence due to the walnut trees growing nearby; furnished as for late forties.

Weighing machines both for farm and house use; nowadays so many items come PRE-PACKED; sweets are still sold by weight in village shop on Open Days.

X,Y and Z are difficult to spy....can you help?

## AROUND THE WORLD, NOT in 80 days BUT IN 8 hours!

Cycling, a “legacy of the Olympics” to quote a well-known politician, has become a very popular Twenty-first Century hobby. In the flatness of the Fen Country, single cyclist during the week and club outings at week-ends are commonplace....in fact a well-used route is as follows:

Starting off from Ely, the Ship of the Fens, take the B1411 off the A10 to Little Downham where the Bishops of Ely once had a palace then turn right at the village sign and you enter CALIFORNIA. Continue on the fen road (now designated as a Cycle Way route 11) and proceed to the hamlet of Pymore, entering by DUNKIRK....recorded on documents 1825. Continue across East Cambs District via JERUSALEM Drove (see the RSPB new site for water birds on the right) to the bigger village of Sutton-in-the-Isle where the road to the west is known as AMERICA. The route to Earith (formerly part of the county of Huntingdon) follows the line of the New Bedford river which was cut in 1651. Adjoin the A1123 by turning left to Haddenham on the Hill which dominates the sky-line because of being situated on the highest point in the Fens. Follow to Wilburton and take the right turn to Cottenham along Twentypence Road (named after the toll fees before the bridge was built across the Old West River (part of the Great Ouse) and there will be found AUSTRALIA FARM. The Ship of the Fens is visible throughout this circular tour and return to it may be made along the A10 from Landbeach via Stretham (not the one in London) and bypassing Little Thetford (not to be confused with Thetford on the Norfolk/Suffolk border)

The skipping rhyme also travels a long way.....but only in the continent of Europe!

Mr Wheeler is a very good man, he tries to teach us all he can  
To read, to write, and arithmetic and never forgets to give us the stick –  
And when he does it makes us dance out of England into France  
And out of France and into Spain, over the hills and back again .

Derivation of some local place names areas follows:

Grunty Fen – a shallow watery place mentioned 1221

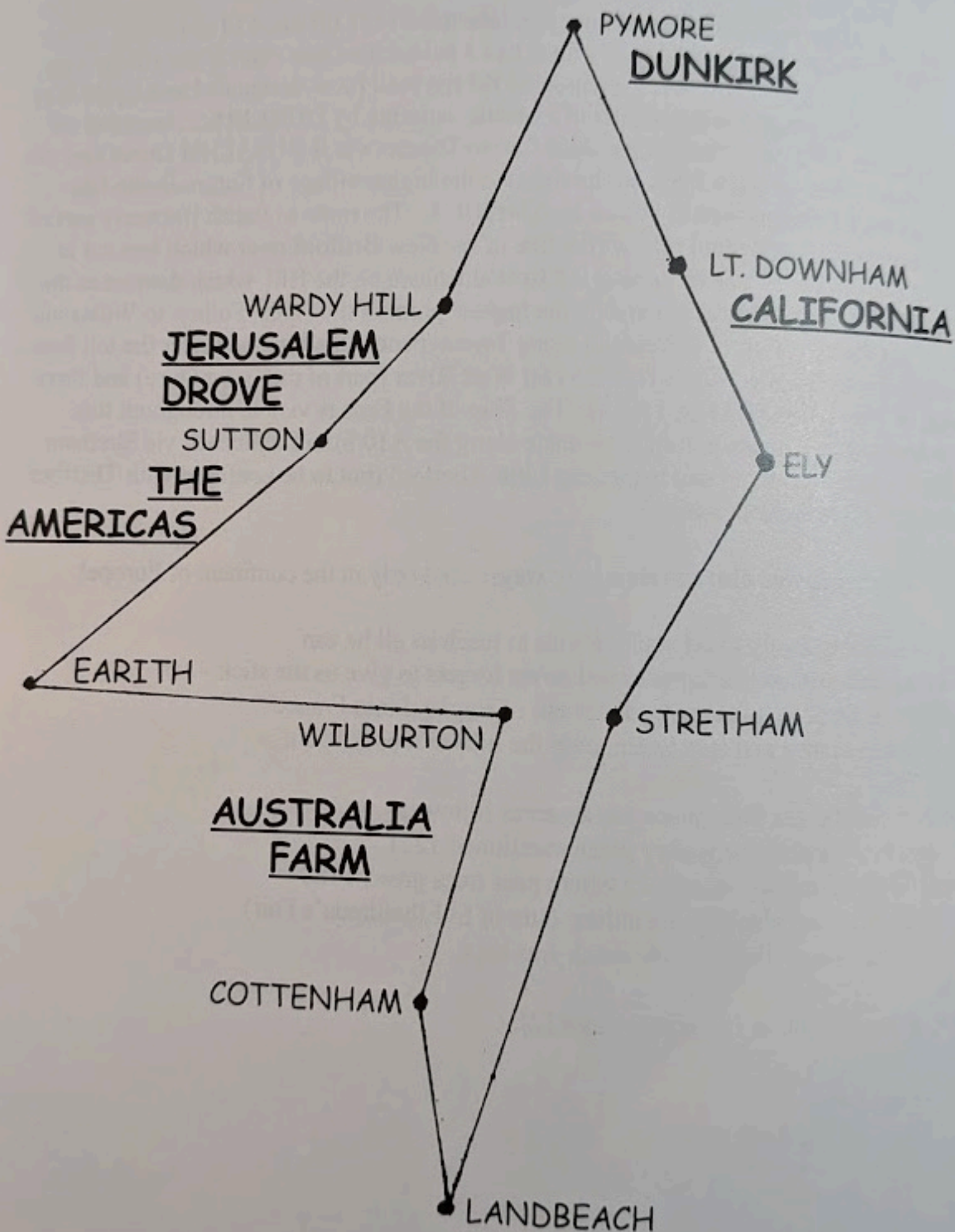
Perry Way – Peryway -the place where pear trees grew; 1488

Aldreth – landing place by the alders (site of St Etheldreda’s Fair)

Wardy Hill, island from which watch was kept.

Sketch map to show route (see page 12):

SKETCH MAP OF THE WORLD AROUND ELY



Cycling/walking/car tour to the west of Ely but always with the Ship of the Fens in view.



## ELY CATHEDRAL

We all know of St. Paul's and Sir Christopher Wren -  
But there were others, unknown, who were just as great men.  
They built Ely Cathedral, seven hundred years ago,  
Just how they did it we will never know!

How long did it take? How many men died  
In order that their God should be glorified?  
Their names aren't engraved, no stone effigy,  
The cathedral their monument for us all to see.

The Lady Chapel, an architectural delight  
With its lofty ceiling and so full of light.  
The geometry, triangulation: imagine if you could  
Building the lantern tower, almost entirely of wood!

But in spite of the years, storm, rain and gale,  
The "Ship of the Fens" continues to sail.  
For that is the name by which it is known -  
That glorious monument hewn out of stone.

To the lonely traveller in the night  
Midst the yellow sodiums, stands out a white light;  
It's the lantern tower shining out over the fen  
To join as was intended, God and men.



## FEN SKIES

A young lad from London visited the Fens -  
He must have had a discerning eye!  
His comment when he stepped from the car:  
“Cor, int you got a lotta sky!”

He had spotted in that brief moment  
One of the great features of the Fen -  
To depict the sunrises and sunsets  
With brush or words, defies men.

Even the camera can't truly capture  
Those brilliant multi-coloured skies.  
The effect of the light on the landscape  
Can hardly be accepted by ones eyes.

But there are those who scurry on,  
Never taking time to look so far...  
Sunset, alas, only means to them  
It's time to put the lights on in the car!

## **Anecdotes and advice given by visitors to the Farmland Museum helpers at Haddenham (1969 – 1992)**

WHIP THE WHEELS was the advice given by an old woman (a witch?) when the horseman could not drive his team of horses past a particular cottage at the end of the village:..putting the advice into practice, the team walked meekly on.

THAT"LL DEW ANOTHER TURN is a Fen expression meaning that the machine/object will do good service for another year.

When it was becoming a real struggle to keep the Farmland Museum going at Haddenham, an old neighbour offered the following: THE WORLD IS FULL OF WILLING PEOPLE, THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO WORK, AND THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO LET THEM.

Life was cheap years ago: a little gypsy boy was turning the wheel on the chaff cutter (a lethal rotating knife)and cut his thumb off. Never mind that, said the farmer whose wife bound up the child's hand with a strip of sheeting - and the lad was sent back to complete the task!

Docky is a mid-morning break for food and drink for farm-workers in the Fens: two men and a boy sat down near the dyke and opened their bags: "Do you like ends?" asked one. "No" said the boy - whereupon the loaf was cut in two, half each for the men and the boy went hungry.

Fen quotes: IF YOU WANT TO FIND A FOOL IN THE FENS< BRING HIM WITH YOU.  
THESE FENS HAVE OFTIMES BEEN BY WATER DROWNED  
BUT SCIENCE A REMEDY IN WATER FOUND.  
THE POWER OF STEAM SHE SAID SHALL BE EMPLOYED  
AND THE DESTROYER BY ITSELF DESTROYED.

CAPTAIN FLOOD WILL WIN IN THE END- an old Fen worker made this statement after the 1947 floods and with the present climate changes, he may well be proved right.

The wise old owl sat in the oak, The more she heard, the less she spoke.  
The less she spoke, the more she heard....why don't more people follow that wise old bird?

The museum collected over a dozen dibbers (a hand tool made of iron for making holes in the soil)and when demonstrating their function to children the following rhyme was taught:  
FOUR SEEDS IN A HOLE , ONE FOR THE ROOK AND ONE FOR THE CROW. ONE TO  
ROT AND ONE TO GROW. (Hence 25% germination expected!)

Wells formed an important aspect of country life; INTO THE WELL THAT THE PLUMBER  
BUILT HER FELL AUNTIE NELL – WE MUST BUY A FILTER.

Filters (as exhibited at the museum) acted as strainers for well/ditch water and even today people can recall drinking river and ditch water..... when it was suggested that Mains Water be brought to the village of Haddenham, one old farmer stood up at a public meeting and said that he did not want any of this new-fangled stuff: IT HAS NEITHER COLOUR, TASTE NOR SMELL.

On STEAMING DAYS, when the threshing tackle, driven by steam engines, visited the farm, it was the job of the farm boy to keep the water troughs filled up from the wells/pumps and often water fights broke out at slack moments of the day.

A college-trained farm student arrived at the farm: old Joe, who had worked there for 50 years asked if he needed any help. "Of course not" came the confident reply. The farm manager told the youngster to drill a certain field with turnips. Easy thought the student – we have done so much about seed drilling in our college lectures. Alas, he did not check the size of the seed cups in the drill – and in one round of the field all the seed allocated for seven acres was used. The previous time the drill had been used was for beans! Think of the comparison in seed size!

A child from a family of doubtful morals was looking round the museum "I think it is all REMARKABLE" he said. The guide asked why he thought that. "WELL, IT'S A REMARKABLE THING THAT YOU DO NOT GET THIS LOT PINCHED".

A four-year old was being bossed about by his older brother (who was at least six!) so in order to make the little one feel important, he was told that the Farmland Museum began with a four-year old's collection of bits and pieces. "Oh," said the big brother, "was he stupid too?"

An infant on a school visit, was very impressed with the stuffed birds in the Natural History building at Haddenham. On reaching the Bygones Building, where a "model" sat in the living room smoking his pipe, he asked; "IS THAT OLD MAN STUFFED TOO?"

A hard-working old farmer was busy planting seed potatoes one Good Friday evening. Along came his neighbour, Bob, for a yarn: "IF YOU'VE GOT HALF AN HOUR TO SPARE, DON'T COME AND SPEND IT WITH THOSE WHO HAVEN'T"

Old fen cures: put cobwebs over a cut to slow up bleeding  
Put lily leaves pickled in brandy to encourage healing.  
For a tonic to keep well, put enough black powder on a sixpence and swallow once a week (caution, not for smokers!)

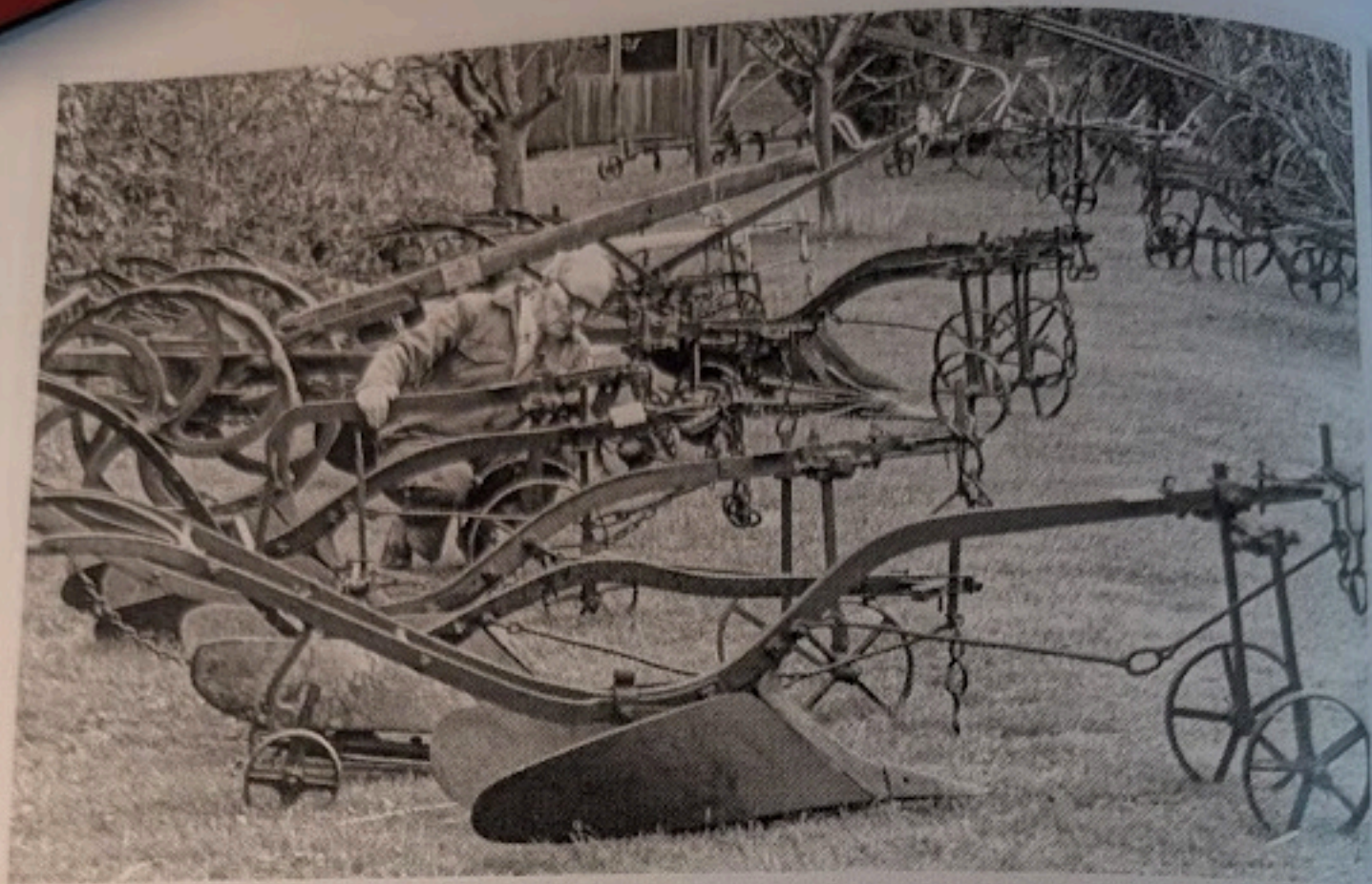
Friday nights were "Syrup of Figs " nights.....it used to be thought necessary to take laxatives to clean your insides.

