

My Memoirs

- Book One -

by

Levi Armsby

To Maurice who asked me to record some
of my experiences in earlier life. I hope
that he will be interested in the
contents of these pages.

With best wishes

Levi Armsby

As one grows older the memory often begins to fail in some ways. Generally things that happened in early life can be remembered better than during middle age or even later.

By starting as far back as I can remember and working more or less systematically through my life has helped to bring back memories of things I had forgotten especially names of people and only by going through the alphabet letter by letter and thinking hard have I been able to recall many names. Often I can picture the person in my mind's eye without knowing who it is. On the otherhand a name springs into mind sometimes when I have'nt been thinking about it.

Thinking and writing has helped me to pass many hours away without getting bored which seems to trouble so many people these days. I had hoped that mum would help me but she is not interested. Anyway I have made an effort and hope it will be accepted in that light.

By introducing machines and various ways of working many jobs have been discontinued. So that they should not be forgotten I have written in detail of some things that happened as a fact of life.

For instance the combine harvester has taken the place of many people in the harvest field and the picturesque views of thatched corn stacks have vanished from numerous farmyards in the country. Now very few people know exactly how this was done. The same could be said of clay-ing by hand and other kinds of tool work on the land, some means of fishing are illegal today, also traps to catch various animals of prey, some birds are now safe from the poachers net, which may have been a bird cage pet. The lark can now sing with rising delight, after being free from the trammeller at night. Machines have made work easier to do, and put many people on the dole too. The way of life in my younger days, could well make history in various ways.

Reflecting on West Norfolk dialect when two men meet goes something like the following:-

- 1st. "Waht cheer"
2nd. "This is no Shire. This Norfolk". Being clever
1st. "Howre goin ^{on} no"?
2nd. "Bart half" meaning half right and half left.
1st. "Where yor orf tu"?
2nd. "I'm goin arter sum taters down the fen".
1st. "Well I shell hetta goo cheeroo".
2nd. "So long. Mind how yu goo".
1st. "Ritoo".

Some other words used were:-

Doo'nt, oo'nt, war'nt, shar'nt, car'nt, dar'nt and so-on.

During the past few years Maurice has been very keen to know more about my early life. There may be various reasons why I have not told him much about them. Firstly, I have not got the gift of the gab like some people. Secondly, when he was becoming old enough to take interest in ones history there were strong rumours of war breaking out in Europe. This was 1938 and 1939 when my spare time was occupied acting as air raid warden for Chettisham, near Ely, Cambs. where we lived. My duties included fitting and instructing the people about gas masks and self defence. Unpaid of course. On September 3rd, 1939 war was declared with Germany. Six weeks later we took over the Anchor Public House at Little Downham. So now with a full time job as Mole Catcher, a pub with an acre and half of land to work and having joined the Home Guard there was'nt much time to think of earlier life but now (better late than never and having retired) I will try and put on record as far back as I can remember including some things that my parents told me.

Starting with my parents. My fathers' name was Robert Albert Armsby. He had four brothers. The oldest, Uncle Bill 20 years his seniour left home soon after my father was born and lived in the Loftus area near Whitby, North East Yorks. He married and apparently had a large family so any Armsby in the North East could be our relations. The only member of the family I saw was cousin Florry when I was very young.

Uncle Harry was married and had a family of two boys and two girls. They lived about a mile from us at Ten Mile Bank.

Uncle Fred was a time serving soldier before the first world war. He was married in London and had one son. When the 1914 war started he was recalled and was a Sergeant Instructor training recruits. After a time he was sent to France where he developed tuberculosis and was discharged.

A few months later with Aunt Alice and cousin Eric he came to live in Denver, Nr. Downham Market where he gradually deteriorated and died after about 12 months. Aunt Alice died from the same complaint about 9 months later. Eric went to live with relations in London and I have since lost touch with him.

Uncle Charlie single, lived with his mother in Hilgay. He was a small holder farming about six acres of land and was a part-time mole catcher.

I can not remember my grandfather Armsby and I only saw my grandmother once. My brother Albert and I went to see her when I was about 8 years old. She seemed a kindly but stern old lady and welcomed us with a piece of cake and a glass of home made wine which she said was rather tarty. She never came to see us and we had been forbidden to go and see her. We never knew the reason why.

My mothers' name was Rosetta Porter before marriage. She had two sisters. The eldest aunt Mary Ellen married to John Kerridge and lived for many years in Uxbridge, Middlesex. They had two boys and two girls.

Aunt Hannah married John Bowers who lived all their lives in Southery Norfolk had one son and two daughters.

My grandparents Porter were small farmers near Southery. Grandfather died when I was quite young and after a time my grandmother went to live in Ely, Cambs. I remember her quite well. She came to see us as often as she could and wore a bonnet and a cape covered with very small dark coloured beads. She was very kind to us and we were always pleased to see her. When we were able to read she sent us each a little letter. After she died mother had her cape and it was kept in a drawer for many years, I never knew what happened to it.

I was born in a four roomed cottage that stood end ways to the east bank of the Great Ouse river. The cottage comprised a living-room, kitchen and two bedrooms with a tool shed against the river bank. It was in the parish of Hilgay Nr. Downham Market, Norfolk. The Great Ouse started as a small brook near Brackley in Northamptonshire and rises near the Cotswold Hills on the borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. It passes through Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk on its 160 mile journey to the Wash near Kings Lynn. At Denver Sluice the river becomes tidal and is joined by the Hundred Foot or New Bedford river. Where the river passed our house it was about 100 yds. wide and the banks were built up to stop the land from being flooded.

The scenery was not very exciting because the land is flat, especially towards the West. On that side of the river where there is a gravel road on the top of the bank in places and along the fen side in others. There are farm yards and houses near the road. The distance between them being according to the size of the farm. Most of the

farm yards had poplar trees around the outside to shelter the corn stacks from strong winds. These trees were tall and quick growing. There were also isolated farms yards further into the fen beside a drove.

About half a mile up stream was a church followed by more small farms and houses which helped to make up the village of Ten Mile Bank about 1 1/4 miles from where we lived.

The village had three public houses, a school and two general store shops one of which included a post office and both of them had a bakery. People living near these shops would often take their yorkshire puddings to be baked. A road went due west from the river, through the village to Hilgay Fen Railway Station which was about three miles from Hilgay. There was a toll bridge over the river with a road going east to Modney Bridge one mile to where the road turned left one mile to Hilgay and right two miles to Southery.

Looking towards the east was a little more interesting because there were large plantations in the distance and Hilgay village would be partly seen on a slight hill about 2 1/2 miles away.

There was no road on our side of the river but there were several houses at intervals by the bank side and a few small farms. Going towards Ten Mile Bank father had a long garden about 12 yards wide. Part of it was fruit and part vegetable. Near the house he kept chickens and pigs.

Next was a small farm owned by Dibber Brundle who often complained about various things in a comical way with a loud voice. His wife was a very refined and smart woman. Sometimes Dibber's voice was too much for her so she would go and live with her brother, for several weeks, who kept a public house near Ten Mile Bank bridge. This did not please her husband who complained to neighbours with a loud voice said "A nice little cottage down there on the farm. Can't live there! Must go and live long a brother Bill". In reply to someone who said that farmers were doing well he said "You never know what's going to happen. You yoke your horses in the morning and get going nicely when straw shoot out of the horses collar or your horse might drop dead and often we work day and night".

Near Dibber's house was "Hunts Sluice" with a hump back bridge over a small river called the Twenty Foot that drained land in Methwold fen between 3 and 5 miles east. There was a square flat topped pumping engine which was used when the water could not flow naturally through the sluice doors. From the bridge to the outlet into the river Ouse a brick wall was built to protect the banks. The top of one wall sloped sharply down about 3 ft. every 10 yards.

Further along the bank was an old house where grandfather Armsby and family used to live. It had a long garden which was on a 99 year lease. My father made good use of the garden until the lease ran out.

Next lived a spinster known as Liz Walter Cotlin, who had two sons much older than me. She always wore a mans peak cap and was not ashamed of being unmarried. As soon as possible after her sons were born she worked on the land and kept herself and children without any public assistance or as far as one knew without help from the fathers of the children.

There were other houses further along also a Baptist chapel which was well attended.

In one house worth mentioning there lived a shoe maker named Pell who made most peoples shoes and boots by hand.

Down stream about 100 yds. lived Mr. and Mrs. Jim Kerridge. He worked a steam engine with a huge paddle wheel that drained water from West Fen Hilgay into the Ouse when necessary and he farmed five acres of land in his spare time.

Further along by the river another Robert Armsby lived with his wife and family of four boys and three girls working a farm of about 200 acres. He had a son Robert who later had a son Robert. Naturally they were all called Bob so to identify them my father being the tallest was known as long Bob. Farmer Bob was short and thick set. His son was small was called little Bob and his son smaller still was called son Bob. For many years they lived within 3/4 of a mile of each other.

When I was born I had a brother Albert 3 years and 3 months old and a sister Harriett one year and ten months old.

I can not remember much of what happened before I was three years old but my parents told me that I was mischevious and accident prone as soon as I could walk.

When I was about 2 1/2 years old I remember climbing up the rails of the pig sty to look at the pigs and fell in just where they used as a lavatory. My mother ran and pulled me out. She was too frightened that the sow would get me to be angry and I should'nt think I had the smell of violets.

A few months later father had prepared some tar, for the shed, in a large round iron pot and it so happened mother had just dressed me in a new cream suit but I must see what was in the pot so I climbed up and fell in. Father was very angry and mother told me later that he would have thrashed me but she grabbed me and carried me onto the stairs where I remember her cleaning the tar off me with butter. I don't know what happened to the suit. Probably it was burned!

During my early days father worked for Tom Howlet, a farmer, who lived across the river opposite and one day when I was about 3 1/2 years old father took his sow across the river in a boat to be served by Tom Howlet's boar. Meanwhile I was playing with Albert and some other children around Hunts Sluice running along and sliding down the slopes of the wall which I did once too often and slid into deep water. Of course I could'nt swim so I and the other children screamed bringing Jim Kerridge running along the bank. He could'nt swim either but he got a long pole hoping I would get hold of it. I could'nt so he tried to hold me up.