The wild plant, FEVERFEW, was used to cure "bad head aches" long before its modern equivalent was available in Health Food Shops for help with migraines..

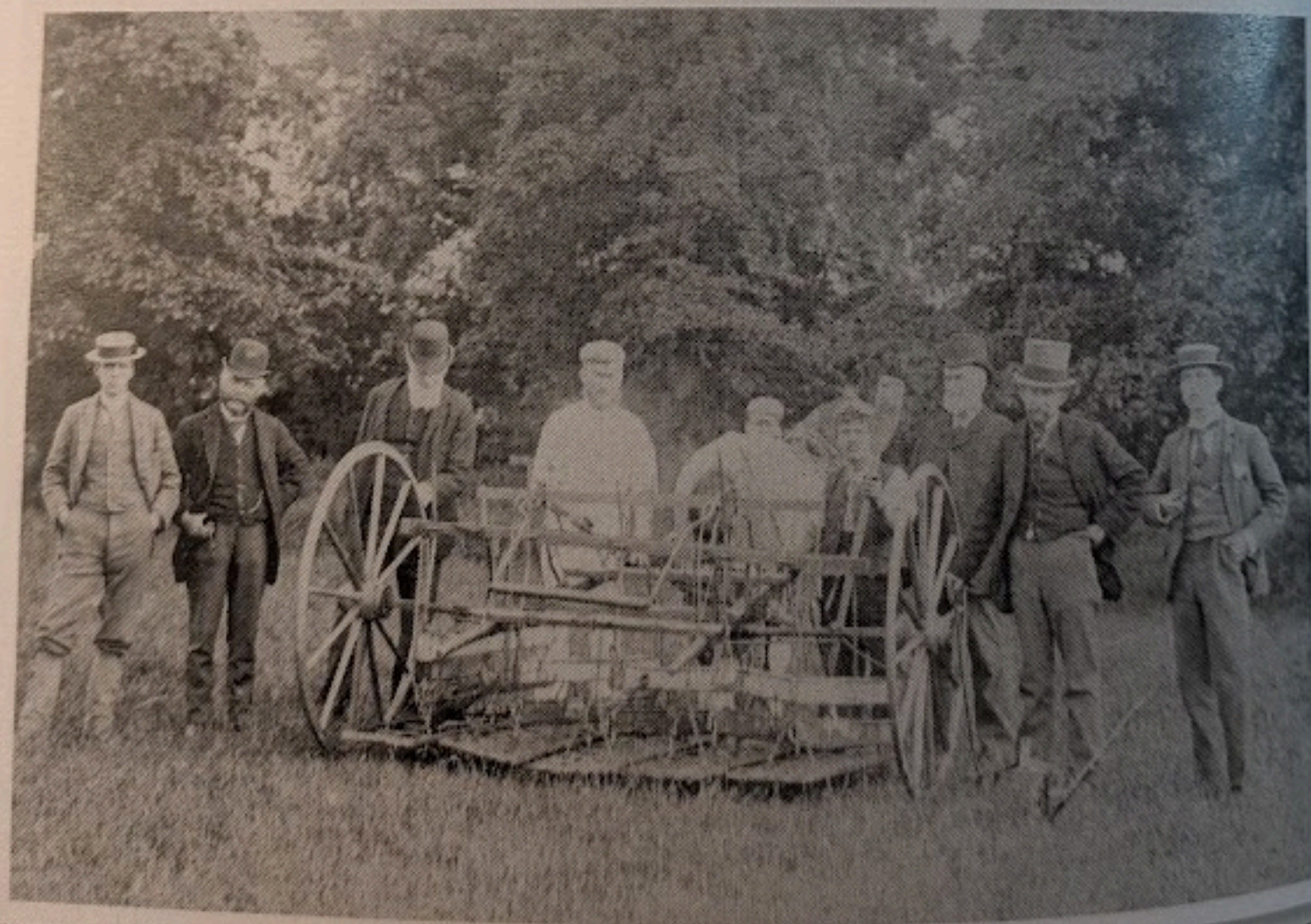
One old boy got so desperate with weather forecasting that he grabbed his barometer off the wall took it to his front door (where it was raining hard) and said in a loud voice: "NOW WILL YOU BELIEVE ME!" Other weather forecasting includes the appearance of slugs in the garden (RAIN), the opening and closing of fir cones and sea weed.

The museum was featured on the programme ANGLIA BYGONES in the early seventies: the collection of basket work made with willow had been given to the museum by Harrisons the basket makers of St. Ives a few years previously: it transpired that the items had been specially made for an earlier edition of the programme. Small world. The present basket maker at the museum is one of only eight yeoman basket-makers in the WORLD.

The Annual Sugar Beet Day had small beginnings: a grower at Haddenham suggested in 1982 that he would like the local paper to feature a beet he had grown.....was it the biggest in the locality? Interest developed, cups were awarded, over £2000 was raised for Riding for the disabled and the heaviest root in 1984 was featured in the Guinness Book of Records.



*A line-up of some of the seventy horse-drawn implements in the garden; early cars were often described as being as powerful as twelve horses!*



*Photography was very special in the eighteen-nineties and here the farmer and his workers "pose" in front of the NEW horse-drawn machine; note the hats!*

Two

Memories of  
Earlier Days

*Memories of a Fen Childhood; John Taylor (wrote "Raising Fen Tigers", a book of verse) born at Littleport, travelled the world and now is retired in Australia.*

### Poaching and Gathering

My Grandfather fascinated me with tales of poaching and gathering. Grandmother said that had it not been "for a bit of poaching now and then" they would not have had meat very often. Perhaps only when grandfather slaughtered a pig or an old cockerel or hen was past its prime. Grandfather poached with a local policeman who hid his helmet under a bush. Some of the methods might seem cruel today, but I guess that's how it was.

**Woodpigeons** were reasonably easy to gather if you could move quietly. You kept an eye on trees to see if pigeons came and went. If they did, then there was probably a nesting hole there. You soon got to know which trees had them and where the nests were. You'd wait at a distance until you saw a pigeon go into the hole then quietly approach the tree on the side away from the hole. If you could get round to the hole without alerting the pigeon you stuck your hand in and grabbed it. Pigeons eggs were sometimes a bonus.

**Ducks** were a special treat. A short plank of wood, a brick, some strong fine string or fishing line, an eel hook, bread and a hoe was needed. Most farm workers carried their own hoe, especially at beet chopping-out time. On the way to work he would stop by the river or drain where there were reeds and where ducks might be found.

The plank was floated in water that was about three feet deep and tied back under the reeds so it couldn't be seen by anyone. String was firmly tied around the brick leaving a piece about eighteen inches long. The hook was tied on the loose end and a piece of crusty bread was secured to it. The brick was placed on the edge of the floating plank and the hooked bread in the water. A few pieces of bread were scattered about to attract ducks.

An unsuspecting duck would eagerly eat the bread, get caught on the hook, fight to free itself and pull the brick off the plank. The brick would sink and the duck followed. On his way home from work the man would look to see if the brick was gone from the plank. If it was he'd know where to find it and fished it out with his hoe.

**Gin Traps and Nooses** were commonly used to catch rabbits, especially at dusk. Gin traps were not as

popular as might be expected. Eight or ten of them became heavy to carry and clanked together at the very time stealth was needed. Indiscriminate in what they caught, their prey was gripped tight by the leg, sometimes held for many hours to die a slow death. The creature would shriek aloud in pain possibly attracting foxes and owls which mercifully completed the kill. So the poacher would lose his booty.

Wire nooses were easier to manage and staked in positions close to the entrance of rabbit burrows and on runs. The unsuspecting rabbit would put its head into the noose as it left the burrow. The noose was large enough to allow the head through but not the body. The rabbit would try to continue and pull the noose tight around the throat and neck, so strangling itself within a few minutes.

Eels were plentiful and often cut into one inch pieces while still alive and fried. The little pieces wriggled in the pan for several minutes. Catching a few eels was not hard or illegal, all you needed was a sack, two sticks, some straw or hay, a length of string, a heavy stone and something dead and smelly...a rat would do.

On his way to work at Prickwillow grandfather cycled along the Great Ouse bank and the River Lark. He thought the Ouse was better for eels than the Lark saying the water was not so clear. It seems eels are happier in cloudy water. The stone and "something smelly" were placed in the bottom of the sack. Then the straw was loosely pushed in. The sticks were tied into a cross and wedged tight across the mouth of the sack to hold it open. A length of sturdy string or rope was tied near the mouth of the sack.

The end of the rope was staked to the bank and the sack thrown into the river. Eels were attracted by the scent and entered the sack for lunch, eventually to become disorientated in the straw as they tried to leave. On his way home grandfather recovered the sack and tipped the eels out. He always took newspaper with him, I asked him why? He said. That when you tip them out they panic and wriggle away, so you could lose a few. They were hard enough to grab as it was. If you tipped them onto something light they didn't wriggle half as much and mostly didn't move at all. *"I think it were strange for em an they dint know what tu do and they git frit."* He said.

**Pheasants** were a delicacy for most people unless allowed to shoot on someone's land. Soon after dark was considered the best time to "collect them." A pole with a sliding wire loop at the end and a torch with a strong beam were needed. Grandfather said the cock bird would roost high in a tall hedge while the hen rested in the long grass under the hedge.

Quietly patrolling the hedges on a bright evening was best as the cock could often be spotted without using the torch. Then the beam was shone directly onto the bird which became transfixed by the light and afraid to move. The noose was slid over its head and pulled tight. It was important to get the cock first as the Hen would not move as long as it believed its mate was still in the hedge. If you grabbed the hen first the cock would fly away. The hen was soon found with the torch and most times it could just be picked up, dispatched and placed in a sack.

JT 2015

Why is it when you get older all sorts of memories come into your mind, is it something you see on TV or someone says something and it triggers you off.

When I first started dating I was invited home for a meal, very nervous – but off I went, getting there on the back of the boy friends' motor bike. I knew that he came from a very large family, fifteen to be exact although two girls had died in childhood, but that still left thirteen, although some of the older ones had already left the nest. I was made very welcome and I asked if there was anything that I could do to help – yes there was – I could peel the potatoes – OK fine I thought I could manage that, but when I was handed a large bucket full of potatoes, I began to wish I had kept quiet, being an only child with just mum, dad and myself the bucket full came as a shock, but I persevered and finished the chore.

When all of the children lived at home meals had to be taken in two sittings – girls and then boys. Some were out and about so we all managed to squeeze on to one table. Dad started to dish up, when he came to the potatoes in a loud voice he said 'who peeled these taters' in a very squeaky voice I said 'I did' back came the reply, 'well you wanna take the b..... Eyes out, have you ever felt two inches high.

They always had the dessert course first and the main course last, which to me seemed very strange. I eventually married the lad and the first thing he had to get used to was main course first and sweet course second but he obviously did not mind as we were married over sixty five years.

All of the children were expected to attend Chapel on Sundays, all wearing their Sunday best – after Chapel as soon as they got home before doing anything else, they divested themselves of their Sunday clothes and had to neatly fold them and place in a large tin chest ready for the next Sunday. Dad worked very hard to provide for his family and mother truly deserved a medal, for apart from all the daily chores she made all of the children's clothes- including trousers for the boys and would you believe for recreation she pegged rugs for the home – a quite remarkable lady.

I remember once during tea time the milk ran out, so up gets dad- down to the bottom of the garden and coming back with a steaming jug of fresh milk. How very handy to have your own cow.

## BUFFALO BILL IN THE FENS

There were few people who had not heard of Colonel William F. Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, Pony Express Rider, army scout, buffalo hunter, sharp shooter and Showman extraordinary. He had first brought his Wild West Show to England in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and had given a Royal Command performance for the Royal Family. The tour was a great success and he returned for further tours in 1891 and his "farewell tour" in 1903, commencing on the 4<sup>th</sup> April at Manchester.

Buffalo Bill planned to visit 86 towns in England and Wales in 1903, and considering that most towns were one day stands, the route had to be planned and timed with military precision. This was no easy task considering the huge show, comprising 700 men and five hundred horses, tons of scenery, wagons, tents, seating, and electric light plant, was conveyed on three trains pulling a total of 52 wagons. The wagons had been specially built and used by the Barnum and Bailey Circus when it had toured England in 1898.

By early September 1903 the Wild West Show had reached King's Lynn, and shortly after posters were placed around Ely announcing the show would visit the town on Tuesday the 15th September, following its stay in Wisbech. However, soon after the posters went up a rumour spread that Buffalo Bill was not travelling with the show, causing a great deal of disappointment throughout the district. This rumour, however, was soon dispelled by Major John M. Burke, the general manager of the show, by stating to the local press that "Buffalo Bill is with the show and will be in Ely on Tuesday 15 September."

In the early hours of Tuesday morning the first of the trains had arrived at Ely. The train was of such a length that they took up the entire sidings on the Cambridge side of the station. The first train was 378 yards long and comprised of 19 wagons. Soon after the second train arrived, comprising 18 wagons, and then the third train comprising of 15 wagons. By 5.30 am the mammoth task of unloading the wagons and horses was well under way.

Even at this early hour hundreds of people had gathered to witness the long line of wagons conveying the Wild West Show from the station to Mr. Gill's field on the Prickwillow Road where the arena was to be erected ready for its first show in the afternoon. No sooner had the box office wagon been put in place and opened, queues began to form of people eager to purchase their tickets. The prices of admission were designed to fit all pockets, ranging from 4 shillings to 1 shilling, and for most people this once-in-a-lifetime spectacle was not to be missed whatever the cost.

In the early afternoon special excursion trains began arriving at Ely from around the district bringing excited fen folk to see the great American hero of the Wild West. A great swell of humanity began heading towards the show, and people began to jostle for the best seats. The show was almost full to capacity by the time the Cowboy Band began to play the overture, "The Star Spangled Banner," and a great cheer went up as Buffalo Bill entered the arena leading the grand parade of the performers.

The performances that followed were a spectacular depiction of life on the western plains. One of the opening scenes depicted an emigrant wagon train crossing the plains being attacked by marauding Indians. Suddenly the U.S. Cavalry arrived, chased off the Indians and saved the emigrants from certain death.

Another display was the exhibition of horse riding skills by the Pony Express riders, who showed how letters and telegrams were distributed across the American continent previous to the building of

the railway and telegraph. After which the American marksman Johnnie Baker gave a marvellous display of sharpshooting. The Wisbech Standard commented, "it would appear that no matter what position he might be placed in he could shoot with equal and astonishing accuracy."

It was, however, the performance of Buffalo Bill that gained most admiration. His exhibition of sharpshooting whilst at full gallop around the arena produced roars of approval from the crowds who had never witnessed such skill with a rifle. Buffalo Bill was followed by a group of Mexicans who gave an exhibition of their skills with the lasso, and great amusement was caused by the lassoing and riding of bucking bronchos by the American cowboys.

The evening performance was also filled to capacity, and was performed under illumination of electric lights. Whilst the performance was taking place the work of dismantling the show and loading the wagons had begun. By the time the performance concluded several wagons loads had already departed for the railway station where the first of the three trains was due to depart at 11.55 pm.

The railway station was about a mile and a half from the show field, but the shows staff of about 490 men worked with such efficiency that the second train had left by 1 am, and the third which was due to leave at 2 am actually set off 10 minutes ahead of schedule. The shows next stop was Bedford. During Buffalo Bill's stay in Ely 3,128 people visited the city by train.



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

## A DAY'S FISHING TRIP NEAR CROMER

### A STORY WITH A MORAL

Funny how sometimes in a spare moment something that happened years ago pops into your head.

Some friends and I decided to have a day's sea fishing in Norfolk, so one lovely bright morning we set off in a van driven by Mac. Four happy contented friends nattering together – an hour or so into the journey Mo decided he needed to find a bush. Mac said O K and drove on for a further five miles – Mo said 'you've soon got to stop', driving on for another three miles, the situation was getting desperate and Mo stated in no uncertain terms the need for an immediate stop or there would be trouble. A further mile and a half – lo and behold some trees and hedges along with loads of stinging nettles came into view – the van stopped and Mo left the van quicker than a startled rabbit looking for his burrow.

I decided to peruse my copy of the Angling Times that I had purchased before departure – as Mo left the van he hastily grabbed the outside pages of the paper that I was about to read. Jim collapsed with laughter and I was shouting that I had not yet read it.

After all the mayhem we continued on our journey to the beach. Upon arrival Mo decided he was hungry and it was time for breakfast. Out comes a large wicker basket and the stove from within is duly lit, all went well and the sausages and bacon cooking in the pan smelt wonderful – until a gust of wind took a flame to the basket and promptly set it alight.

Now don't get excited the day is not over yet.

After the repast, out came the fishing regalia. Jim had a long shiny black oilskin coat on; lying on the beach he proceeded to fit his rods together to start his fishing.

Along the top of the shingle bank we could see two women approaching plus two 'Scottie' dogs, enjoying their morning constitutional.

YES you've guessed it a large mound of something black and shiny was just too good to miss – two very unpopular dogs, who continued their walk quite unaware of doing anything wrong.

The moral of this story is "When you've got to go you've got to go".

## THE LAST OF THE LITTLEPORT HANDYWOMEN

*This is a contribution from the Littleport Society*

Long before the days of the district nurse many labourers, when they were ill, could not afford the doctor's fees, so their only resort was to consult the local handywoman. The handywoman's knowledge of the old folk remedies had been passed down from mother to daughter over the centuries. Whether it was a persistent boil or an unwanted pregnancy the handywoman would quickly resolve the problem with her home made medicines and her acquired skills.

W.H. Barrett, who recorded much about the folklore of the Fens around Littleport, mentions some of the handy women he knew or had heard of during his youth. One of them was Granny Gray who was active in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She seems to have been most noted for her anaemia pills.

Anaemia is usually due to a deficiency of iron, and according to "The Lady's World" of 1898 it was a common complaint of domestic servants, caused mainly because they occupy the "lower, darker rooms of the house," and that "their food is often of course quality and of insufficient quantity." Granny Gray's anaemia pills were guaranteed to overcome this deficiency, because they were made with the real stuff.

Granny Gray would go to the blacksmiths near Littleport Bridge and sweep up the iron filings from around the anvil. She would then crush them to a fine powder in a mortar. The powder was mixed with butter and honey, which was then rolled into small balls. Finally each ball was rolled in crushed dandelion root. These pills were then sold in bags containing three pills for a penny.

Handywomen often came into their own whenever there was a pregnancy or childbirth. They could not only predict whether it would be a boy or a girl, but they also acted as midwife's, and could ease the pain of labour and childbirth with their own particular concoction. Granny Gray produced a pain-killing cake made of wholemeal flour, crushed rhubarb root, grated dandelion root, and the main ingredient crushed hemp seed – cannabis.

Boils on the back of the neck were a common problem for men due to the chafing of the starched collar's they wore. Granny Gray's remedy for this was her little black pills. She would scrap the tarry deposit left in the chimney after burning peat, roll it into balls, two of which had to be swallowed three times a day to effect a cure.

Another Littleport handywoman was Mother Gooby. She would often be seen in the fields collecting cow dung for one of her renowned poultices. It was said her greatest achievement was the cure of a man who had a large abscess in the middle of his back. The medical profession had given up on the case as hopeless, but after Mother Gooby applied her poultice of fresh cow dung mixed with mares urine, the man was cured within a month.

Mother Gooby was also known as "Mrs First and Last" because she not only attended births, but also the dying and the dead. She would prepare the dead person for burial in a process called "laying out." This process included washing the corpse, closing the eyes, and dressing the deceased in its Sunday best clothes or a shroud. An important part was to place a silver florin, called sin money, on the dead persons forehead to show the devil that their sins had been paid for. The deceased could then be placed in the coffin ready for the "viewing" by relations, friends and neighbours.



*Two views taken along the New Bedford (known as the Hundred Foot); now part of the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership (OWLP). See map on back cover.*



## FEN HUMOUR

Those who went to the Littleport Secondary School on Wisbech Road and the early days of The Martin School on Parsons Lane will remember Mrs. Browning. Year after year Mrs B. enthusiastically produced an excellent choir. That enthusiasm and passion for things to be perfect caused her frustration and at times she let students know in no uncertain terms. She could be frightening. Her English Language lessons were no exception.

On hearing John W's deep Fen accent (she was not from The Fens) she scolded him for his perceived mispronunciation and what she described as his "Fen drawl".

"Repeat after me boy." She demanded, greatly emphasising the 'O' said. "How now brown cow."

John said. "Hew new brewn cew."

No! No! No! She shouted. It's "HOw nOw BrOwN cOw. - HOw boy, hOw!" Repeat it after me. "HOw, hOw."

John squinted, contorted his face in lengthy preparation in a theatrical manner and said "hOw" perfectly.

Mrs B. was satisfied and asked him to now say the full phrase.

With great gusto and much preparation John said. "HOw... new brewn cew."

The class thought it hilarious. Then John made his biggest mistake...he grinned from ear to ear at Mrs. Browning.

## RECIPE for FARMLAND COOKIES.... or 123 biscuits.

Cream together 100 gm sugar (white, brown or icing) and 200 gm marg (or butter)  
Fold in 300 gm SR Flour and squeeze into a "sausage" ....cut into slices and bake at 180 till light brown.....double or treble amounts as required!

These can be made more attractive with a slice of glace cherry on top....or stirring in chopped nuts/peel into mixture before cooking.

### Recipe for making and preserving friends

Select some sound hearts, be very careful not to bruise them with unfeeling WORDS.

Take the milk of human kindness, one heart-ful, add to this plenty of tact; warm the mixture with sympathy but do not let it get too hot at first or else it will only ferment mischief.

Knead it with lots of oil of unselfishness to make all smooth. Beware of jars - the mixture should be kept in a warm corner of the heart and the years only serve to improve the flavour of friends thus preserved.

## The Sunday School Anniversary....or SSA

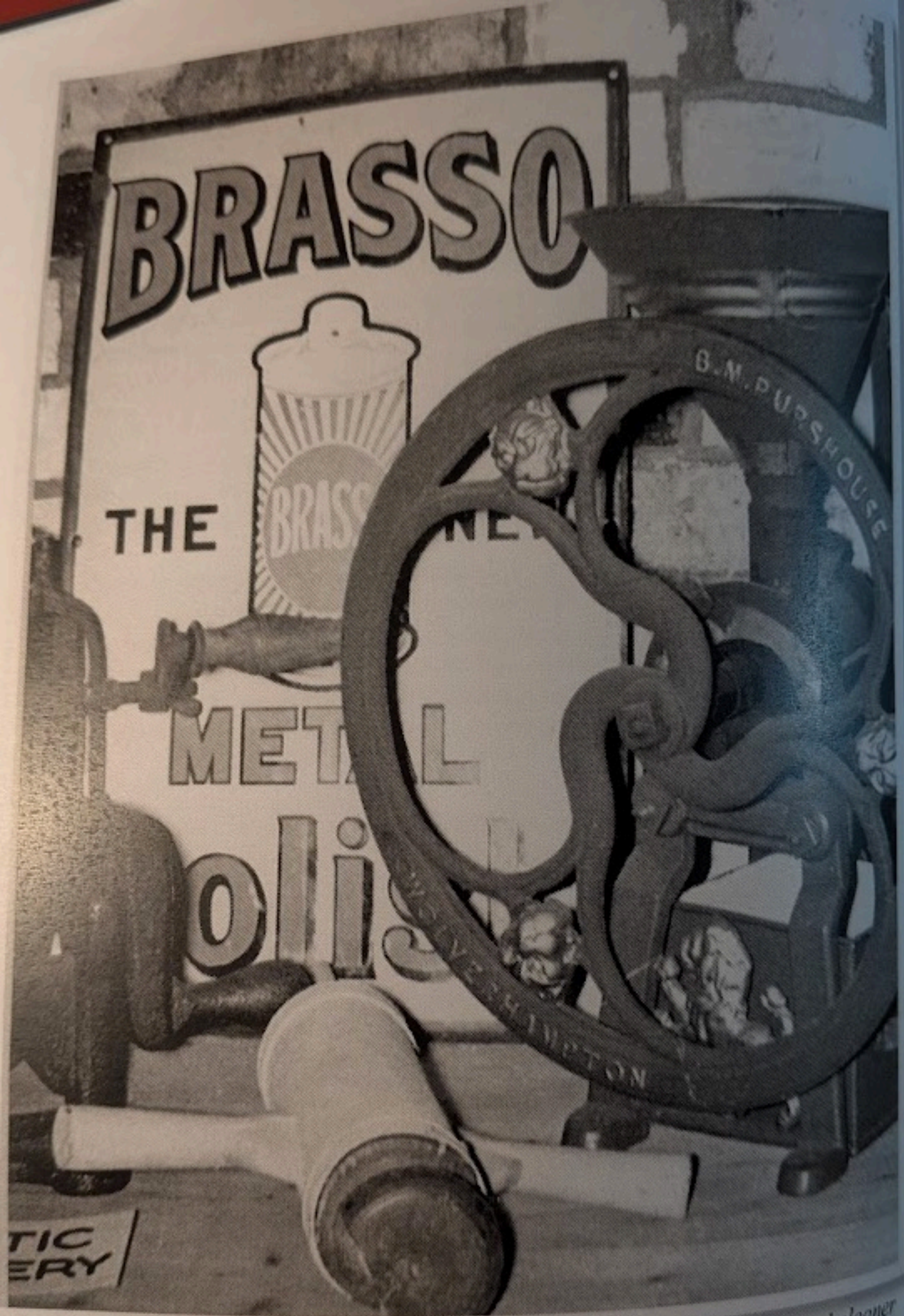
Ask anyone over the age of "three score years and ten" and the chances are that they will talk of the SSA as being one of the highlights of their childhood in the fens. Here is an account written by my mother in law of her memories of such an event on the fen-edge village of Fordham in 1906.....the words and English are hers

My life began at the tender age of three, taking part in the Sunday School Anniversary. The congregational Chapel was "lent" to us for the occasion because our own Primitive Methodist Chapel was too small to accommodate the parents of the children there who made sure of a seat so that they could see and hear their offspring perform.

It was a great day for everyone; we had been drilled as far as possible to perfection by dedicated SS teachers.....I realised in later years just how dedicated they were; they were not on the whole educated people but they were real CHRISTIANS trying to teach us all they knew; teaching us a real love for our friends, our different contacts and above all INTEGRITY which covers everything worthwhile in Life.

Our SSA was one of the most important happenings of the year; there was great excitement at the enormity of the occasion when one imagines a small village in the heart of the fen country where nothing seemed to happen. We were all dressed-up....new dresses, new shoes etc and that was a real field day as that didn't occur very often because of shortage of cash together with big families, my own consisting of six boys and two girls....however, the doting mothers managed somehow and there was a right-royal turn-out. I remember I wore a white dress with a blue sash and a straw hat tied with rosebuds under my chin. With the other small children (I was only three and remember it as if it were yesterday) we did our little piece (which we had practised for weeks) and then sang the last hymn.....I saw my parents leaving and cried because I thought they were leaving me there forever

Sunday Schools had a big influence on children's lives as did School Assemblies at Day Schools....both now but memories.