My father had heard the screams and rushed across the river in his boat. By the time he arrived I was just going down the third time when he pushed me to the shore with the oar and Mr. Kerridge pulled me out. They carried me home wrapped in a blanket and put me to bed where I remember being fussed up afterwards.

Jim Kerridge and I were great friends after that and he used to fondly call me Bonus. Perhaps he thought that he had helped to give me an extra lease of life. Every year he had a lot of very nice mellow gooseberries in his garden and I was the only one allowed to go in and help myself. He would say "Eat all you can and pocket none". I often went to see him at his water engine and sometimes I was allowed to start the machine which, when the steam was up and a lever moved, only needed a little pressure on the big paddle wheel to start it turning. Coal was taken up the river to the water engines by barge and men carried it in bags on their backs to the engine sheds.

Father had 1 1/2 acres of land next to Jim Kerridges'. There were other small lots in the field which belong to the Hilgay Feoffees and came close to our house. One year father had half an acres of broad beans which, in those days, were pulled up, tied into shoves and stood up in stacks. At the time they were ripe father was very busy with other work so when a tramp called Jumbo came along father thought here was an opportunity to get the beans pulled and a bargain was made for the job to be done for a few shillings. To save time father paid Jumbo and mother gave him some bread and cheese and some tea before he started.

SiHocks

Jumbo, a middle aged man with a hump on his back and with blood shot eyes was well known and used to come round about twice a year. Although he was a tramp most people trusted him. As it happened this particular morning there was a thick fog and Jumbo was seen to start work but soon he disappeared into the fog and we never saw him again. When father came home the fog had cleared and he soon realised what a B.F. he had been to pay in advance. Jumbo had only done a few shocks. Most of us children were pleased he didn't come back because we were afraid of him although he was supposed to be harmless.

As I grew older I was able to climb higher and as our lean-to coal shed was built up to the river bank it was fairly easy to climb onto that and then onto the roof of the house. I was on the roof one day when I saw Jim Kerridge coming along the bank. Hoping that he hadn't seen me I climbed into the chimney pot but he had seen me alright and thinking of my safety he told my parents. You may be sure they were not amused.

Soon after I was four years old even my mother, who was very kind to us all, thought it best that I should go to school.

I remember starting in the infants class at Ten Mile Bank where we tried to make things with plasticine and write letters in trays of sand. There were large coloured beads on wire fixed to a frame and we were taught to count by sliding the beads across the wires. I was beginning to enjoy this and walking or running to school with Albert and Harriett often along the muddy river bank but trouble soon caught up with me. I was enjoying

swinging on the high iron gate leading from the playground to the road when someone pushed it too hard and nipped the end of my middle finger of the left hand which burst open and bled badly. The teacher (Miss Bedford) gave me half a big apple to try to calm me while she dressed my finger but the apple was soon covered in blood so that did'nt help much. I still have the scar on my finger.

I can only remember being late for school once and that was in those early days. Somehow I got left behind and when I went over the Ten Mile bridge a lout known as Ally Slooper stood near the village pump at the top of the station road not far from the school. He said "If you fetch a can from Miss Bedford's (the teachers' home) you will not be late". Innocently I went after this can but Miss Bedford's mother knew nothing about it. To help me Mrs. Bedford gave me a small water can. As I met Ally Slooper again he had a crafty grin on his face and there is no need to say what a fool I felt. I had taken the can back and remembered the lout for a long time.

When I was between five and six years old we moved to Hilgay Creek, into a house belonging to farmer Bob, at the mouth of the river Wissey, a tributary of the river Ouse another mile down stream towards Denver Sluice. This meant we had over two miles to go to school which we seemed to take in our stride. There were other children living in two more houses next door to us and often we joined up with two of farmer Bob's youngest children Albert and Maud.

We ran or walked according to what game we were trying to play. Sometimes we acted like a team of horses being tied together with string and controlled by one behind with reins who would carry a whip which he would try to crack. Other times we would run a hoop made of iron 1/4" in diameter and about 3 feet high. It was pushed along with a thin piece of iron attached to the hoop or hit with a stick. To make a change we sometimes leap frogged for a long way. The girls had skipping ropes and often skipped along and it was surprising how quick we got to school.

After a year in the infants classrommm I was moved to standard one and the next year standard two. These classes were both in the same room and were separated from the higher classes by a partition which was folded back every morning for a scripture lesson usually by the head master whos name was Eldekin. We called him "Daddy" not to his face of course. He taught the top two classes standard six and seven. Often there were only one or two in standard seven. Sometimes he was relieved by his daughter who usually taught standard four and five aided by Miss Williamson who taught standard three and helped Miss Brown with standard one and two. We always addressed these teachers as Miss.

I remember Miss Eldekin taking all the classes in a singing lesson when I with others were standing on the class forms at different heights with some on the floor so that she could see us all. A girl about my age named Hilda Jefferson stood on the floor and she turned and looked at me. I smiled at her and Miss Eldekin thought I was trying to make a date which was far from my mind. However

we were both hauled in front of the class and Hilda was made to stand so that all the other children could see her while I had to walk from about five paces up to Hilda and touch her face with mine 12 times. I never felt so humiliated in all my school life and I would much rather had the cane 20 times. From then on when Miss Eldekin took singing class I did not try to sing.

Sometimes Daddy took the singing lessons and I rather liked that. The only scale we were taught was Doh, Ray, Me, far, so, Lah Te, Doh. He taught us various hymns and songs. One of his favourite songs was:-

Daddy neptune one day to freedom did say,
If ever I lived upon dry land,
The spot I should hit on would be little Britain
Says freedom "Why that's my own island,
Oh t'is a nice little island,
A right little tight little island,
All the world round there's none can be found,
So happy as this little island".

Perhaps that was why we called him Daddy. he had a lot of patience in getting us to sing the word (say) right. We would raise the note at the end like sa^{eh} instead of s-a-y-. Finally we kept it even.

Another one he taught us was:-

Underneath the gas light glitter,
Stood a little fragile girl,
Heedless of the night winds bitter,
As they round about her whirl,

There are many sad and deary,
In this busy world of ours,
Crying every night so weary,
Won't you buy my pretty flowers.

There was no doubt that Daddy Eldekin was a very learned man as education was in those days. He taught all subjects that were on the curriculum but his main ones were the three R's and he was very keen that every one should read aloud. We all took turns in reading a sentence or carried on where the next one left off. Sometimes we read from the Bible and once I was reading when Daddy stopped me and after a pause he said "In place of the next few words say "He that every man"". The words were "He ~~had~~ pisseth against the wall". He seemed rather embarrassed but most of us were amused.

Daddy was very strict and used the cane when it was necessary. I received this punishment several times on the hand and posterior the latter across the knee when he would pull my shorts tight and sometimes laid me on his desk where he could get more force behind the strike. I dare not tell my parents in case I got more but once I remember having some large weals on my back and legs my father threatened to go and thrash the master. He sent a message to that effect and I didn't have any more weals.

In spite of these canings most of us got in turn, we respected Daddy and did not bear him any malice. As I grew older we were more friendly. He had two cows and a donkey and I used to look after his cows in a small grass field between his house and garden. For payment I was allowed to ride on

the donkey until four other boys came along and Daddy came one day when five of us were all riding on the donkey at the same time. That was the end of my cow keeping but I regained his confidence in me later and he made me a prefect.

Nature and Biology seemed to be rather neglected only once can I remember going on a nature study walk which lasted about one hour. Afterwards we were told to write about things that we had seen growing in the fields, gardens or elsewhere I think the most interest I took was in things that were growing in peoples gardens because as we were growing up we all had to do something such as digging, hoeing, weeding, sowing or planting. It seemed natural to watch things grow according to the season and what they were. We had very few lessons on how things grew and why except vegetables or a few flowers. I suppose we took it for granted.

Biology is a word that I can never remember hearing at school and yet it concerns every living being. Sex was never mentioned unless it referred to male or female what ever living being it was which is as it should be in my simple way of thinking but nowadays if sex is mentioned it seems to mean that a male and female are having sexual relations or intercourse with each other. To use any reference to biology seemed to be strictly forbidden either at school or at home. The only lesson on reproduction of life at my school was on Tadpoles. In some dykes there were masses of frog spawn. We took some to school in a jar with water in and looked at them everyday until they turned into tadpoles. Then after a time they developed legs and feet and lost their tails then they were frogs. We were never told how the frog spawn was produced.

Many times we all asked our parents where we came from and the answer would be "From under the Gooseberry bush" or "The stork brought you". I often wondered why our parents tried to fog us off with such ridiculous answers but being brought up that way I found myself in the same embarrassing position when I became a father. Nevertheless living in the country districts on farms those days it was almost impossible to keep reproduction of life a secret because it was going on around us nearly all the time.

While I was at school there were never any organised games or sports. We created our own according to the season. During spring and summer top spinning was a favourite. There were two kinds, squat and mushroom. Both had a hobnail in the bottom. I liked the mushroom best because it would jump several yards when hit with a whip (a string on a short stick) especially on the road where the surface was fairly good.

The only traffic on the roads were occasional horse and carts or waggons. They could be seen long before they came near and then with care it was easy to keep clear of them. The squat tops were best in an enclosed space like the playground where many other children could be. When hit hard they stay nearly in the same place.

Marbles was a game for the play-ground or on the path where a small hole was made. Players rolled their marbles to the hole and then took turns to flick them in and take all they got in the hole. Another marble game was hit them against the wall and win by touching yours and the other player's marble with your thumb and little finger.

Baseball was always enjoyed in the play-ground especially at our old school where we tried to hit the ball over the school roof sometimes onto the road so one could easily get round all the stops before the ball was recovered. But often the ball bounced on the side of the roof then rolled back to the play-ground to be caught putting the player out.

The girls pastime was usually skipping or playing hop-sotch. Infant boys always played in the girls play-ground.

The only time that girls went into the boy's ground was on or near as possible to the 1st of May when children danced round the Maypole. We used to enjoy making various patterns with different coloured ribbons then go the opposite way round to undo it and another group took over to make other patterns.

In the classrooms girls and boys were mixed and it seemed to work very well. It had always been that way and we took it for granted or perhaps the presence of the girls had a sober effect on the boys.

The only refreshment that could be obtained at the school was water. During the summer, water was taken into the play-ground in a bucket where each child was given a drink from the same tin mug.

Those of us not living near enough to go home for lunch took sandwiches and ate them in the classroom. We welcomed this especially in the wintertime we sat close to the fire and swept up afterwards.

When my sister Edith was about to be born Albert was sent to Downham Market for the doctor and I went to Ten Mile Bank to ask Mrs. Long, a widow who lived on Hell's Row with her two children Lillie and George, to come as soon as possible.

She was one of the few amateur midwives who attended women in child birth and often stayed several days to nurse mother and baby and look after the rest of the family, also doing the household chores.

Mrs. Long left her two children with neighbours every time and she attended women which was very often because there was no social security in those days so she had to work to keep herself and the two children.

After a little experience midwives were capable of delivering babies by themselves. Edith was born before the doctor arrived. It was not unusual for this to happen because often the midwife lived closer to the patient and although the doctor might have a pony and trap he walked long distances as well. The doctor was always called in case there were any complications.

Soon after the birth mother became very ill with bronchitis and a nervous breakdown. She was also getting very deaf which didn't help matters. Mrs. Long did her best and stayed with us for ten days which was the usual time for midwives. Father wanted her to stay longer but she could not because her children needed her attention.

Father was left with a big problem because mother could not be left alone and he did not want her to go into hospital so he stayed at home for a few days until Aunt Hannah came to help and father was able to go to work.

It so happened that he was claying for Martin Brothers in a field that could be seen from our house and it was arranged that if mother became very ill a white sheet would be hung from the bedroom window. When father or anyone working near him saw it he quickly went home and sometimes Doctor Cross of Downham Market was sent for to give mother some drug when she was restless.

The few neighbours he had were good and very helpful. When we had several visitors I slept with the Raynor family next door. They had seven children and only two bedrooms. It seemed fun to squeeze into bed with three other boys.

Aunt Maryellen came from Uxbridge to help but like Aunt Hannah she could not stay many days because they both had children at home. Mother and her two sisters were a very close family. She was always pleased to see them and I think they helped her to gain confidence.

Nonetheless it was a very distressing time for everyone concerned, especially for my sister Harriett who did several jobs including looking after the baby.

There were times when no grown up could be there, so Harriett had to stay away from school and mother was not very kind to her. For some reason Harriett received no thanks for all she did but she did her best because she knew mother was very ill.

Farmer Bob and his wife Mary made several visits. She did many jobs including the washing. One day I arrived home during very cold weather with hot ache in my fingers after being nearly frozen and she told me to put my hands in the wash tub. What a relief!

Bob and most of his family were strictly chapel members. Although he did not preach in the pulpit he, like many others got down on his knees and said a prayer during the service. I can remember when he prayed for my mother it did seem to help a lot at that time.

As mother began to improve slowly she still was not able to cope with all the house work especially cooking and preparing food, consequently Albert, Harriett and I were often sent to school with a halfpenny each to buy our own lunch from Steven's shop. Usually I spent mine on small rather hard biscuits with a sugar sweet on them. They were filling and about the cheapest food I could get.

Some of the neighbours continued to come in occasionally until mother saw one of them take some eggs home one day which up-set her very much and she never spoke to the woman again.

Mother never completely recovered from her breakdown and being deaf did not help matters at all. Sometimes if any of us took friends home they were not welcome and were made to feel uncomfortable. It all depended who they were. Some were accepted and made welcome.

As time went on she improved so much that she was able to join us in the harvest field which she did for a few years until one year father had started thatching but there were still some corn and a field of horse beans to be tied and shocked so mother, with the help of Albert, Harriett and me, carried on until all the beans were tied.

With the end of the harvest came the settling up of all the lands we had tied and shocked but there was one land of beans mother did not get paid for, a complaint was made without satisfaction. It seemed that someone else received the money. Mother was very angry about it and she never did any more work for Martin Brothers.

Mothers' deafness became gradually worse and the only hearing aids in those days was a trumpet. Grandmother had used one which was handed down to mother but it didn't seem to be any help.

A few years later a battery aid was tried without much success. The set and batteries were carried about and were rather cumbersome. If it wasn't set right a high pitched note would occur which she could not always hear. Finally she gave it up as a bad job and we had to shout to make her hear.

Sometimes I envied other children who had mothers to give them advice and talk freely but I was thankful to have a mother who was always kind to me.

About 9 months before I left school we moved to a new school that had been built beside the Station Road which meant that we had another 1/4 mile to go.

This school was built in the style of hospitals these days with a long corridor and classrooms leading off it. Boys had separate rooms from the girls, also play-ground.

Boys in standard five, six and seven had a small garden each. Some of us took a great pride in them and tried to grow the best vegetables. We worked for a hour two days a week. Philip Eldekin, Daddy Eldekin's son, had just started teaching and was very keen on the gardens. He had heard about digging clay and started to dig a hole but he had'nt got much idea how to do it so as I had dug a few holes with my father's advice I dug it for him and he was very pleased with it.

Our first and my only crop was reasonable. All pupils who had a garden were allowed to take their products home which included potatoes, carrots, onions, lettuce and marrows. Not many of course and that seemed to be the best way to dispose of them. One snag was the lack of manure. There were no compost heaps in those days. Daddy Eldekin gave us a few barrow loads of cow muck which helped a little.

When Daddy was ill for a few weeks his son Philip took over teaching standards five, six and seven. He had not been to a teachers college but he went to a high school for a few months and may have gained some experience of teaching there. When he left our school he had been in standard six and was not the top of his class. Now after 12 months he was back to try to teach us.

One day I told him that I thought he was wrong about something and he ordered me to go out in front of the class to be punished. I remained on my seat so he grabbed me and tried to pull me out of the form which I held on to and was dragged with the form across the classroom. He was nearly exhausted but managed to hit me on the head a few times and snatched my prefect badge off my jacket. I had been proud of that badge for some time and to loose it hurt me more than being hit on the head.

Life and industry around Ten Mile Bank was farming and horses played a major part in that because they were used to pull all kinds of implements on the land such as ploughs, harrows, rolls and drills. Thrashing tackles, until the traction engine, could not get anywhere without horses.

Goods of many kinds were carried in carts and waggon pulled by horses to and from railway stations. Horses were also used for towing lighters or barges along rivers.

During the past 30 years the horse has almost disappeared from the land but owing to high prices of oil there are signs of horse-power returning and may well do in less than 50 years because of oil shortage. Some breweries have retained heavy Shire horses for delivery work in towns and competitions in shows and some farmers are increasing their stock.

The Tumbrel Cart

Also spelt Tumbril, Tumberel, Tomberel and is known as a tip cart comprises two large wheels, an axle, two shafts and a buck which is made of wood nearly a square box shape to hold about one ton of potatoes, coal or anything of that nature.

The buck with one end of the shafts rests on the axle, which has a wheel on each end, so that the buck can be tipped up leaving the shafts horizontal. A pommel stick which holds the buck and shafts together is removed when the buck is tipped up to let the contents fall to the ground.

The buck sides sloop down slightly to the rear where a tailboard is fitted loosely about a foot high which can be removed to let all the contents fall out.

To increase the capacity of the cart raves can be fitted, permanently or temporarily, to the front and rear. The front one comes over the horses backside with irons that fit on the shafts both sides to take the weight.

These raves were always used on the carts during the harvest time to carry larger loads of shoaves from fields to the stackyards. Usually one horse pulled these loads, but when muck from the cow or horse yards was being moved to the fields two horses are necessary, one in the shafts and one in front.

Years ago the wheels of these carts had iron rims, which was an expert wheel-wrights job to put on usually in a blacksmiths yard, but these days where the carts are still used they have smaller wheels and rubber tyres.

Again like a lot more things on farms the tumbrel cart has been replaced with lorries or tractors and trailers.

The Waggon

The waggon is twice as long as the tumbrel cart and has four wheels. Two large, one each side at the rear, and two smaller ones at the front so that they can go under the waggon when it is turned round or to one side.

There were two kinds of waggon. One the front wheels went right underneath the waggon. The other the front wheels were attached to a frame which stopped the wheels at half way, any further might turn the waggon over.

These waggons were used to carry goods such as potatoes and corn to the railway station. Three horses in length were necessary to pull the waggon.

I remember a young man named Kitchener Barratt riding on a waggon when the horses ran away. Kitchener tried to stop them but he fell off and was killed by the wheels. Although we are supposed to have safe machines these days there are more people killed by them than ever there were by horse power.

Quite a number of people living in the country had an occasional pig killed at home. It was often referred to as killing a pig in the house. The owner kept 1/2 or 1/4 and sold the remainder. There were two part-time killers at Ten Mile Bank, one named Smith and the other Butcher. Both men worked on the land and killed pigs after work or if there were more than one pig, they had half a day off.

They both had a long stool with a wheel at one end and two handles at the other a large scolding tub was placed on the stool, which was wheeled to where the pig was.

This was a "field day" for us. After the pig was killed it was plunged into the tub of scolding water and soon the killer, my father, Albert and I were scraping hairs off the pig. The killer used his carving knife and the rest of us had scrapers something like a curry comb. A small hook was used to pull nails off the feet.

Often the pig weighed 20 stone or more so blocks and pulleys were used to pull it up to hang from a branch of a tree. After the entrails were removed the pig was cut into four quarters and weighed. Those for sale were delivered later via boat.

The smaller intestine or chitterling, after cleaning could be fried and consumed (very good) or used as sausage skins. To clean:- remove all excreta and half digested food and wash in several pails of clean water. Turn inside out and leave in salt water all night and wash again.

The next day, after mother had prepared the sausage meat, Albert, Harriett and I were eager to make sausages so after putting the intestine on the machine, we took turns in turning the handle, filling the machine and twisting the sausages at intervals to determine their length. We knew they were pork sausages with just seasoning.

The feet or trotters and the head were boiled all together and after the bones were removed the remains was made into pork cheese. I liked it but only in small pieces.