*Simple kitchen equipment together with enamel sign advertising a metal cleaner which is still around in the Twenty-first century; cleaning and de-rusting is very time consuming.*

Three

# Countryside Matters

## Casting Bread upon Frozen Waters

Richard Jefferies once wrote that 'Woods and fields lose half their interest without a gun. I like the power to shoot even though I may not use it'. It was with similar thoughts that I set out into the misty damp fens so disliked by those who do not understand them, on a cold winter's afternoon. I walked with my small Labrador along the frozen muddy drove. Each wheeling of the tractors filled with ice and looking like some complicated irrigation system reflecting the setting sun. The drove along which we walked leads eventually to the river - that meandering portion of the Great Ouse River known as the Old West. These droves are very wide, a requirement of days gone by when the heavy horses, pulling the large wheeled Tumbrill carts would move to another track on the drove when the one they were using became too churned up and the cart would 'bottom out'. I pondered on this thought and smiled to myself. What is so new about three lane motorways? The speed was less I suppose. My attention was drawn to what appeared to be a large flashing light in the sky. No, UFO this, only the sun reflecting on the white breasts of a large flock of Lapwings as they wheeled and tumbled in unison. Nature can be so spectacular. The silence was shattered by the roosting call of an old cock Pheasant and before he could croak the second note of his call, he was joined in a chorus of sound by all the other cocks sheltering in the reedy ditches of the fen, away from that lazy bitter wind. Why lazy? Because as they say in these parts 'It goes through you, not round you'. I was startled by a Snipe as it sprung from the ditch by my side, no doubt trying to find some mud into which it could probe with its long bill in search of food. I did not shoot as I still have enough feathers to tie that lovely fly of fast running waters, the 'Snipe and Purple'. I watched the bird as it 'zigzagged' away into the setting sun. By now I had reached the river bank and climbed to the top. Fenland rivers have these large banks that run their full length to contain the winter floods. Without them all the fertile land would be flooded in winter and 'Old Captain Flood', as the fenman used to call the winter deluge, would win the day. The frost of the previous night had been much harder than I, and the 'Met Office' had thought. The river was frozen right over and as dogs and ice covered rivers don't mix I called the dog to heel, an achievement in itself, and put my gun away in its slip.

There is something strange about a frozen river, not least of which is the noise it makes as the ice cracks and bangs, due to the changes in the water level. So

to round off this pleasant walk I set off along the water's or rather ice's edge, appreciative of the fact that I had such opportunities to enjoy being close to nature.

Rounding a bend in the river there was a pitiful sight. Five swans, the parents and their three offspring, had become trapped in the ice in the middle of the river. They could not fly off, they require a long 'Runway', they could not break the ice to reach the bank, nor could they get enough momentum to break off any of the ice around the edge of their few square metres of water, kept clear by their paddling. Purdey the Labrador stared at the swans then at me. Never before had she been so close, the swans hissed their disapproval. With no prospect of a thaw in sight, it presented a situation which required urgent attention. Yes, I did have an appointment at 5.30, but if I hurried I would have time to go home, pick up some bread and at least provide the birds with their supper.

Once home, dog was put in the kennel, you can't give food to anything or anybody without 'little black dustbin' wanting a major share of it, even if it meant walking on ice. I grabbed five bread rolls and hurried back the mile or so to the river, where my captive birds still paddled round their tiny pond. Was it frustration or perhaps an awareness of what the result would be if they stopped? Having made swan like noises, which didn't appear to help one little bit. I slid the first bread roll across the ice, it 'plopped' into their little pond. In fear they rushed to the far side and in doing, broke a little of the ice, thus making their swimming area a little larger. Some of the bread I broke into small pieces and managed to get these to come to rest on the edge of the ice, in reach of the swans with their long graceful necks. They ate none of the bread, in fact they didn't even look at it while I was there, perhaps they did when I had gone. I hurried off into near darkness, back along the riverbank to the drove. As I reached the drove I tripped on a frozen clod of earth and sprawled full length along the frozen mud and grass. Thank goodness I had left the dog at home, she would have found a way to laugh. As I picked myself up and brushed off the ice and mud, a thought came to me, 'I'm sure Her Majesty is not aware that I am risking limb, if not life, to feed her birds and probably my efforts will be in vain and the sodden bread will sink to the bottom before the swans gain enough courage to eat it. Oh well, not to worry. If my five small loaves do sink to the bottom, perhaps they will feed two small fishes.

Michael Delanoy (21/1/95)

## A WILDFOWLER'S WEEK

The rewards of the true wild-fowler are many, most of which are those he SEES rather than what he shoots. So it was with me one week in December '01. "My" wash (it isn't really mine, I only rent the shooting) is situated on the Hundred Foot (Ouse) Washes at Sutton Gault, and I love being there...

In the Autumn, Harriers patrol the countryside, sharing it with Barn and Tawny Owls; two Sparrow Hawks are semi-resident on the adjoining RSPB Willow Patch and Herons are always in evidence throughout the year.

The entries of the journal I keep, are as follows:

### December 13th

While wading across the Wash a very large swirl of water meant a large Pike was present: as I waded off in the darkness, it "had a go" at my boot (I wonder if this was at the request of the duck!!)

### Dec. 14th

Cold and calm: saw and heard a few Wigeon but numbers worryingly low for the time of the year. Saw a Muntjac creep into the hedge on the Sutton Gault Road.

### Dec. 15th

Cold and calm: beautiful reflections right across the Wash. Saw a drake Shoveller, a few Mallard and Wigeon.

### Dec. 16th

Sunday – no shooting of Wildfowl in the old Isle of Ely by law, and in the case of most Wildfowlers, by choice.

### Dec. 17th

Still cold and calm: many large groups of Teal flew just before dusk. As darkness fell, a perfect "V" formation of Canada Geese flew over, each leg of the "V" absolutely equal. They were very high and very noisy – a delightful sound.

### Dec. 18th

On the Wash by 7.15 a.m. As it got light a few Wigeon were flying high up: on leaving the Wash to walk back along the drove to my car, a grey Wagtail accompanied me most of the way, keeping only a few feet from me. When I returned later that afternoon, the Wagtail (if it were the same one) joined me at the car and accompanied me in the opposite direction back to the Wash. A Sparrow Hawk passed within a few feet of me, flying at an incredible speed chasing some field-fares.

### Dec. 19th

Still calm and cold: saw only 3 Duck all evening – a Teal, a Wigeon and a female Pintail. As the last sunlight "painted" the water a beautiful gold, a Kingfisher flew across silhouetted against this background, its wings barely clearing the water surface. What a week!

Mike Delaney  
21.12.01

## HARVEST TIME IN THE LITTLEPORT FENS

### A memoir of the late Mrs Warren

My grandparents farmed in the Littleport area. My father was the eldest of seven sons and seven daughters, and harvest time was for us very much a family affair.

The day began very early with all the adults both men and women going to tie up the corn. The men were dressed in calico smocks with red kerchiefs round their necks and cord trousers tied round the knees with strings which were known as "yorks." The women wore long skirts, long sleeved blouses or "bumpers," sun bonnets to shade them from the sun and sacking aprons.

It was the children's job to pack small wagon and carts with baskets of good food and stone bottles of beer, ginger beer and a drink called hore-hound which my grandmother made. When we got to the field the big boys rode the fore-horse on the reapers and cutters. Most of the girls made bands to tie up the corn, and some looked after the small children who played and slept in the shade of a shelter made from sheaves of corn.

When "dockey time" came round, we sat in a circle eating chunks of bread, salt pork or a home-cured bacon, apple tarts or jam turnovers. The small children usually had rounds of bread and pork dripping, or bread and cheese which was much enjoyed. As it was mostly piece work, breaks for food were as short as possible, and we were soon at work again. During the afternoon on hot days my brothers and I would walk two miles for cans of cold water to refresh the sweating men. Sometimes I came back with an apron full of apples he had picked from under the trees, and everyone scrambled for them. The next meal was "fours" when my grandfather sent cans of hot tea, home made fruit cake and apple tarts down to the field by pony and trap.

We worked as long as the light lasted, when tired but happy, we travelled back to the farms in wagons. There we had to help unyoke the horses, and feed and water them. Needless to say we were all by this time hot and dirty. Water was heated in a brick copper in the yard and we washed in bowls, with plenty of carbolic soap and Hessian towels to dry ourselves on. When we were clean, we all sat down to a supper of plain suet roly-poly pudding served sometimes with gravy and potatoes, and sometimes with jam or treacle. If there was any meat, the grown-ups had it. Now and again we were lucky and had fried eggs and a big pan full of fried potatoes and onions. We loved that.

Next came the threshing. To see the threshing tackle arrive in the yard was for us as exciting as a circus. It was the children's job to carry pails of water to put in the tank to keep the engine going. The bigger boys looked after the chaff, treading it down in the shed to make room for more. I used to be terrified of the mice, but dare not say so, or I would have been ridiculed by the others. One of my uncles used to get us to throw pails of water over him to keep him cool on a hot day, and we thought this was great fun.

After many weeks of very hard work, from early morning to late at night, my parents used to consider they had had a good harvest if they earned in that time an extra £20. This was spent on winter clothing, warm coats and strong shoes for the girls, and corduroy suits and boots for the boys. They were happy days for us children, and I thank God for the hard working and warm hearted family in which I grew up.

## HOREHOUND BEER & TEA

Some Recipes contributed by members of The Littleport Society

I have never used it but know that it was used to make cough sweets and cough syrup which would have been in demand in the fens no doubt and a ginger beer type of drink. I have seen it growing plenty of times on our farm near Lynn and here where I live on the coast. I found this recipe for horehound beer on line it comes from Mrs Beeton's book:-

1 oz. of horehound, 1 oz. of burdock leaves, 5 ozs. of ginger, 0.25 oz. of hops, and the size of a hazel nut of gentian root. Tie all in a cloth, and boil in 5 gallons of water for an hour, then strain and again boil, adding 3 lbs. of brown sugar and 2 ozs. of Spanish juice. Ferment for 24 hours, then bottle.

Now the main problem is horehound comes in two sorts, white or black, the white smells nicer than the black and the web page I link confirms that it is the white used for the beer and candied. Burdock leaves should be easily available growing wild but health food shops and home brewers seem to stock horehound which is like a stiff hairy dead nettle. No idea what Spanish juice is-possibly orange juice.

.....

Ingredients -water, ten gallons; sugar, five pounds; horehound herb, ten ounces; camomile, two ounces; Jamaica ginger, bruised or crushed, six ounces; good fresh yeast, one pint; liquorice for colouring, one ounce. The latter made into a liquor with a pint of boiling water.

Method -put the horehound, camomile and ginger in an open gauze or coarse flannel bag, and let them together boil gently for two hours or longer, to extract all the aroma from the herbs and ginger; then remove all the liquor into a tub or large pan, and at about eighty degrees of heat add the yeast. Stir the mixture, and let it stand with a cover over it for ten or twelve hours, after which put it into a cask to ferment, taking off the yeast as it arises at the bung-hole. This preparation is made stronger by adding an ounce of the extract of malt mixed with the liquor when cooling.

.....

I have found this recipe for the horehound tea that the workers used in the fields.

1 cup of fresh horehound leaves (or 1/4 cup dried leaves), 1 quart of water, 2 tablespoons of honey, 1 fresh lemon, 1 tablespoon of aniseed (optional). The Horehound can have a bitter taste but the honey and lemon balance it out. The aniseed is a nice licorice like addition. Hope this helps. All the very best for Christmas and New Year.



*Josh Scott, the first warden at Welney WWT Reserve: he retired to Littleport and was Maureen's brother-in-law.*

**Bog Oak may still be ploughed up in the Fens; here Alan Bloom recalls his experiences with it when draining Priory Farm (now part of the Wicken Vision, NT); he later established the nursery at Bressingham**

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

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

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

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

Alan Bloom, Bressingham Hall, Norfolk  
February 2003

## Bog Oak in verse from Fenland Facts and Fancies

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

Sometimes they're ash or fir or yew.

But one thing is fact, so it now appears,

They've lain buried there for four thousand years.

As the Fens were drained, so they dried out.

They began to shrink and to blow about

Exposing these great trunks of wet black wood-

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

So when from the fields they had to go,

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

To the roadside verge they were then dragged away

To dry out, where many remain to this day.



*The Ship of the Fens dominating the flat fen lands, Bog Oaks in the foreground.*

HOBSON'S VOICE is a folk group based across the River Ouse at Over on the edge of the Fen Country. Here is one of the songs recorded on cd entitled FEN FOLK. It illustrates not only the fens around Ely but also the importance of Ely as a rail junction.

### THE MOUNTAINS OF ELY

Verse 1      There are mountains, they say,  
So far, far away,  
And they're there on The Island of Ely.  
There's a dream in my head,  
Whatever is said,  
To climb up The Mountains of Ely.

Chorus            As I sit on this train  
I commute in my brain;  
I could live my life as a rover.....  
And that office of pain  
I'll ne'er see again  
When I climb up The Mountains of Ely

Verse 2      My soul turns to fudge  
Every day as I trudge  
To that office with no love or feeling.  
I stare at a screen  
Where nothing is seen  
But wheeling and dealing and stealing....

Chorus

Verse 3      I work long every day  
But my pension they say  
Will be worth diddle(bugger)-all ....if I get there...  
My heart starts to throb  
When I think of my job  
And my short little life's going nowhere.....

Chorus            As I sit on this train  
I commute in my brain;  
I could live my life as a rover....  
And that office of pain  
I'll ne'er see again  
When I climb up The Mountains of Ely....

....And that office of pain  
I'll ne'er see again  
When I climb up The Mountains of Ely

## DOCKEY TIME TALES

**A Dockey Bag** – Fen farm workers carried in their dockey bags half a loaf of bread, a hole cut out filled with butter, a hunk of meat or cheese and an onion. When they stopped in the morning for their break they would cut the bread to their requirement, spreading the butter on and eating the meat, cheese and onion. This they called “dockey”.

Before this was made an official meal break, a farmer caught some of his workers having a stop for a feed. So he said to them, “I shall ‘dock ee’ time for this!” So after this it was called ‘dockey time’ and later it was made an official break by farmers.