Back to the day of the kill, when we were rewarded for our efforts with a feast of fried liver which we called pig's fry. A thin sheet of curtain like muscle, we knew the leaf was added. It had a portion of fat that made the liver more nutritious.

During the evening we all helped to salt the pork. A small amount of saltpetre was mixed with salt in a large pan. We took handfuls of salt and rubbed it into each joint which took some-time, especially the rind because it had to be rubbed until it was pink. Our fingers soon became sore so we were pleased when the job was finished. About 2 inches of salt was put in the bottom of the meat pot then a few joints of meat followed by salt and pork, finally a layer of salt. After a few weeks the salt turned to brine and the meat would keep for a long time.

We always had pork in the brine pot and it was good food if you liked fat pork. Father really enjoyed it but the rest of the family were not all that keen because owing to the size of the pig it was often more than 3/4 fat.

I didn't mind small portions with plenty of bread or potatoes. There was one joint we all liked very much which we knew as pork bone. There is an old saying "the nearer the bone the sweeter the meat" which seem to be true. After being cooked and turned cold the fat meat went white and was just as tasty as the lean.

Mother always put that joint to one side to be cooked soon and it never saw the brine pot.

Although my parents always had pork in the pot they never had cured hams or larger joints hanging about like it was said that some people did in other parts of the country.

Some of the really fat parts of the pig were cut into small pieces and baked down to scraps which produced plenty of fat to spread on bread or used for cooking. I liked the bread and fat but not the scraps.

Several incidents occurred during our to's and fro's along the river bank. Every year weeds that grew on the river bottom were cut by a chain of knife like blades joined together, which reached across the river.

Two men, one each side the river, pulled the blades forward and backwards while moving slowly along the banks. One man, a few yards in front walked backwards, while the other across the water faced him.

As the weeds were being cut they could be seen rising to the surface of the water where they gradually collected into various sized bunches. At first if there was no tide, they might remain in masses each side of the river but, traffic up and down the river soon broke them up. Some of the larger bunches clung to the bank, which grew larger as more weeds floated down with the tide and made these bunches thicker and solid enough to walk on if they were close enough to the shore.

One day as we were going home from school we came to a large bunch of weeds that were too far from the shore to step onto so, not to be done, I ran and jumped but missed the solid part of the weeds and went into deep water.

With the help of other children I got out and walked home with water squelching from my boots to a good thrashing from father on arrival.

There were two shoe makers at Ten Mile Bank. Charlie Stone, a bachelor, lived with his mother on the South side of the village beside the river. He had a wooden hut on the garden with a small portable stove where he burned cinders from his mother's house for warmth during winter months.

He was very interested in boxing and had several pictures of various boxers on the wall of his shop. When I went there to take or collect some repairs he did for us he always like to talk about Jack Jackson, Jefferies and other boxers of the day. Jackson was his favourite who was heavy weight champion of the world for some time.

Mr. Pell the other shoe maker lived on our side of the river. His shop was a very interesting place to visit, it smelled strongly of leather on opening the door. I liked to sit and watch him sewing boots together. He had many years experience and was very reliable in making thigh and knee boots also various heights above the ankle. The lower ones were whole or half tongued. I preferred the whole tongue which were water proof if they were kept well oiled or greased, although they did'nt always stop me from getting wet feet. The thigh or knee boots were used when cleaning or deepening dykes or drains and for claying according to how much water there was.

Mr. Pell farmed a few acres of land each side of the river, somewhere near the church which was opposite the house and he had three acres in the same field as my father had his near Jim Kerridges engine. Mr. Robinson lived with Pell and he did the land work. Mr. Pell helped when he could spare a few minutes from his cobblers shop which was'nt very often.

Mr. Robinson had a donkey to do his haulage and rolling. He had a small cart which was narrow. All these things and the donkey were taken across the river in a boat which meant hard work for Robinson.

Hilgay, being the key village in the area, had more and larger shops and businesses. Butchers, bakers, groceries and other goods merchants took their goods around the district with ponies and carts. The butcher took his cart as far along the road or drove as far as possible then he had a carrier, a piece of wood about 4 feet long and 2 feet wide scooped out the middle with two short handles at each end, where he put what meat he thought the customer might want. This he carried on his shoulder along the river bank or across fields to where people lived.

The baker, like the others, went in various directions. One, was known as Doughy Ostler, left his cart at Ten Mile Bank bridge and hung two large bags, joined together, one each side the ponies back and filled them with bread. Twice a week he would go along our side of the river bank towards Ouse Bridge and often we were going home from school at the same time. Doughy was a kindly man and perhaps he took pity on me because many times he put me on his ponies back and I would ride nearly all the way home. Once I remember the bags slipped off and I went with them. It was luck that none of the loaves got dirty.

Not often Doughy would go further than Farmer Bobs so either Albert, Harriett or I was given two or three loaves to take home. At least one was a cottage loaf which was nearly round with a smaller piece on the top. As it was new we could'nt resist

taking the top off and eating it before we arrived home. Mother said that we should'nt do it but she was not angry. In any case it was too late then.

On our way home we had to pass Farmer Bobs and during the colder days two or three times a week we would go in to a large wash-house where the yardman usually had some pig potatoes cooked in their skins. We could help ourselves and we enjoyed 5 or 6. Often we would'nt want much tea when we arrived home.

Every day, on the way home from school, one of us had to collect milk and sometimes butter from Farmer Bobs. It was nearly always skimmed milk and we carried it in a quart can which cost 1/2 penny. Sometimes we had a drink of milk before we got to Ouse Bridge.

Sometimes when a calf was born Farmer Bob's wife would give us a point of Bislams* or Beazlums which is thick and creamy. It makes very nice custard.

Before my brother Albert and distant cousin Albert at the farm left school, we often went to school and came home together and during spring when I was 9 or 10 years old, we would often see stallions (male horses) being led round the countryside from farm to farm. I had often wondered what went on and what the mystery was how all living things were reproduced. Every year we would see young foals with their mothers. Small lambs running and gambolling about as though they were pleased to be alive. It was nice to see them but what had they got to be

* The first milk from a cow after the calf is born.

pleased about. They didn't know that they stood a good chance of being killed and eaten by the time they were twelve months old. The same applied to many other animals and birds such as pigs, rabbits, pheasants, partridges.

Although I knew nothing about biology I had a good idea what happened between human beings and one day as I was going home with the two Alberts a stallion was being led along Steels drove towards farmer Bobs yard. The Alberts knew that the men in charge of the horses did not agree with children seeing what went on so the mares and stallion were taken behind a stack or building. We kept on the riverside of the bank until we were level with the stack yard then crept to the edge of the bank top and peeped over where we had a good view. The stallion was on one side of a gate and a mare on the other because if the mare wasn't friendly she would kick the stallion, but in this case he was sniffing about and biting the nape of her neck fondly I suppose. If there seemed no resistance the stallion automatically prepared himself ready for action. Now he was led round the fence to the mare and mating took place.

The stallion was taken to the farm yard once a week where the mares were tried until they conceived then they would stop mating. This goes on for about three months in the spring when mares and fillies are likely to be in season.

As we grew older we were allowed to go in the farmyard and see what happened. There were cows which were taken to the bull. Sows taken to the boar.

We kept rabbits, chickens, ducks and geese so with other animals, birds and insects all around us it seemed to grow with us naturally that male and female must have sexual intercourse before reproduction can take place but we still didn't know anything about biology.

During the past two or three decades things have changed a lot. Artificial insemination has been introduced with many animals and mating of animals and birds also giving birth have been shown on TV. Besides details have been told what happens so that some grandparents have learned biology from their children.

It does not seem long ago when it was almost a crime for a child to be born out of wedlock. The man responsible was expected to marry the mother or go to the police court and if found guilty, he would be fined to pay a few shillings a week until the child was 16 years old. In a village these incidents made a special journey to the court to hear details of what happened - much to the embarrassment of the girl.

At first, living at Hilgay Creek we seemed to be more isolated than at Hunts' Sluice, but we soon got used to it because the surroundings were more interesting and picturesque.

The house we lived in had been a public house. It had two bedrooms, sitting-room, living-room, kitchen and a long pantry where the beer used to be kept. One of the bedrooms had loose floor boards in one corner which could be removed so that one could climb a ladder, placed in a cupboard off the living-room, into the bedroom

without going through the sitting-room and the other bedroom. I well remember those loose boards because father used to rattle them with a broom handle to wake Albert and I before he went to work.

There was a large shed at one end of the house with an open fire place where long logs of wood could be burned under a large hanging boiler. The shed was also used as a work shop and a coal store.

At the other end was a lean-to wash-house and a store place. It also had a brick oven in which mother baked bread and other edibles.

It appears that barge men were the chief customers for the beer and some stayed overnight and put their horse in the stable kept for that purpose.

I can only remember a few times when a horse was kept there and then the men lived and slept in their barge.

A double seated wooden lavatory, or as we called it (the closet), stood about 12 yards from the house partly screened by a lilac bush. There was a hole about three feet deep under the lavatory which was emptied once a year by digging a much deeper hole on the outside then removing the contents into it. Care had to be taken that the wind was blowing in the right direction so as not to annoy the neighbours because the aroma was not very pleasant.

There was an orchard with several apple trees, some plum, pears, cherry and other fruit trees. At the end of the orchard was a large vegetable garden with a stable substantially built of wood and a tiled roof. Later it was used as a pig sty where the sow lived.

Nearer the house was a building where fowl were kept. We called it the hen-house which was enclosed in half the orchard by wire netting so the chickens could run about.

From the front of the house we had a good view of trains, a few 100 yards away, as they travelled between London and Kings Lynn then on to Hunstanton.

A new iron railway bridge was being built over the Ouse. My father worked on it for a time with Mr. Lambert who lodged with us at the creek until it was finished. Ouse Bridge soon became the official name for the surrounding area.

In those days trains ran strictly to time and people did not look at their watch, if they had one, to see what the time was. As trains went by often remarks could be heard "Thats the "Niner" or "Tener"". There used to be a train from London at 2.10 pm referred to as the twoer. When toolmen saw that they stopped work changed their slops for a shirt and was soon on their way home.

Looking across the mouth of the river Wissey as it joined the Great Ouse we had a very picturesque view which often changed with the rise and fall of the water. After long or heavy rains the rivers became full and sometimes overflowed in places. Other times when the Denver Sluice gates were open, there was just a narrow channel of water with a long sloping area of mud on our side where both rivers met. This scene included a round house known as the Fishing Cottage. It had a pike as a weather vane on the top and was painted in colours that blended with shrubs and trees of a plantation in the background. A large weeping willow tree, growing on the corner

of the bank, hung several feet over the water. Large steps were cut in the side of the bank with six feet of concrete at the mean water level to help protect the bank.

Mr. Fuller (gamekeeper) and his wife occupied the ground floor of the cottage and were caretakers of the first floor for the owner Squire Pratt. It was one large room where he entertained his friends after a pheasant shoot perhaps including partridge and hares. Wide steps led up to the room from the bank. Squire Pratt, who lived at Ryston Hall near Downham Market, owned large estates in the district also fishing rights of the river Wissey and half the Ouse from the Creek to Denver Sluice.

On the other side of the Great Ouse, Martin Brothers of Littleport owned and farmed about 1,000 acres of land with four farm yards. The "Top" yard was opposite the Creek where the foreman and two yardmen lived beside a gravel road on the river bank. The "Bridge" yard was near the railway where a horsekeeper and yardman lived. The "Fen" yard was about 1 1/2 miles west of the Creek where a horse keeper and a yard-man lived and "Pictures" taking the name of a man who lived there as yard-man, was half way between the Fen and Bridge yard.

My father worked on this farm for many years as a toolman which meant using all kinds of tools on a farm. Because he did not live in a tied house on the farm he was allowed certain privileges such as thatching stacks for other farmers or for doing work on his own land which later grew to 2 1/2 acres.

There were usually six or seven tool men and during the winter months they dug clay to enrich the soil especially black land. The tools for this were spade, scoop, four tined fork, fly tool to dig the clay, slough to skim earth off top of the clay and a pick axe to break top soil when frozen.

Toolmen had to buy their own tools and so learned to take care of them.

A chain of holes averaging three feet by eight was dug through the field and were called dykes. The clay was at various depths from 2 ft. to 6 ft. Each finished hole was partly filled in by the top soil off the next hole. The clay dykes were about 15 yds apart.

Clay was thrown out to each side of the hole then spread about 3 inches thick over the land. This is where the toolmens sons came in. As soon as they were strong enough to lift a four tinned fork with a piece of clay on it they had to go with their fathers and spread clay. My brother Albert had been going three years before I started which was soon after I was seven. At first Albert helped me and as I got stronger we worked on each side. At the deepest holes a man known as a clay catcher stood near the side of the hole and caught each piece of clay as it was thrown up by the digger and put well clear of the hole. The catcher was usually an old man partly disabled. One I knew lived nearly two miles from his work, was crippled with arthritis and it took him two hours to get to his work with the aid of two walking sticks.

As we grew stronger and more used to the job we could throw the pieces of clay to where they had to go. We were not allowed to stay away from school so the only time we did clay spreading was on Saturday and school holidays. Sometimes when father was having his (docky) lunch Albert and I would dig and throw out some clay but at first we only dug small pieces.

Care had to be taken when digging a clay hole because there might be an old dyke that means the clay may have been dug out several years before and perhaps went across the dyke now being dug and sometimes one might dig a hole one or two feet from an old dyke and often water came in from the old dyke.

Sometimes it was possible to stop the water by ramming some clay in the crack but there were times when it was hopeless and the digger had to get out quick because he would be flooded out or the side might cave in. I can remember a man named Feetam being buried and was lucky to get out alive. Someone heard a faint call and sounded the alarm. Soon the other men were digging or scrap-ping the earth away from Mr. Feetam and were just in time to save him.

There was a hut on wheels moved at intervals to a convenient place where the men had their lunch and changed their shirt. In the morning shirts were removed and a slop (a short calico or linen shirt) was put on. This was because working in a deep hole was rather warm. When men came out of the hole they would soon feel cold, especially during frosty weather so the men worked very hard on the next hole to get underground.

When the dykes were finished across the field they were ploughed in by three horses in length which went round each side of the dykes mixing earth with the clay.

Claying by hand is now a thing of the past because machine has taken over where it is necessary but on most black land farms drainage has shrunk the soil, also the soil has been carted away on root crops so much so the plough can reach the clay.

When the claying season was finished the toolmen went on other work such as digging and cleaning out dykes and drains. Boys could not help fathers with these jobs so on our days from schools we joined gangs of other boys and sometimes girls in the summertime pulling weeds from corn fields. An old man usually over 70 years old was in charge. He walked behind with a hoe to chop up any weeds that we had missed. Often the main weed was the Charlic* or the Dock which had to be dug up and carried off the field. We also picked up twitch, not to mention stones and carried them off grass fields.

One ganger was called old Martin. If any child misbehaved he would hold his hoe over his head and say "Damn ye I'll crack ye". He threatened me several times because I was a little cheeky at times. Finally he reported me to the foreman and I was put to work with some of the men hoeing or similar work. Later I did other work like leading horse for drilling corn or horse hoeing corn and other crops. Sometimes I had one horse to roll or harrow the land. Driving a horse with cart to carry muck (or farmyard manure) to the fields or to a heap, collecting crops from the fields and many other jobs.

* A weed with a yellow flower like mustard.

During our summer holidays from school the main work was the harvest and when that started most children able to work joined their parents.

Rye grass was the first to be harvested. The men mowed the grass with a sythe and all the family who could make bands or tie the grass into shoves would join in

This grass grew about three feet high and usually produced masses of small seed which was used for making gin. As it was cut early a second crop grew and was made into hay for horses food. When the rye grass was carted it was usually thrashed off the shock because it ripened quickly and the seed would fall out each time it was moved. For that reason a large strong cloth was fixed to the cart and spread out while two corners being held by boys each shock was pulled onto the cloth before the shoves were pitched onto the cart. This saved a lot of seed.

About the middle of July hay stacks were ready for thatching and my father usually did five or six stacks for Martin each year and some for other farmers. As soon as I was able to pull a few straws I went to help Albert to get bunches of straw ready to put on the stack.

At the end of July coleseed and mustard was hand reaped and placed into small lumps. It wasn't often tied because it would cling together and wasn't very heavy.

I liked to help to cart this because each youth or man kept to one horse and cart to load and unload each time. He would stand on the front of the cart so as not to tread on the mustard straw. If you did the seed would fall out and be lost.

Oats were next, usually early in August, which were cut with sythes by toolmen and other strong men with their families to help them. Often babies were taken in old prams or boxes on wheels.

Each family would cut, tie and shock a width of land across the field marked by a furrow or stop colter (a row across the field where no seed had been sown). Younger members of the family were taught to make bands, either single with 6 to 8 of the strongest straws or double with lengths joined together and lay them on the ground ready for a sheaf or shoaf to be laid on (which had been gathered by mother or big brother after being mowed) then tied and later stood up in rows of shocks.

Gathering the corn could be dangerous at times because the gatherer worked backwards towards the swinging scythe and it was easy to get too close which happened to me once when father was happily swinging along and looking where he was cutting. I was working hard to keep up with him when suddenly the end of the scythe shaft hit me on the head and knocked me out. That was the only time I got too close!!! After that I kept one eye on where I was going.

As soon as enough shoves were made a shock would be set up with some shoves laid down on one side so that all members of the family could sit down comfortably at meal times and all spare clothes, food and drink was left against the shock. When each land had been shocked a wooden hand rake about six feet wide was dragged over the land and between each shock to make sure there were very few ears of corn left. This was often done by one of the family left behind while the others went to start another land, sometimes in the same field or a field some distance away.

Usually barley was next and also cut with a sythe followed by wheat which, if it stood up was cut by a reaping machine about 6 foot wide with a large curved metal table that slooped down in front to about two inches from the ground. A blade with sharp teeth that moved and cut the corn as the machine moved forward. Four wooden arms with blades attached turned round and swept the corn off the table in separate heaps which were later tied into shoves and shocked by the various families.

Later the binding machine was invented that cut and tied the shoves. This made the work a lot easier as we only had to stand the shoves up into shocks but during the first few years the binder did not tie all the shoves and this could mean work for nothing and like the reaper the corn had to be upright. If it was flat or twisted, which could soon happen during a thunder storm, the old faithful sythe and muscle power had to come into action. Both machines were pulled along by horses. Usually three on the reaper and four on the binder.

Some boys were employed riding the front horse but this was never my luck.

Corn that was cut by machine made it unfair for some because starting all round the field and finishing in the middle meant that one or two extra rows of shoves were put on the outside lands and somebody would be lucky and have one or two rows of shoves less in the middle. Everyone knew this and often planned not to get the outside.

I remember once when I was twelve years old I had my first bicycle we had nearly finished in one field and my father noticed there were two lands left in the next field so he told me get on my

bike and get the land one from the outside. As I pedalled quickly along the drove I passed a woman hurrying along with a pram who didn't seem very pleased when I started working on the land one from the outside.

Several years later this lady became my mother-in-law. Imagine how mean I felt when she reminded me of it. I was never allowed to forget it while she was alive.

Working in the harvest field was varied. Those who did mowing, tieing, shocking, carting and thatching were on piece work and others who worked with horses, machines and other jobs were paid double time for four weeks.

Piece workers started when they liked. The longer and faster they worked the more money they received. When the weather was hot and dry wheat straw soon got brittle and bands would break so it paid to start early while the straw was damp with dew or fog and tie as much as possible before the sun got too hot then shock and rake or rest.

Each land was measured by surveyors when all were finished. They used the chain (22 yards) with 100 links. The length of the field was measured then the width of each land which e.g. might be 1 acre 1 rod 20 poles. There was never or very rare two lands measured the same. The land owner came round each day and told the men the measurements so that everyone knew how much they were earning. Each week the head of the family would sub what money they needed, mostly less than they earned then have a lump sum when harvest was finished.

Most families took lots of food and drink because three meals were consumed in the field. Various sized bottles were taken from one gallon to half a pint with different kinds of drink. Some had cold tea with no sugar or milk. Others had beer, oatmeal, cocoa, or various kinds of minerals often homemade like lemonade. As a luxury we sometimes had bottles of ginger beer with a glass ally stopper. My father always had a nine gallon barrel of beer and took half a gallon each day.