**Heaps of Time** – A gentleman out riding his horse one morning looked at his watch and found that it had stopped. Seeing an old fellow working in a field, spreading farmyard muck, he enquired of him the time of day. So placing his fork in a heap of muck he looked up the field, and then down, counting the muck heaps. “Well guvnor,” he replied “according to what muck I’ve spread today, when I’ve spread four more heaps it will be dockey time”. “What is dockey time?” asked the rider. “Half past ten,” answered the muck spreader, “so now it is nigh on ten past ten.”

**Time for Dockey** – A cockney chap, a window cleaner by trade, found there were no windows to clean during the London blitz, so he volunteered for the RAF. He was rejected on medical grounds, so he decided to go the Fens where his wife and daughter were evacuated to.

He soon found work on a nearby farm. The foreman, on his first morning at work, gave the cockney a job cleaning up the barn and making it tidy. Mid-morning came and several farm workers came by on their bicycles, and seeing Cockney framed in the doorway shouted “Dockey!” Not knowing what they were saying he carried on his work. About half-an-hour later they returned and said to him “What about Dockey, ain’t you had it?” So the new farm hand said, “What do you mean? Who is this darkey fellow you are talking about?” “No” they said, “Dockey, ain’t you had it? Call it lunch if you like, we call it dockey.”

So he was put in the picture, and after that he made sure he stopped for dockey at the right time each morning.

Four

Recollections of  
the War Years

## Wilburton in WWI

Researched by Sue Slack, local studies assistant at Cambridge Collection, Lion Yard Library, Cambridge.

In 1914 the population of Wilburton was only 475, and life revolved around the seasons. Local produce such as fruit, wheat, barley, oats and beans were carried away by rail from the station and life was slow and uneventful.

As early as 1912 though, there was unease over Germany and the sabre rattling of the Kaiser, and the country began preparing for the possibility of war. Major manoeuvres were held on the Gog Magog hills in Cambridge which were like war games and which were attended by King George V.

In Wilburton a lookout was posted in a shed at the top of Twentypence Road by members of the Hunts Cycle Battalion, apparently to watch for any movements.

A biplane piloted by Bill Cody (Buffalo Bill) took part in the manoeuvres and there was an airship which a Wilburton lad help to land at Royston.

These manoeuvres, therefore were very popular with the local lads, just imagine the excitement in the local sleepy villages and towns when previously to see even a bicycle was a novelty. Two years later they would be going off to fight for real.

It is interesting to note that Marshall Haig, who was overall commander of the manoeuvres at Cambridge, lost the battle which was held and his concluding speech at Trinity College, Cambridge was a shambles.

However, he still went on to be in charge of the disastrous battle of the Somme in 1916 when 20,000 British soldiers died on the first day and 40,000 were wounded. The popular view of the war was that men were "lions led by donkeys".

Five young "lions" from Wilburton, William Alsop, Arthur Cundell, Henry Knight, Harry Sneesby and Sidney Sharpe were killed that day and Oliver Hopkins and Sidney Alsop were also wounded.

As soon as war was declared the recruitment campaign began, horses were requisitioned and the First Eastern Hospital at Trinity College, Cambridge was set up.

Motorcycles toured the Cambridgeshire villages putting up Kitchener's appeal for recruits, "Your Country Needs You" and the young men, with little

inkling of what they were signing up for, did not want to miss the adventure which would be over by Christmas. Very few survivors spoke of patriotism as the reason that they joined up, they did not have much idea what had been going on in Europe. Peer pressure, and the chance of an adventure were the main reasons for volunteering.

Of the four early recruits from Wilburton (6/11/1914) William and Sidney Alsop, Sidney Sharp and Fred Sulman, only Fred survived the war. They had left "to the cheers of the schoolchildren and with the good wishes of the residents generally" but only Fred came back.

Soldiers were given eggs for breakfast and biscuits and large tots of rum before going over the top, it was a nice sunny morning and at 7.30 they went over "Like brave lads".

They were mowed down by German machine guns "like mowing down corn". Later he described it as "like cutting that Coleseed down in that big ground down the drove".

A mate recalled that there was "Smoke, gas and blood, dirt and water everywhere, with the ground erupting like a volcano underneath them".

Two sons of the Rev Beauchamp and Julia Pell of the Rectory served in WWI. Major Albert Julian of the Old Manor House died suddenly of a cerebral haemorrhage in 1916 aged only 53, while training soldiers in musketry at Tattenhall near Chester. He had been a member of the Old Cambridgeshire Militia. A memorial service for him was held in Ely Cathedral in October 1917 and Mrs Pell commissioned a stained glass window in his memory for the church in Wilburton.

Beauchamp Tyndall Pell, Major, Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment died aged 58. Beauchamp was only in command for one month when he was wounded on 31st October 1914 at the first battle of Ypres. He was captured by the Germans and died of wounds in a Field Hospital at Werwick, Belgium after an unsuccessful operation.

## HOME FRONT

### WOMEN

Women all over the county were called up to do war work in place of men on farms, buses, trains, the Post Office and in shops, and there were even lady librarians in Cambridge City Library for the first time.

There was a secret munitions factory run by the Cambridge Instruments Company, making pyrometers in Magrath Avenue, Cambridge in what was a roller skating rink and which was staffed mainly by women. After the war the site became the Rendezvous cinema and Rex ballroom.

In the newspapers there were reports of Land Army girls picking apples 20ft from the ground, milking cows, gathering barley and reaping corn. The Land Army was formed in 1917 when it was realised that women could do most of the work previously done by men and their help was needed to feed the country.

Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely had large numbers of women working on the land.

“Women were wanted on all sides, wanted by people who thought very little about women’s work before the war. Women were needed to preserve the country while the men were at the front risking life and limb. It was their duty to preserve the country for when the men returned.”

In fact, it was often difficult for women to return to being the wife at home after the war when domesticity and motherhood was encouraged to build up the country’s population again. There were many more independent women after 1918 as a whole generation of men were wiped out and there were few able bodied and eligible men left to marry.

## WORK

Miss Lucy Christian Kernode of Haddenham was a nurse in Nairobi during the East Africa campaign. She was the daughter of Rev Sidney Kernode of the Rectory House, Haddenham and by a bizarre quirk of fate, local man George, who was serving in Kenya, met her and was treated by her in the field hospital. The Kernodes housed six Belgian refugees at the Vicarage in October 1914 and Haddenham set up a Belgian relief fund collection. Mrs Kernode was on the committee of the County Nursing Association along with Mrs Oliver and Mrs Albert Pell. Miss Annie Hudson was district Nurse in Wilburton who cycled everywhere was very highly thought of.

There were difficulties with the harvest and potato picking, due to the shortage of men so there were some appeals for exemption due to farm work at regularly held tribunals. Some men, however, who wanted to go were disappointed, such as Len Warren who leaves delightful memoirs in the

Cambs Collection, called "Wilburton as I knew it". Seven times he got call up papers and seven times it fell through. Men claimed they were needed at home in agriculture and some invented ailments in order not to go, like walking to Ely to make varicose veins worse.

## **PATRIOTIC FUND RAISING**

There were Red Cross sales of livestock, farm implements, household furniture and garden produce which were held at Mr Warren's premises to raise money. The War Funds Society gathered funds for comforts for soldiers and money for the wounded and their families was collected. Local farms supplied eggs for the wounded soldiers at Ely hospital and everyone collected for smokes for soldiers. Cigarettes were seen as an important addition to the soldiers' rations to keep them calm under fire. Lung cancer would have been the least of their worries.

The Wilburton Volunteer Training Corps. Committee consisted of Messrs. Whiting, Camps, E. C. Everitt, G. Seppings, R. Uffindell and Harry Warren, Rev Holford Scott. Albert Julian Pell was President. Harry Warren provided the Range for practice. The Home Guard however had to make do with dummy rifles whereas Haddenham's VTC was abandoned, Wilburton's thrived.

One highlight amongst all the hard work and anxiety was the crash of a zeppelin somewhere locally. The exact location was not know due to war secrecy but the farmer charged 3d to see it and 2d to see the pits that it created and the local pub ran out of beer!

When the armistice was signed there was great jubilation. In Ely, crowds waited for the official notice to appear in the Post Office in Market Street on November 11th 1918.

At nearby Sutton, Drakes chaff works repeatedly sounded its buzzer which was heard for miles around. Pte. Alfred Warren, who had enlisted in 1915, returned home after four years as a prisoner of war. The Men's Institute re-opened and a billiard table was installed. Dancing classes were started, and romance returned to the village.

After the war there was a general increase in land and food prices. Some farmers did very well, and the towns were calling out for produce, but there was some bitterness as those who had fought were less well off than those

who had stayed behind to farm. Land off Twentypence Road was given to returning soldiers as allotments.

The returning soldiers had been promised "A land fit for heroes" but homes were often double the rent of before the war. The country, having no capital left to draw on, suffered real economic hardship which led to the slump of the 1930s. Certainly life was never the same again. Women got the vote which opened up many professions to them. They became doctors, magistrates, barristers etc. and of course they could soon become MPs too. Work as a typist or shop girl was more exciting than being a parlour maid.

There were not the men available to maintain the large country house estates anymore after the war. Men having seen life away from the farm were sometimes reluctant to return to the land. A life of service was no longer what men and women wanted, having seen a measure of freedom during the war, and large stately homes and estates could not function due to a shortage of staff.

Some people have criticised the commemoration of WWI as war mongering but when you see the hardships and death and deprivation everyone endured its right we do remember. There was not a family in the country that did not lose at least one member and Wilburton and Haddenham lost a whole generation of its young men.

## MEMORIES

Even though I was still a 'young-un', I can remember the day war was declared, but had no idea what war meant, to me it was just a word! I was staying at my grandparents house as my parents had gone down to the West Country on holiday. An aunt and her family lived a few hundred yards away and had all come to my grandparents home with me wondering what was going on. They all gathered round the wireless and heard the words 'we are at war' and one of my cousins burst into tears and said 'I do not want to go and fight'. My parents arrived, they had got home as soon as they could and said they had a terrible journey, with everyone trying to get home as quickly as possible.

That was just the beginning as everything started to change very quickly, gas masks, no lights showing, masked lights on cars, men being called up, girls moving to munitions factories to work, paper strips on windows, blackout curtains, everything being rationed and so on. All able people were joining various things like first aid, wardens; in fact anything that they thought would help the war effort. The list of changes became longer and longer.

The village was inundated with evacuees from London, being sent to the country for safety. We did not have an evacuee as our house did not have enough rooms, but my aunt in a nearby village did, she had a nineteen month old baby and an eleven year old evacuee from Woodford. Her husband did not get home very much as he was working away at Bletchley. Therefore every Friday after school I would cycle to my aunt's home and remain until Sunday evening or Monday morning.

A small cottage a few yards from my parents house became the home of a lady from London and her daughter. I became firm friends with the girl and a short time later they were joined by another little girl, also a relative. The three of us were almost joined at the hip. By this time the war had progressed to the point of food becoming scarce, having said that I can never remember being hungry, you ate what you were given and never complained. I cannot remember seeing any fat children, home cooked food, plenty of fresh air and exercise was the order the of the day.

We three friends decided we wanted to do something for the war effort, so we begged anything from our parents, friends and neighbours that they could spare and turned our hands to craft work. We made all sorts of things from ink wipers, dishcloths, woolly balls, aprons and all sorts of items. We then

went round from door to door to sell our ware for a few coppers. The next step we decided to put on our own concert and make a small entrance charge, we wrote our own songs, I can remember one was 'Down among the Cherry Blossom'. We danced and read poems etc., looking back at it now must have been just awful and very boring to the listeners, but altogether we made the princely sum of £6.50 (which was quite a lot then) and promptly sent it off to Clementine Churchill for her 'Aid to Russia Fund'. We were sent a hand written letter of thanks from the good lady herself.

Early in 1945 an American bomber crashed into my aunt's bungalow killing the evacuee and my little cousin. Seeing her in a little white coffin had a long lasting effect on me and something I will never forget. My aunt was not killed but very seriously injured and was in hospital for many, many months and was very badly crippled – but if it had not been for the RAF Hospital and its treatment and staff she would not have survived in the first place. It was a fantastic hospital.

Here we are all these years later and the three of us are still very good friends. We reach from The Isle of Ely, Cornwall and Canada. Long may we reign?



*Fields in the Fen Country depend on artificial waterways for drainage; here is a Victorian bridge crossing a lode/drain/ditch/dyke: the Fens is a "man-made" landscape highly dependent on drainage.*

## MAKE DO AND MEND; Recycling is nothing new

Today the expressions are often seen on mugs and other trivia.....a reminder of the hard times before and during the war. Over the years I have met many folk who have reminded me of "harder times" and I would like to share some of their thoughts and comments with you.

Back in the early Seventies Mard suggested that a very good way for the children to "earn" spending money was to collect and sell old rag to a dealer in Ely; sacks of the stuff were collected from friends and neighbours and the biggest financial result was forty pence (eight shillings in old money)....would not even buy an ice cream today!

"That might come in useful" was a common comment from an ageing friend; she used to "save" cardboard boxes and would bring them along to the museum as she thought they would be of use to "house" items. My aunt always saved such rubbish to light the fire under her copper each Monday morning for wash-day.

Dear old Rose brought along empty jam jars and recalled her younger days when a halfpenny, or a paper windmill, would be exchanged for them; today they are put in the recycling bin....unless of course the householder is a keen WI member and makes jam or pickles to fill them.

During the war-time shortages many adults gave up sugar in their cups of tea; farmers' wives were advised in the press to "use" shredded sugar beet to sweeten such desserts as gooseberry pies; yes, I have tried it!

Lydia recalled that in her childhood before WW1 a real "treat" was to have fried birds eggs collected from the nests in the hedges; on one occasion when carefully transporting them back to her house in her hat, she stumbled and fell making such a mess....raw eggs are yucky!

My granny was diabetic (always referred to as sugar diabetes) and in early spring she used to gather dandelion leaves with which to make sandwiches....what would children think of that fare today? Another "fresh" treat were the new shoots on hawthorn bushes which locally were called "bread and cheese".

Pet rabbits were not bought food from pet food shops which exist now....children were sent out round the roadsides to gather greenery ..., and vegetable peelings from the kitchen were recycled as food in the hutches.

Mums who were good at sewing turned the tops of trousers into neat straight skirts for girls to wear for school....before the days of school uniforms; being of very strong material mine never seemed to wear out.