The time for meals were nine a.m. breakfast, twelve noon dinner and four p.m. fourses. All the family sat on the sheltered side of the shock and out came loaves of bread, meat, cheese, jars of pickles, and other different edibles. Mother cut slices of bread and butter handing them round until we were all supplied and father helped with drinks according to who liked which. I used to like sucking drink from a bottle with a straw. Sometimes from the beer bottle although I was not very keen on beer at that time but it helped to wash the dust out of the mouth and throat.

It was fun to push the glass ally stopper down in the ginger beer bottle. After having had a drink the stopper could be replaced by shaking the bottle and turning it upside down and the gas in the ginger beer would force the ally back in place.

These breaks from work were very welcome and often enjoyable. If it rained more shoves were put on top of the shock so as to overhang where we sat. Sometimes after dinner or if it rained father and mother had a sleep while us children crept inside the shock and lie so we could see outside and so we mixed some fun with hard work.

Mother often went home a little earlier to cook an evening meal which would include plum or apple pudding or pie. I used to look forward to them and enjoyed them.

One evening I was sent home an hour earlier to light a fire and put the saucepan on with a pudding already in. I had my baby sister Laura in a box on wheels with me. When I arrived at the river Ouse (which we had to cross) the tide had gone down leaving the boat stuck in the mud and I could'nt get it off. You may guess how the rest of the family felt when they came along hungry and tired. Father was angry which seemed to give him extra strength to push the boat into the water and we were soon home with the fire out!!!

I remember once we found a salmon trout weighing ten lbs in the punt as we were going to harvest work. Apparently it had jumped in during the night. Some of our neighbours had crossed the river in another boat 15 minutes earlier and seeing the trout in our punt thought we had been fishing during the night. When they knew that we had'nt seen it until we were going to work they said that we were lucky to have seen it at all. No need to say that we enjoyed it and shared it with our neighbours.

When most of the corn was cut and shocked the first was ready to cart and be stacked so three carting sets were formed with six men in each. One set for the top yard, one for the Fen and one for Pictures and Ouse Bridge yards. The head horsekeeper of each yard was usually the stacker with the other five taking turns in, two in the field, one pitching and one loading the cart, one unloading the cart onto the stack and two moving the shoves, some to the stacker on the outside and some placed to bind the outside ones in.

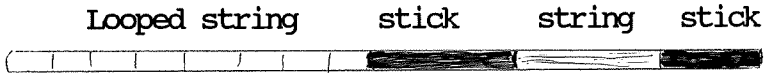
The number of stacks in each yard depended on the amount of corn and the size of the yard. Some had to be stacked in the field. Boys' led the horse with cart to and from the field. The number according to distance to the field. One boy led the horse in the field from shock to shock. Each time before moving the boy would call loudly "Hold yea" so that the man loading the cart was prepared to steady himself. We used to call it "Hollering hold yea". It was very rare Albert and I got these jobs because we were kept with the family finishing crops to be tied and shocked, which sometimes included horse beans and brank or buck wheat.

When four or five stacks were built and settled down a bit my father would start thatching. Before Albert and I were strong enough to do the job a man named Jim Stone served my father who said that Jim was an expert at the job and it was more than half the battle if the straw was well prepared on the ground so we often watched Jim and when Albert was strong enough to carry small bunches of the stack and I was able to pull straw we began to learn how to serve thatcher and believe me we learned the hard way.

Thatching stacks was a worthy art with the main object to keep rain water out. This was always my fathers object.

To describe thatching I will start where my father said that the work should be done on the ground. The tools for the job were usually two 2 tinned forks, a four tinned fork, two pails, yokes for carrying pails and two or three sets of frails used to hold the straw in bunches. These were made of two elder sticks 2ft 6ins long and two eight strand lengths of string 2ft 6 ins long.

Frails



First a bed is made (not to sleep on) in a convenient place which was sometimes a problem. It depended where the stacks to be thatched were and where the straw was. Sometimes the straw and water was carted to where it was wanted but in a stackyard. Often there was a large straw stack from which we put straw to the ground to make a bed about ten yards wide, five ft high and about fifteen yards long. If possible the straw was shaken with the wind. The idea was to shake thinly so that any chaff or very short straw fell to the bottom. After about six ins. thick of straw had been shaken over an area of two yards at the front of the bed, two pails of water were thrown thinly over the straw. This was repeated building the front of the bed up and the back slooping down. After the water was thrown on each layer of straw, the bed was thrashed with the two tinned forks to help the water to soak in and make the bed tighter so that as the straw is pulled it comes out straight.

Water was often a long way from the straw. Sometimes we carried it from a dyke where a plank slooped down over a dipping hole or we got it from a tank, filled by pump in the horse yard.

When possible it was best to make the bed overnight so that the next day the straw was softer and easier to work.

Before starting to use the bed the front was raked with a four tinned fork so from the start the straw would be pulled straight.

As the straw is wet the server had water proof material round each leg to a little above the knee. To start the server lays the frails on the ground with the looped string to the right as he faces the bed, then goes to the right hand side and pulls straw from the bottom and clear of the bed so that it rests against the outside of his right leg to a depth of 9 to 12 ins.

Then keeping his right leg against the straw, moves slowly to the left until a row of straw is pulled the width of the bed.

Now he starts to make yealms by placing his left foot against the pulled straw and his right foot just clear of the row. The pulled straw is, or should be, tapered towards the bed and the server pulls a few straws down towards his left leg with his right hand and makes a sweeping movement through the straw to the left with his left hand, while continuing these movements he pulls the straw down to about 3 or 4 ins. Keeping it tight as possible and working his right foot gradually forward. With each sweep of the left hand the yealm is made longer. When the yealm is about 2 ft. 6ins. wide the tapered ends are raked through with the fingers of the left hand. It is advisable to wear thatching thimbles for this because it soon makes the finger tips sore. There is no need to cut finger nails!!

To pick the yealm up it must be kept tight or it will fold up, then laid on the frail stick next to the looped string. This is repeated until enough yealms are made to go up the length of the stack roof or as many as one can carry in a bunch. Sometimes more than one bunch is needed. The bunch

is now tied by bringing the other stick over and pushing the end through one of the string loops keeping it very tight. Sometimes water will drip out as the bunch is being carried up the stack so a sack is laid on to help to keep the back dry.

When the bunch is made the tapered ends are raked through with a 4 tinned fork to make sure there are no cross straws left in.

Corn stacks are built in various shapes and sizes. Some parts of the country they were all gable end but in West Norfolk where we lived they were mostly cap end and a few round only hay stacks were gable end. A few of the larger farms had elevators which helped higher stacks to be built and Martins farms were no exceptions and some of the stacks were so high that the fifty two rung thatching ladders did not reach the top by three or four yards.

The ladder was very heavy and if the carting set were working in the yard, father would get them to help to put it up but if not, a shorter ladder was put against the stack and father carried the small end of the thatching ladder up a few rungs at a time while Albert and I pushed it up a few ins. until at last it would rest on the roof.

A very important thing in thatching the roof must be solid and build with an even slant. Father always walked the roof and filled any holes with a shoaf or short straw and each time the ladder was turned he made sure the length of the roof was solid. Any low places would be asking for water to seep in.

Tools used on the stack were sheep shares for trimming the eaves, a rake about four feet long with a spike on one end so as it could be pushed into the stack to hold the bunch on and sometimes a thatching iron about 8ft. long to push in top of the stack to hang a swing ladder on which hung below the eave about four rungs. This was used where it was not possible to use the big ladder such as a building, a fence, another stack or other obstacle might be in the way. It was very handy on a round stack because it was lighter and easier to move the shorter ladder nearly all round the roof. Spits or Broaches (stakes sometimes split) about three feet long were needed also binders of string made with binder or tarred string wound on a stick about fifteen ins. long. usually one to each yealm.

When everything was ready a row of spits were pushed into the stack about one foot and one foot apart along the right side of the ladder from top of the stack to the eave. Then the ladder was turned over away from the spits and two spits were pushed in at the eave. The space between the row of spits and the ladder was called the steltch. Often the thatcher walked down the steltch to make sure it was solid.

Now to start thatching e.g. father being on the stack called "Bunch" and the server would lift the bunch onto his back and carry it up the ladder. An experienced server balanced the bunch on his back and held on to the ladder with both hands. As the bunch reached father he rolled it onto the stack to the left side of the ladder where the rake is in the stack to stop it rolling down. The server then returns to his bed to make another bunch.

Father opens the frails, takes a yealm off the top and slides it down to the eave keeping the thick ends at the bottom and place them against the spits. The yealm should be kept tight or it would spring up or down in the middle and have to be re-made. As it goes into place it is straightened out and pressed down onto the stack. The next yealm is placed on the top of the first one overlapping it three-quarters with the tapered ends downwards keeping it fairly tight. The next overlapping the second by half and the remainder the same with tapered ends downwards. As each yealm is laid it is levelled out and pressed down. It is hoped there are enough yealms to reach the top in which case the steltch is full.

To tie the straw down three spits are pushed into the thatch and stack at equal distances 6 ins. from the top then string from a binder is fastened to the outside spit by two half hitches then two twisters round the middle one and three twists with a loop under the tight string and over the spit near the ladder then each spit is knocked in tighter with the back of the rake which then comes into more vigorous action not to rake the straw as one might think, but to hit the straw fairly hard with the teeth of the rake pointing upwards. This is done several times to each yealm with an occasional sweeping motion down towards the eave. The teeth just straighten straws on the top and picking up any loose ones. If the teeth go in too deep often short straws will be disturbed and let water in. This and hitting the straw down while it is still wet helps it to mat together and keep the water out which is the main object in thatching.

The second binder is tied to two spits which are pushed in so that they enter the stack pointing slightly upwards which helps to stop the wind from blowing the thatch off. All the spits are put in so that they are not in line with the ones above. If two or more were in line down the roof they would tend to make a channel and let water in. The second and following binders down to the eave are placed so that the string catches the tapered ends of each yealm and held by two spits except at the eave which has three. The number of yealms vary from four upwards. At the eave the bottom of that yealm is usually raked out and clipped neatly with the shears or as my father did, with a sythe blade with a handle on it.

Another bunch is called for and after clearing any spits or spare yealms the ladder is turned for the next stretch. As each yealm is applied after the first steltch the right hand side is tucked under the left side of the previous steltch and this is repeated all round the stack or for a gable end along each side.

Martin Brothers had two regular thatchers, my father and Tom Redcar, and they both prided themselves in their work for different reasons. Redcars' pride was on being a pretty thatcher and for that reason he was chosen to do the two farmyards near the road, Top Farm and Ouse Bridge. His son was head horse keeper and was a very good stacker so he made good solid roofs to help his father and there was no doubt that Tom did make his thatching look nice. On the top of round stacks he would put a cockerel or some other image made of straw. However, there was one big snag he used his rake like a tooth comb consequently any chaff or short straw - in the yealms was disturbed

which would let water in. Nearly every year there was quite a lot of wet and spoilt corn.

Father, who did Pictures and the fen farmyards, prided himself on keeping the water out which was what all the farmers wanted. Although he did not try to do any fancy work his stacks always looked neat and it was very rare he had any wet or spoilt corn. He thatched for Martin Bros. and other farmers for over forty years so need I say more.

When Albert and I took over the job of serving thatcher it took us more than one harvest to do it well. Albert, being older and stronger than me made the yealms and carried bunches up the stack, while I pulled straw, carried water, helped to make beds or carry odd things up the stack like a few spits or a binder that had fallen down. Sometimes when the wind was gusty it might blow all or part of the bunch away so I had to go up the stack and hold the stick on the bunch after father had taken a yealm off the top. When the wind was very strong it might take a yealm or two off before father could tie it down. He would swear and curse the almighty for making the wind blow. I was afraid it would blow me off and wished that I could be one of the boys leading horse and cart to and from the field. Perhaps I was jealous!! If it was too rough we had to stop thatching or perhaps we could go on the sheltered side of another stack. One advantage I had in being up the stack with father, I began to learn how to thatch. It was the hard but sure way.

When we were thatching in the Fen yard and the carting set were there father used to buy them two gallons of beer because they helped him with the ladder. The set had the use of a pony and

trap to ride to and from the top yard sometimes we were lucky and got a ride with them. The pony worked the elevator during the day. It was attached to a long wooden arm under the elevator and walked round and round carrying the shoves onto the stack when necessary.

After a few years Albert and I got so that we could do the work fairly well and keep father supplied making the bed up as time allowed. Sometimes we got a bit too forward so we made extra yealms and stacked them in bunches but they soon began to dry which didn't please father, so we had to keep sprinkling water on them.

As time passed I learned how to make a good yealm and to carry small bunches up the stack. At first I held the ladder with one hand and the bunch with the other but I soon found it best to keep both hands on the ladder and the bunch balanced much better, besides as father and Albert told me if the bunch is likely to fall through a gust of wind or an awkward position, its best to let it go. If you try to hold it you might fall with it and another bunch can easily be made!

Some of the straw we used had reeds mixed with it, probably grown on lowland and near a dyke. These reeds had broad leaves with sharp edges and as I pulled the straw my fingers were cut in several places which were so painful through continuous wetting I was too big to cry so Albert did the pulling and I got relief by making the bed and carrying small bunches up the stack sometimes two to each stetch.

I was always pleased when we had finished at the Fen yard and on our way to Pictures where the stacks were not so big, the work seemed easier, it was nearer to home and the atmosphere was much more pleasant. Mr. Pictures lived there with his daughter known as Georgie age about 25. She always made us some tea and have a few words with us every day. Her father had lived there all his life. Probably his father before him too, which was why it was called Pictures. A boy, about my age, used to go there for a weeks holiday sometimes when we were there. He would lie on the straw and sing to us. One of his favourite songs was "This old man" which went on for a long time and making our work seem lighter.

A tramp went there one day and Georgie gave him a mug of tea. He went into the yard and found a hens egg which he broke and put in the tea. The egg was bad but he stirred it up and seemed to enjoy it.

After we had finished Pictures and usually a few stacks in a field. In all over 30 stacks we went to other farmers nearer or further away.

One farmer father thatched for every year was Ben Lister, who lived beside the Hundred Foot river about two miles from our home, but we didn't mind that because working there was very much easier. The stacks were not so high, the straw and water was always handy and we earned more money.

At most places we went to if it rained we sheltered in the barn but here a public house called the "Dog and Duck" was quite near and if it looked like raining very long we went there and stayed until it left off. In those days pubs were open all day.

Albert and I drank ginger beer and father drank beer. Often there was a taproom full of men so Albert and I went in the kitchen.

There was usually someone who could play an accordion or concertina and after a few drinks the music would start and soon someone obliged with a tap dance, wearing hobnail and cleated boots, on the brick floor. The others showed their skill or sang a song and so it went on with quite a lot of beer being drunk until they would'nt care if it rained all day.

I remember Bill Webb, a toolman and thatcher, would soon fall asleep and stay there for hours. Albert and I getting blown out with ginger beer had our lunch in the kitchen where the landlady gave us some hot potatoes. Father seemed to be able to take the beer until tea time but a cup of tea with the landlady revived him and he was soon back in the taproom drinking beer again until it was time to go home. By the time we arrived home father was nearly sober and ready for a good hot meal which mother had prepared. This was the best part of the day where Albert and I were concerned. I remember when I was just turned 13 years old we were thatching at Ben Lister's and the school attendance officer named Silk came to inquire why I was'nt at school (a serious offence in those days). He asked me where father was and I pointed up the stack. Mr. Silk said to father "Why is'nt your boy at school" and father replied "Because I want him here" in an angry voice!!! Albert and I realising a row was brewing kept well away but we could hear father swearing and saying that he would not let me go to school until we had finished thatching. But after about an hour they came to an agreement that if I went back to school I could leave at Christmas. Father came down the stack and shook hands with Mr. Silk and I left school at Christmas when I was 13 years and 4 months old in 1914.

While we were at Listers a young man lodged there who used to walk in his sleep and one night he climbed out of his bedroom window and opened the horseyard gate then went back to bed. The next morning all the horses had gone and it was a mystery how they got out. Two weeks later the same man woke up hanging on his bedroom window sill and nearly fell in fright but that solved the horse mystery.

Another farmer we did thatching for was named Palmer who lived at Ten Mile Bank and had a farm beside the Hundred Foot bank about three miles from our home and it was near a public house call the Pig and Whistle, some people called it the Wry Neck where we spent a few wet days. We did not get paid for wet time so we worked when it was possible but if rain did stop us the same amusement was enjoyed. Palmers was usually our best place because everything was placed where we wanted it and we received a penny a yard more than most other farmers paid so we didn't mind walking that extra mile and as Albert and I grew older and stronger we could keep father going and it was possible to do two stacks a day because at times one of us stayed on the stack and took the yealms off the bunch to help father. Sometimes he would take them off while one of us laid them on under his supervision. In that way we learned how to thatch and as time went on Albert was able to thatch a stack while I served him. Later I was able to take over so there were three thatchers in the family.

As our younger thatching years went by Albert took a regular job with farmer Bob so that left me as head server and my sister Harriett came to help me. It was hard work and awkward work for a girl but she had done other agricultural work and soon learned how to do all the jobs except carrying the bunch up the stack. She carried water, helped to make the bed, pulled straw, made yealms and kept the bottom of the bed clear of short straw that worked to the bottom. This was cleared with a four tinned fork raking it through the front of the bed. If another bed was to be made in the same place all short straw had to be cleared away. When I left Martins to take another job Harriett did the serving but father fetched the bunches himself.

Life at Hilgay Creek was far from being dull or boring. The only other place we had been to was Ten Mile Bank and we didn't know anything about large towns or the seaside except that some children belonging to the Band of Hope, an organisation in which members paid one penny a week and signed a pledge not to drink anything intoxicating, gamble, smoke or swear and once a year they were taken by train to the seaside usually to Hunstanton which was the nearest. Some came back with a piece of seaweed. For some reason my parents didn't believe in the Band of Hope so we didn't go. These children got on the train at Hilgay Fen station and we had to be satisfied with waving to them as they passed over the Ouse or Wissey railway bridge.

If we were not at school there was often a job for us to do either on the farm, especially during spring or summer, or at other times like Saturday morning, cleaning shoes with blacking or cleaning

knives with bath brick or other jobs, but even so we had satisfaction in seeing the knives and shoes clean.

In our spare time we played with children who lived in the other two houses or as we got older went to farmer Bobs yard and played with the other Albert and Maud. In the spring time both Alberts and I always found time for birds nest-ing. Farmer Bob had a small plantation, mostly of fir trees, where there were always several black birds and thrushes nests. The trees were not very high and easy to climb up and reported those on the ground what stage it was. Sometimes it was "wet mud" "dry" or "eggs". Often we left them until there were four or five eggs then took one each. One year there was a rumour that the police were on the look out for anyone taking birds eggs so instead of saying how many eggs there were in the nest we said "Threaties" and I remember Albert and I were saving shells to see how many different kinds we could get. A hole was made in each end of the eggs with a pin and we blew the contents out and threaded them on a string. Having quite a number and hearing the rumour we hurried home and destroyed the lot then regretted it because the policeman never came round. Every year we tried to add the king fishers egg to our collection but although there were several of these birds by the river side, we never found a nest.

The tomtits nest always fascinated me. Although it is a very small bird it used quite a lot of material. The nest was almost egg shaped standing on end with a very small hole in the side about room enough to get one finger in. It was lined with feathers and very cosy inside.

Another fascinating bird is the lark which makes its nest on the ground often in corn fields. On a quiet sunny day they will climb into the sky almost vertically, singing as they go, to a height of 200 ft. and stay there for quite a while. Suddenly they will stop singing and dive straight to earth and glide a few inches above it before landing gently. Perhaps to make one think that's where their nest was but, no, it was many yards away in any direction. In my young days most corn-fields were hoed by hand and as we were hoeing we occasionally found a larks nest but the eggs were not disturbed.