Jumble sales were very popular and wow betide the organisers if keen customers were admitted before the time appointed on the posters; knitted garments were carefully pulled

undone and the wool washed in hanks to be made up into "new" garments. Thick material was cut in strips and created into floor covering in the form of pegged rugs.....a craft which is still popular with activity days at the museum today thinner material such as cotton dresses were cut up and used as dusters.....I still have some made by my mother over twenty years ago!

One cottager hand stitched pants for her grandsons from her old vests.....who wears vests today? Another use for that form of underwear was cloths to wash the floors....who remembers the stone floors of old farm houses? Such hard work to keep them clean.

Many Ag. Labs, having worked hard on the farms during day-light hours, spent their evenings repairing their childrens' shoes to "make them last another turn"...hob nails in boys boots and Blakeys for the girls.

My dad used to tell the story that back in the Twenties he used to boil small potatoes for his pigs to eat; one family of small boys used to call in on their way from school to eat them as they were so hungry....and one Easter when he bought them some Hot Cross buns from the bakery delivery, they thought it was a banquet.

Growing one's own vegetables was essential for village folk; summer evenings were spent planting, hoeing and weeding....there were no Tescos or freezers in the war years in my locality. Often surplus produce from garden/allotments were put on a stall for others to buy....an amusing story happened when a surplus of marrows was grown; the owner put them on a table with the note "FREE, help yourself" at the end of the day his pile had increased with his neighbour adding his surplus; NOT a popular vegetable.

Farmers allowed house wives to go into the corn fields after harvest and gather the odd corn that remained; the process was called GLEANING....a tradition which one can read of with Ruth in the bible; poorer folk relied on this corn to be ground at the local mill into flour for baking....or to be fed to chickens which provided eggs for the table.

"Make do and Mend" is a cliché which, in view of the economic climate, we might well have to do in the future....for those of us who lived during the war years, it will be nothing new; I am not sure how the younger generation will cope..

## A Wartime Childhood

From my mother a protective hug  
Overhead the rumble of a Doodlebug;  
On her face, the fear when the engine stopped.....  
I can't even recall now where it dropped.

From the RAF hospital, in bandages swathed,  
Came airmen, the result of bombing raids braved  
The clanking train as it went over the river\*  
Pulling truck-loads of bombs for more airmen to deliver.

Over the fields by the stickle-back stream\*\*  
Were men behind barbed wire – prisoners it would seem.  
“B for banana “ in my alphabet book;  
I was ten when my first bite I took.

Another thing, I thought was funny,  
That “coupons” appeared more important than money.....  
“When the war is over, Daddy will come home”  
.....But he didn't.

\*River Ouse at Ely

\*\* now the Golf Course off Cambridge Road

**A museum visitor who remembered the basic War Rations wrote out the following:  
Sweets, butter, cheese and bacon....4 oz (quarter of pound)  
Tea, marg. and lard....2 oz  
Sugar...half a pound, one egg (if available) and dried egg powder  
Meat...just over a shilling's worth (6p) with no ration on liver and sausage  
At Christmas 4 oz dried fruit; bread was not rationed till after the war.  
Coupons were needed for luxuries of tinned good etc when available  
Farmers wives were encouraged to boil sliced sugar beet to make syrupy sauces;  
extra sugar rations were supplied to WI groups to make jam from the free fruits of  
the hedgerows; parsnips mashed up were regarded as mock banana for sandwich  
fillings and hips were gathered to make into rose hip syrup, rich in vitamin C  
Some housewives saved the cream off the top of bottles of milk, for several days,  
shook it violently in a screw-topped jar, to make a little homemade butter for  
Sunday tea. Dripping from cooked meat was also a very useful tea-time spread for  
toast by the fire. Today, toast by the fire is almost unheard of by present-day  
children!**

## UNSEEN DISPLAYS OF THE FARMLAND MUSEUM - LD

While the collection was based in the garden at Haddenham (1969-1992) a lot of interest was created by the war exhibits which had been given by local people and those from further afield; all were catalogued and are now in store at Denny. The interest shown last year in the outbreak of WWI, and the celebration this year, 2015, in the ending of hostilities, has prompted me to recall some of those war-time exhibits.

Fragments of the Zeppelin which crashed in Theberton; a section through a "shell"; memorial discs of those who did not return and cap badges from the RFC (which later became the RAF) a guardsman's dress sword and a helmet which was dug up, all rusty from a nearby field were on display and many are now over a century old.

Items from WWII include German and Japanese mines together with bombs, all of which had been tested by the Army Bomb Disposal Squad from Colchester; hand grenades; ration, clothing and petrol coupons; medical instruments and most popular of all, the gas masks for adults and babies which visitors both old and young enjoyed "trying on".

Newspaper cuttings and other ephemera brought back memories to many of our visitors, including the daughter of Winston Churchill, Mary Soames, who was staying one weekend with her school friend Hon. Margaret Fox, the wife of our local vicar.

We were invited to put on a display from our WWII exhibits at Churchill College, Cambridge on the occasion of its accepting the Churchill papers and our Oral History Archive contains interviews made with survivors of both wars.

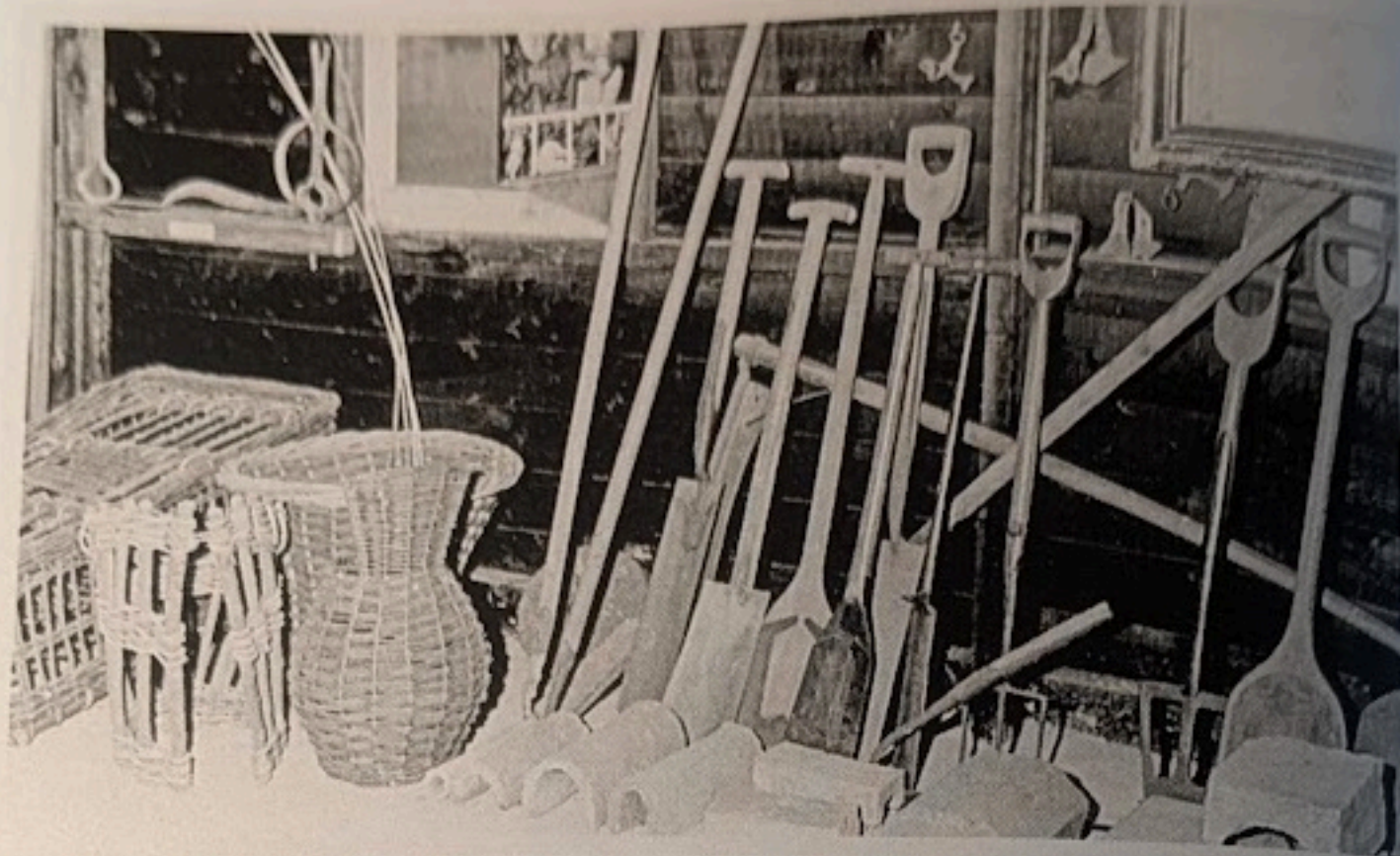
Perhaps some of the most unusual war exhibits are a wood water bottle belonging to a soldier and dated 1862; a rubber bullet as used in the Irish uprising in the Seventies; a helmet from the Falkland conflict and a file containing sand (which was changed to glass) from the testing of an atomic bomb together with a first-hand account by the physics professor, Robert Frische.

Let us hope that these museum objects help bring warfare to its conclusion for all time.

## A – Z of War Words

- A – air raid shelters, Aid to Russia fund. A.R.P.  
B – bombs, black-out, Black market, barrage balloons  
C – “Careless Talk costs Lives”, camouflage, coupons, Churchill  
D – dog fights, double summer time, “Dangerous talk costs lives”  
E – evacuees, ENSA entertainment, eggs DRIED  
F – fire-men, flying fortress, food rationing (coupons)  
G – gas masks, gleaning, Glenn Miller Band, Gracie Fields  
H – Home Guard, Hurricane planes, HARD WORK  
I – invasion of Channel Islands, identity cards  
J – Jeeps (ideal for troop and equipment transportation)  
K – King’s radio message, Kindness shown to strangers  
L – lighting in homes not to be shown, lights on cars screened  
M – “Make do and Mend”, munitions, mines, milk (dried)  
N – NAAFI (navy, army and air-force institute) canteens  
O – “Over paid, over sexed and over here”, Ovalteenies  
P – pill boxes, petrol rationing, Pathe news, pigeons  
Q – Queues for food/clothing/anything!  
R – Ration books, Red Cross, refugees, railings (salvage)  
S – siren, search-lights, spies, Spitfires, submarines  
T – tanks, tin hats, trains full of service men and ammunitions  
U – utility (signs on clothes/furniture), United Church services  
V – V1 and V2, Vera Lynn, VE and VJ Days, VICTORY  
W – “Waste not, want not”, Women’s Land Army, WVS, WI  
X – xtra vigilance, xtra savings for War Effort, xtra rations  
Y – YANKS (service men from USA), Young Volunteers  
Z – Zeppelins, air ships used in WW1

Space in which to add more War Words:



*Drainage in the Fens is vital; here are hand tools that were used before machines dredged out the dykes and lodes; willow basket work was made by Harrisons of St. Ives for Anglia TV.*



*Three-horse powered reaping machine last used in 1947; belonged to Jack Kerridge, a farmer at Littleport and a helper at the museum; the largest of the horse-drawn implements.*

Five

Childhood  
Verses

## Rhymes recalled from a Forties Childhood

The first two were passed down orally long before Texting was invented!

YYUR, YYUB. ICURY 4me. (Too wise you are....)

If the Bmt, put some:

If the B.putting: (If the grate be empty....)

Time is featured in the following:

If you in the morning throw minutes away,  
You can't pick them up in the course of the day.  
You may hurry and flurry, scurry and worry –  
You've lost them forever, forever and aye.

Sixty seconds make a minute.  
How much good can you do in it?

The wise old owl sat in the oak  
The more he heard the less he spoke.  
The less he spoke the more he heard  
Why don't more people copy that wise old bird?

A "Spanish" verse:

Dardago forte lorres onaro.

Demaint lorez, demis trux

Fulla shepe an enz an dux....which being translated reads:

There they go, forty lorries in a row;

Them not lorries, they are trucks

Full of sheep and hens and ducks.

Two quotes from a local preacher.....The Greek inscription featured in many churches and translated as "Jesus Christ, son of God" ..... looks like IHS (in Greek lettering) so he translated it as "IN HIS SERVICE" and "RSVP" on invitations, reply soon by post!

Some go to church to take a walk, some go there to laugh and talk  
Some go there to meet a friend, some go there their time to spend.  
Some go there for observation, some go there for speculation.  
Some go there to doze and nod but the wise go there to worship God.

Another quote from Sunday School days....JOY

Put JESUS first, OTHERS next, YOURSELF last...

And the grace said before school dinners:

For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen

Rhythm of the steam train from Littleport to Kings Lynn: BREAD AND BUTTER, CUT IT THIN. DOWN TO LYNN AND BACK AGIN...interesting to note that now in the twenty-first century it is possible to live in Littleport and catch an hourly service (soon to be half-hourly?) up to the capital or to Lynn for shopping. No wonder the car/bike parks there are FULL during the week

## Numbers are fascinating; but why associate anniversaries in this way?

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### Gifts for anniversaries.

<u>1st</u> Cotton.	<u>2nd</u> Paper, porcelain	<u>3rd</u> Leather.	<u>4th</u> Fruit, flowers, onyx.
<u>5th</u> Wood, agate	<u>6th</u> Sugar, opal, plate	<u>7th</u> Wool, copper tableware	
<u>8th</u> Bronze, pottery	<u>9th</u> Willow, watch	<u>10th</u> Tin, aluminium	
<u>11th</u> Steel, scent, soap	<u>12th</u> Silk, linen, garnet	<u>13th</u> Lace, barometer, moonstone	
<u>14th</u> Ivory, moss agate, clock.	<u>15th</u> Crystal	<u>16th</u> Table silver, topaz	
<u>17th</u> Accessories, amethyst.	<u>18th</u> Coloured gems, zircon.		
<u>19th</u> Furniture.	<u>20th</u> China, emerald.	<u>21st</u> Aquamarine.	
<u>25th</u> Silver.	<u>30th</u> Pearl.	<u>35th</u> Coral, jade.	
<u>40th</u> Ruby.	<u>45th</u> Sapphire.	<u>50th</u> Gold jewellery, gold plated items.	
<u>55th</u> Emerald.	<u>60th</u> Diamond.	<u>70th</u> Platinum.	

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### Another number connection!

How many wise men were there? 3 – multiply that by the number of their gifts = 9, put the 3 and 9 together – 39 that's the number of books in the Old testament, now multiply the 3 and 9 = 27 and that's the number of books in the New testament, add them together and you get 66 which is the total number of books in the bible.

From school days... an easy way to remember the 9 times table: multiples always add up to 9... $18 = 1+8=9$ ... $27=2+7=9$ ... $36 = 3+6=9$  etc and note the tens column increases 123 and the units column decreases 9876

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Confusion between SIX and SICK... in poor fen speech.

“A farmer had 26 sheep; one died; how many were left?”... answer (depending on how the figure 6 is pronounced)... 19 or 25.

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From an old map it is interesting to see the spellings of local places: Reaney's Place names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely is a useful reference for their origins.

In the 1600s.	THE ILE OF ELY
CHATTERES	THETFORDE
WICHFORD	CHIPNAM
MEPOLE	EXNYNG
WILBERTON	RECHE
HADNAM	WIKEN
ERITH	MILDNALL
WATER BEACHE	HELGEY
LAND BEACHE	SOUTHREY
NORNEY	BRAME
OWTWELL	BEDELHEY

The Horse's Prayer; so many members of the older fraternity recall the importance of HORSE POWER on the farms; here is a prayer expressing the close link between the animal and its keeper.

## THE HORSE'S PRAYER



TO THEE, MY MASTER, I offer my prayer. Feed me, water and care for me, and, when the day's work is done, provide me with shelter, a clean, dry bed and a stall wide enough for me to lie down in comfort and always be kind to me.

Talk to me. Your voice often means as much to me as the reins. Pet me sometimes, that I may serve you the more gladly and learn to love you. Do not jerk the reins, and do not whip me when going uphill.

Never strike, beat or kick me when I do not understand what you want, but give me a chance to understand you. Watch me, and if I fail to do your bidding, see if something is not wrong with my harness or feet.

Do not check me so that I cannot have the free use of my head. If you insist that I wear blinkers so that I cannot see behind me as it was intended I should, I pray you be careful that the blinkers stand well out from my eyes.

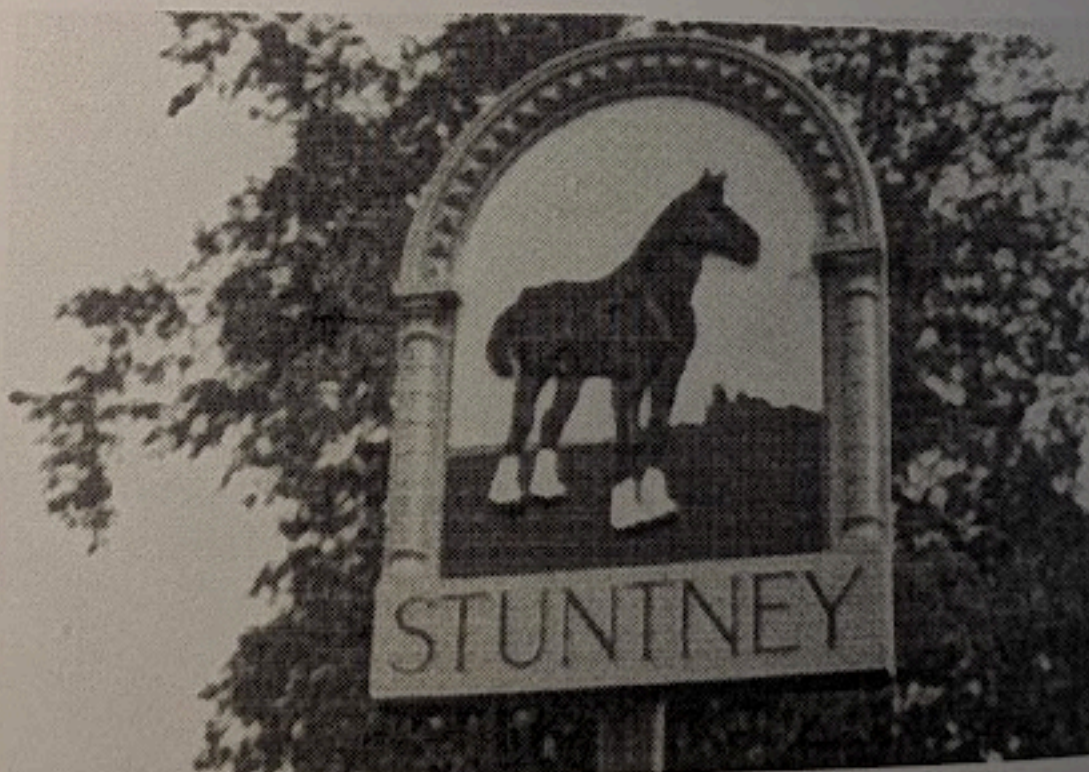
Do not overload me, or hitch me where water will drip on me. Keep me well shod. Examine my teeth when I do not eat; I may have an ulcerated tooth, and that, you know, is very painful.

Do not tie my head in an unnatural position, or take away my best defense against flies and mosquitoes by cutting off my tail.

I cannot tell you when I am thirsty, so give me clean, cool water often. Save me, by all means in your power, from that fatal disease – the glanders. I cannot tell you in words when I am sick, so watch me, that by signs you may know my condition.

Give me all possible shelter from the hot sun, and put a blanket on me, not when I am working but when I am standing in the cold. Never put a frosty bit in my mouth; first warm it by holding it a moment in your hands.

I try to carry you and your burdens without a murmur, and wait patiently for you long hours of the day or night. Without the power to choose my shoes or path, I sometimes fall on the hard pavements which I have often prayed might not be of wood but of such nature as to give me a safe and sure footing. Remember that I must be ready at any moment to lose my life in your service. And finally, O MY MASTER, when my useful strength is gone, do not turn me out to starve or freeze, or sell me to some cruel owner, to be slowly tortured and starved to death; but do thou, My Master take my life in the kindest way, and your God will reward you here and hereafter. You will not consider me irreverent if I ask this in the name of Him who was born in a Stable.



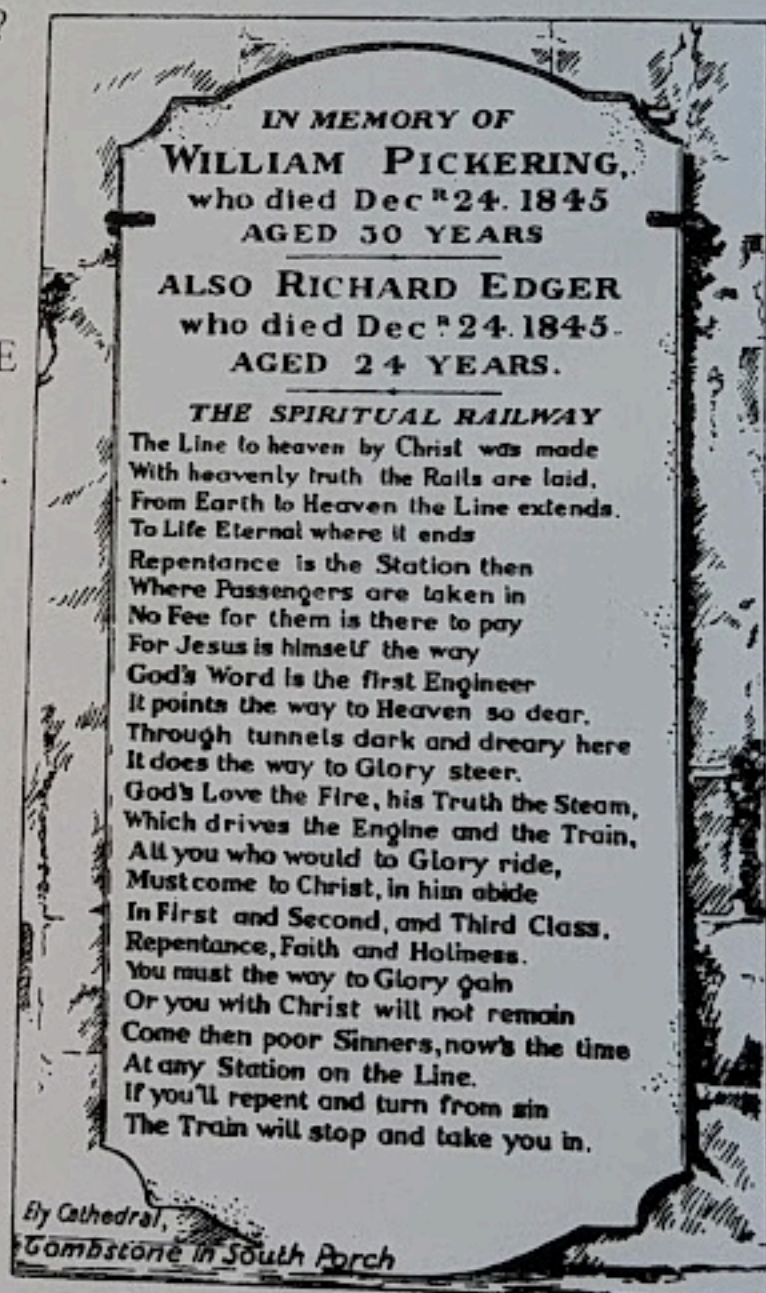
There is so much good in the worst of us  
And so much bad in the best of us  
That..... can you add the final two lines?

How old are you? As old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth.  
Where are you going? There and back to see how far it is.  
Children should be SEEN and not HEARD..... and not ask awkward questions!

A more modern verse I was given but cannot acknowledge it, as like so many it was written by ANON... no wonder visitors from abroad find English difficult!

When the English tongue we speak  
Why is BREAK not rhymed with WEAK?  
Won't you tell me why it's true  
We say SEW but also FEW?  
And the maker of a verse  
Cannot rhyme his HORSE with WORSE?  
BEARD is not the same as HEARD  
CORD is different from WORD.  
COW is cow but low is LOW  
SHOE is never rhymed with FOE  
Think of HOSE and DOSE and LOSE  
And think of GOOSE and yet of CHOOSE  
Think of COMB and TOMB and BOMB,  
DOLL and ROLL and HOME and SOME.  
And since PAY is rhymed with SAY  
Why not PAID with SAID I pray?  
Think of BLOOD and FOOD and GOOD  
MOULD is not pronounced like COULD.  
Why is it DONE, but GONE and LONE  
Is there any reason known?  
To sum it up, it seems to me  
Thank sounds and letters don't agree.

To end this list of verses is one which was drawn to my attention when I was a member of Ely Cathedral club in the early Fifties..... it just may have been written by the Poet of the Fens, Harrison.



An email which was in circulation some years ago reported the following number of WORDS used in official documents... (the truth of them cannot be verified alas!) bringing WORDS THREE right up to date.

Number of words were used to create the following:

(There must be a warning here!)

Pythagorean Theorem:.....	24 words
Lord's Prayer: .....	66 words
Archimedes' Principle:.....	67 words
10 Commandments:.....	179 words
Gettysburg Address:.....	286 words
Declaration of Independence: .....	1,300 words
US Constitution with all 27 amendments:.....	7,818 words
EU regulations on the sale of cabbage:.....	26,911 words

PUTS THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE, DOESN'T IT?

#### ADDENDA

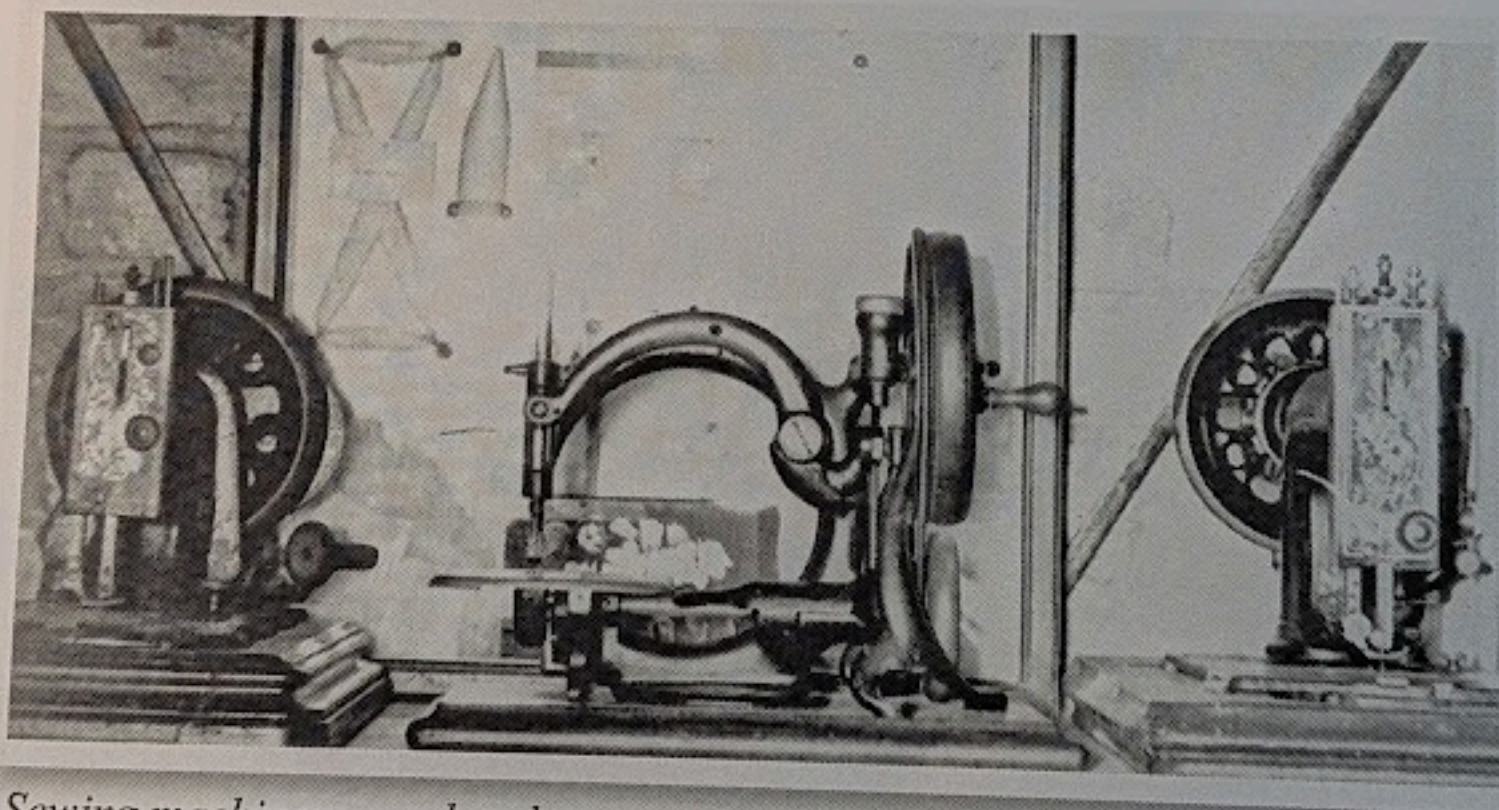
A spelling error in WORDS TWO mentions MARTROUS which OUGHT to be spelt MARSTROUS; it was reported by Margaret Haylock (former pupil and teacher at Ely High School) that it was well-used in the Prickwillow area where she was a child and meant very big (corruption of monstrous/marvellous?)

It would be interesting to hear of any more "local" words common to only a very small region... a request for the details of JEARSE (meaning YES) and DOW (meaning NO) appeared in the local paper recently; they are being researched by a professor from Japan who remembers his grand-parents using them; his family originated from the Isle area.

A cousin of mine, returning from Sheffield to visit us here in the Ely area after a break of forty years recalled "My ole duck" as a term of endearment..... can you add more?



*How did we manage without plastics? Colman' is a firm that continues at Norwich in mustard production, a crop grown throughout the Eastern Counties.*



*Sewing machines were hand-operated as well as by treadle; they were often passed down from one generation to the next.... regarded as really "special", often wedding presents.*

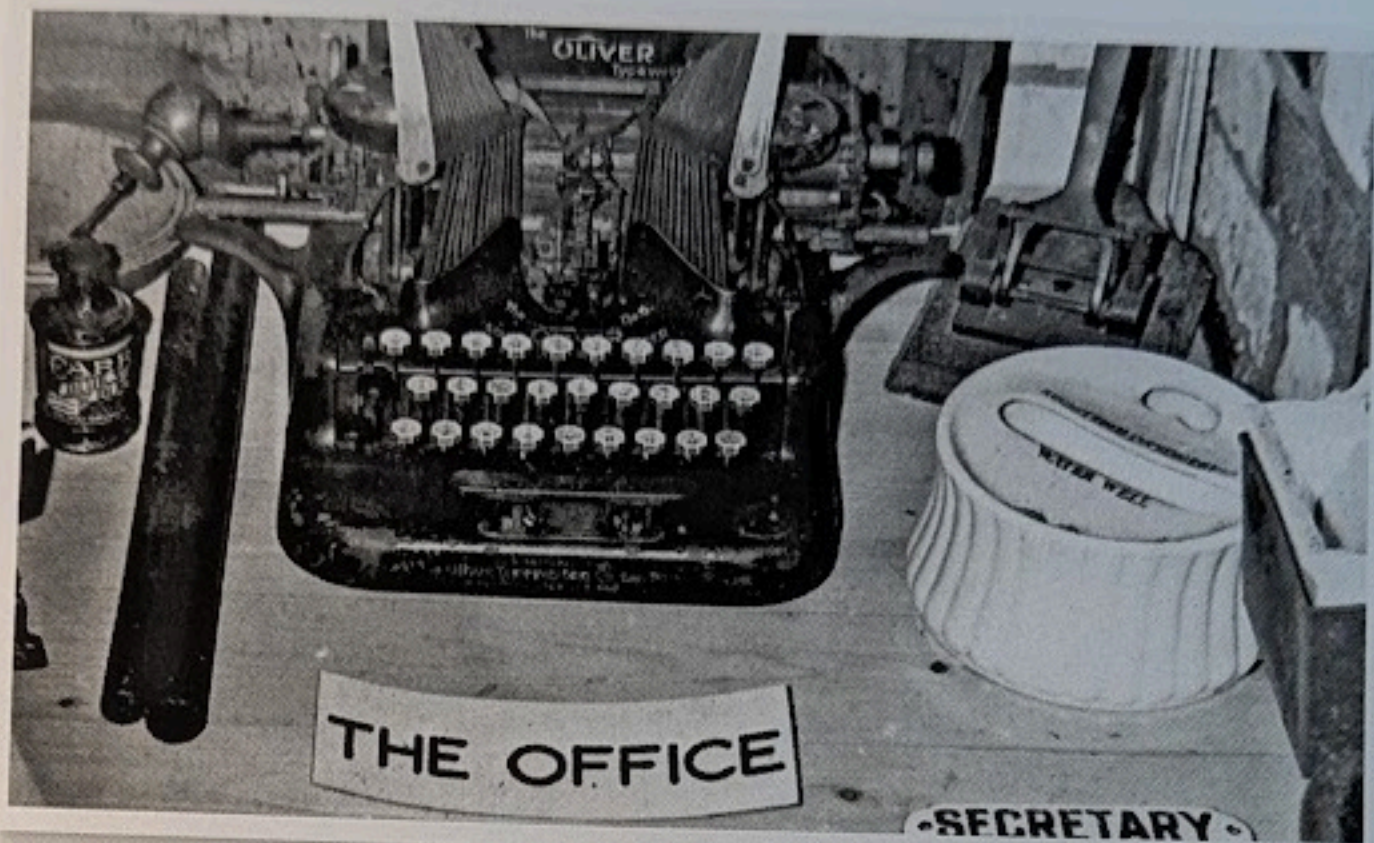


*A peaceful scene  
at Wicken Fen:  
"the silver birch is  
a dainty lady" on  
the edge of the lode  
(man-made waterway  
for transporting  
products of reed,  
turves etc from the  
Fen)*

*The Fens produce a high  
percentage of the potatoes  
consumed in the country,  
with packing stations at  
March, Chatteris and  
Wisbech; here is a verse  
about the HUMBLE  
SPUD.*

#### THE HUMBLE SPUD

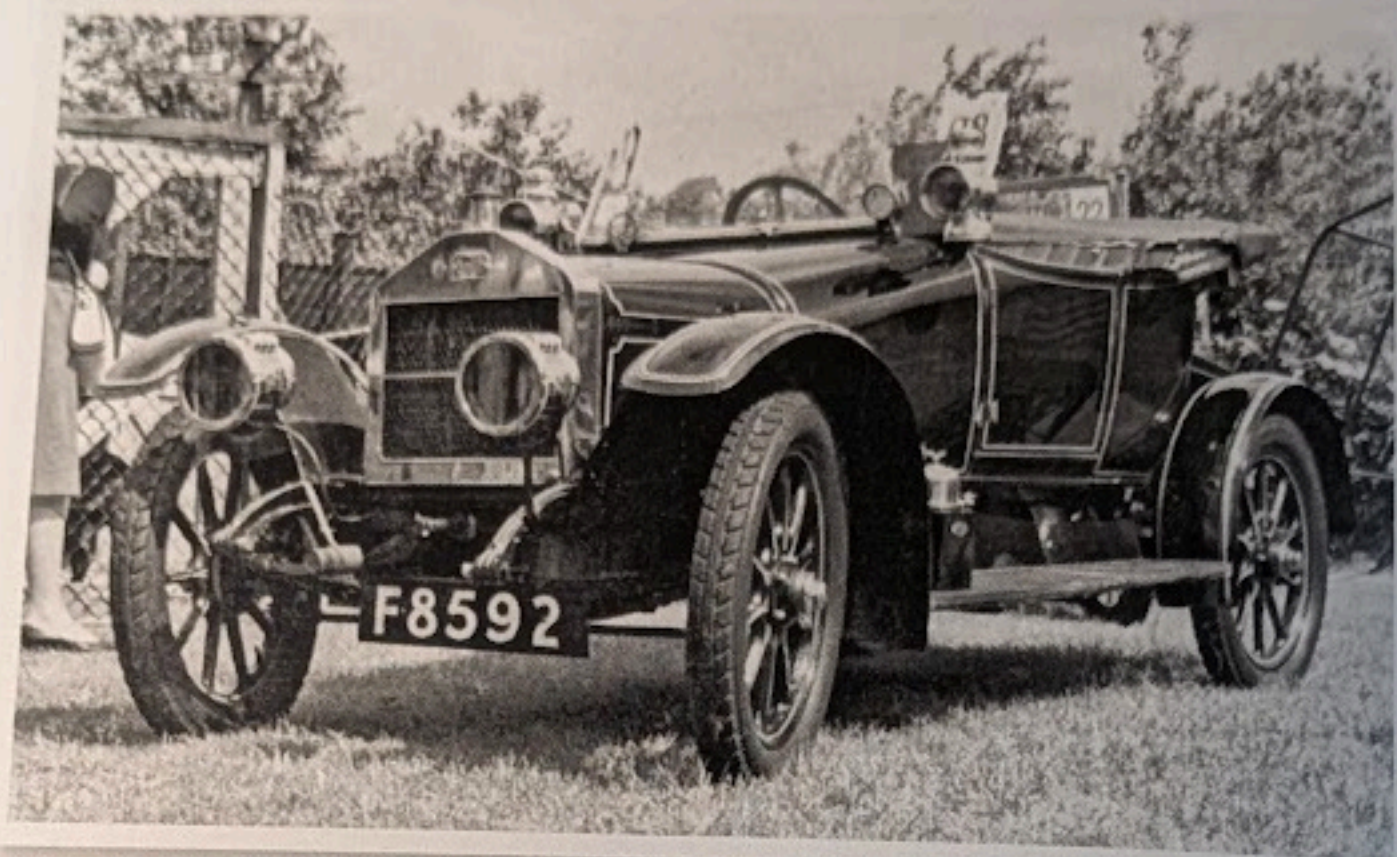
Just ponder on the potato awhile  
Is there a vegetable more versatile?  
Financially people are making a packet,  
Selling me baked still wearing my jacket.  
Fry me in with a piece of fish  
And I'm still the major part of an expensive dish.  
And consider, it may come as a surprise,  
I'm just like a human, because I have eyes.  
Which reminds me, talking of sight,  
I am *not* very pretty when I catch the blight.  
But most of the time I am lovely I think,  
Cause I come in white and many shades of pink.  
Finally, one fact that should be known,  
I bet I will continue to be grown.



*The office before the days of electric typewriters and computers; who remembers "short-hand" lessons? What about the qwerty keyboard?*



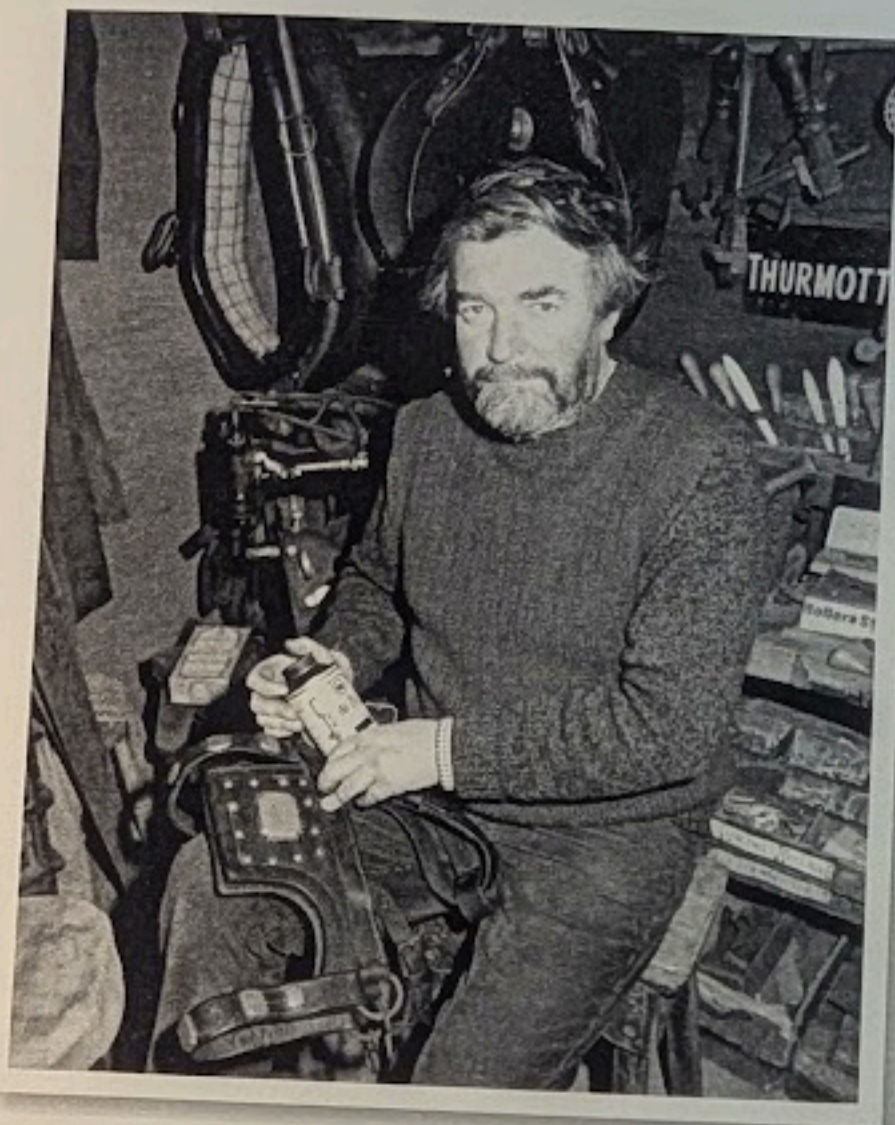
*Lighting was very basic..... here are candle-lit lamps together with one from a miner in Durham. Many Cambridgeshire villages did not get mains electricity until after the war.*



*One of many vintage cars which came to the museum as part of the tour of Cambridgeshire.... old vehicles are becoming very popular (eg. Traction rallies).*



*Farmland Friends dressed up for Blossoms and Bygones, the annual event each May to raise funds for Arkenstall Village Centre – 1971-2013*



*Replica of Thurmott's Saddler's shop is now at Iron Bridge Gorge Museum and is operational some days; harness and saddlery were important village trades.*



*Blacksmith/wheelwright's shop built at a cost of £70; now re-erected at Burwell Museum; drawing by Peter Jeevar.*

Sketch map to show the Hundred Foot Washes between the two Bedford Rivers and villages in the locality.