There were always several starlings and sparrows which made nests in the roofs of farmers Bobs buildings, especially the cart shed where they could fly straight in and as the two Alberts and I climbed about in the buildings we soon found where the nests were.

Farmer Bob's family had a ladies cycle that all the family and many other children living near there learned to ride on it. There was no fear of getting a puncture because it had solid tyres made of gutta-percha. We used to ride in a small grass field so if we fell off it was'nt often anyone was hurt. There was no need for breaks because it was a fixed wheel and as soon as one stopped pedalling the bike would soon stop. We had quite a lot of fun with that bike.

That grass field was a good place to play in but we had to watch out for the cow pads. We played base ball and sometimes tried to play cricket which none of us knew much about. The bats and wickets were home-made and often the ball was made of rag.

When the weather got warm enough more of the boys took to bathing in the river nearly every evening. There were two places where we used to bath. One in the Ouse river near farmer Bobs where it was two foot to four foot deep about ten yards from the bank. Two, in the Wissey river about half a mile from the Creek towards Hilgay where there was a shelf about three yards wide, 3 foot 6ins deep then suddenly dropped down to about twelve feet, there it was'nt safe for non swimmers so we did'nt go there until we could swim a little way. At the Ouse swimming place weeds had been cut and cleared along the riverside for about 15 yards and all objects that could cut the bather's feet removed from the bottom of the river, even so sometimes feet were cut because broken bottles, accidentally or intentionally, found their way to the bathing place.

It may have been planned or because it was an ideal spot but, there was another bathing place on the other side of the river used by boys and some men who lived around Ouse Bridge farms. None of us wore any bathing costumes I don't think anyone took any notice of it. The only time we saw bathing costumes was when Heber Martin and his family came from their home in Littleport and stayed in part of the foremans house for a month during each harvest. They used to bathe in the Ouse river and in the mouth of the Wissey river. Of course they all wore full length costumes because there were two or three girls sometimes as well as men. They would dive off a boat and play with a large ball on the water. Albert, Harriett and I sometimes sat on the corner of the Wissey bank watching them and wishing that we were able to do it.

Back to the bathing place where young boys would splash about, dive while standing in knee deep water or try to swim or dogs paddle which most of us did to start with. I remember a man name Fincham dogs paddled from across the other side of the river. He was nearly exhausted and had to rest before he went back again. It was about one hundred yards across which seemed a bit too much for most of us. Some would go half way then back again. It was very rare we had towels to wipe ourselves dry so we ran along the bank until most of the water had been shaken off or dried up. It was a bit tricky running along the bank because thistles could easily get into the feet.

As we became better swimmers the two Alberts and some boys living near us and I often went to the Wissey bathing place where we could easily swim across because it was only about 40 yards wide and it was much deeper near the shore and we could practice diving much better. There were two boys named Hollman sometimes went with us and the youngest one tried to swim across the Wissey I was near him when he was about eight yards from the other side he started to go down. Not knowing anything about life saving I kept pushing him from behind until with luck he reached the shore. The question now was how to get him back! When some one remembered that Little Bob lived less than 1/4 of a mile down river where he farmed some land on the other side of the river and he had a boat so one of the Alberts went and called Little Bob who came with his boat. By the time he arrived Billy Hollmann had recovered from his shock and exhaustion so all was well. He did not try to swim across the river again for a long time after that.

Among other pass-times we made bows and arrows. The bow from a thin branch of willow tree and the arrows from reeds that grew in a dyke and we put short pieces of elder sharpened to a point on one end hoping that it would stick into the target.

Another weapon was the pop gun made with a straight piece of elder branch about one foot long. We took the pith out to make it hollow and the bark off the outside. Then we made a wooden rod about ten inches long to fit fairly loose inside the elder and a knob was left on one end. Now pieces of newspaper were moistened and one piece pushed fairly tight in the end of the elder and another piece of paper put in the other end. The gun is now loaded and the ram rod is placed against the paper with the knob end against the body. As the paper is forced in pressure is built up inside the gun until the other piece of paper is blown out and often it came out with real force.

We also made a different gun again with the elder branch about one foot long. The bark was taken off and a third of the length was cut in the centre half way through the barrel. The pith was then taken out of the centre and one end. Now to find mother's old stays or corsets and get a bone or steel support, which was rounded at each end, and push one end into the pith then bend the other end like a question mark into the cut out part. The gun is then ready to fire. We used match sticks for ammunition putting one in front of the question mark and pressing the other end making it spring forward and forcing the match stick through the hollow end. We gained quite a lot of satisfaction and pleasure in making these things, which cost us nothing, especially when they worked well.

During winter months Albert and I spent a lot of our spare time catching birds by various methods. One was with a net fixed to a large frame leaning to one side and held up by a stick with a long piece of string attached. Some very short straw, chaff or dust that fell under the drum when corn was thrashed and often quite a lot of corn fell in with it. Martins foreman allowed us to help ourselves to give to our chickens so we put some under the net. When all was ready we took the other end of the string and went into hiding some distance away then waited for the birds to come. When there were enough the string was pulled and as the net fell some might get away but if 3 or 4 were caught we were satisfied and set the net up again. Most of the birds that we caught were blackbird, thrushes or sparrows.

Another method was by what we called, a chuck stick. This was driving a stake in the ground and tying a pole about ten feet long to it then lay the chaff. Attach the string to the pole and retire to hiding. When the string is pulled the pole will swing round like a gate and, it was hoped, knock the birds over.

A small addition to these methods was the brick trap made with four bricks. Three were laid on their side one of them at the end of the other two and the fourth one stood on end between the two. A small stake was pushed into the ground, in the centre of the trap, with 1 1/2" sticking out. Then a small crutch from a branch of tree was placed on top and a small peg on top of that. These hold the fourth brick at an angle leaving a gap so that birds can see food inside. Usually the bird flew onto the end brick then onto the crutch which, if set very lightly, would slip and let the brick fall onto the other end and close the trap.

We found an easy way to catch sparrows in buildings during darkness by showing a light in one corner while others rattled a stick in the roof which disturbed the birds and they flew to the light and it was easy to catch them. They are easy to prepare by skinning them. I remember when I was 16 years old while living near Southery I had a cousin named Porter who lived in the Flint house opposite the old church which was covered with ivy inside and out. We went there several times and caught 30 to 40 in a very short time. The ivy seemed an ideal spot for them to sleep.

During my young days there were many more birds about than there are today no doubt, owing to weed killer being used in recent years. All sorts of birds were caught and either eaten or sold for different purposes.

My uncle John Bowers of Southery made part of a living by catching linnets and finches of various kinds and selling them as cage birds.

There were quite a number of larks in the country which were said to be a delicacy. Many of these were caught and sent to high class hotels. It is not easy to prove a person is guilty of trespassing but if damage is done, stealing or poaching included then it is a different. Nevertheless this did not stop many men from catching larks or partridges with a net at night time and my father was no exception. He had a lark net and used it many times. When Albert and I were strong enough we went with father. It was always a silent or very quiet yet exciting adventure. The net was about 15 yards long and 4 yards wide with a small mesh.

A pole was attached to each end so that when they were pulled tight from each end the net would spread out and the side of the net was raised slightly the way we moved while the other side dragged on the ground. Larks sleep on the ground in grass fields or stubble corn fields. When all is ready, the leader in our case father, would give his pole a little jerk and we started off together keeping level and quiet as possible. Although it would be practically dark it was surprising how far one can see when the eyes get accustomed to it. When disturbed the larks would fly up into the net. Although they are small it could be felt on the poles and the net was dropped immediately then the bird was taken out and killed. Father had a large pocket sewn inside his jacket to carry whatever was caught. That pocket came in handy to carry many things including his lunch or docky as it was commonly called. It also carried the net to and from the fields. We sometimes caught partridges with the net. They often slept on the ground in crops like mangolds and sugar beet. Catching small birds in this way was called trammelling.

Looking back I have sometimes regretted killing birds in the way we did because during the past twenty years I have had a lot of pleasure in watching small birds when they come near the house after pieces of bread and it is interesting to see them building their nests and rearing their young also their song gives pleasure to many people. On the otherhand some of them can be very distructive. They will peck lettuces and other things in the vegetable garden and crocuses when they are in full bloom. Gold finches will pick young shoots of some fruit trees.

In a T/V film shown recently from America thousands of blackbirds moved in flocks ruining crops of corn from farm to farm and on buildings where they slept their droppings were so thick that some of the inhabitants became very ill because of the fumes and dust, so while it might be alright for us with nothing to lose its not so good for those who's crop are ruined and it tends to make one have mixed feelings.

In this country many small birds such as the lark and finch have been protected by law for several years but in Europe especially in the Mediterranean area thousands of small birds are killed and eaten (perhaps by holidays makers from this country) even swallows as they travel to and from various countries to breed.

After the protection law was introduced my father used his net to keep birds off the strawberries.

During the winter evenings of our young life at the Creek we had to create most of our own entertainment and pastimes. Sometimes Albert, Harriett and I played snakes and ladders, snap or Ludo and later draughts. As we learned to read we took an occasional book home from the school. I can not remember ever having to take homework from the school. Of course there were no wireless sets or cinemas the nearest we got to that was a magic lantern slide projector show given in the school about once a year. They were still pictures and a running commentary was given as the pictures were shown. Albert at the farm had a small one which he brought a few times to show us pictures mostly of comical people. He also had a small gramophone which played cylindrical records of songs by Billy Williams. I wonder what became of it. Perhaps it was destroyed or is in an antique shop.

It was not often that father or mother played games with us. Mother usually had sewing or knitting to do and nearly every winter she made a pegged rug to put on the floor in front of the fire and was called a hearth rug. Most married women made them and would make different patterns with various coloured materials. Mother kept a rag bag containing left off clothing. Trousers or jackets made good material for rugs. Sometimes we cut pieces a certain width and length ready for pegging and as we grew older we helped to make the rug.

After father had finished work he liked to read the paper and often read to us. One of us took the paper home as we returned from school but during the school holidays the baker brought them on his cart once a week.

Sweets were a luxury to us but during the winter father made some rock occasionally. The main ingredients were sugar, vinegar and butter. After boiling a short time it was poured onto a plate or plates. It would soon begin to set and if left until cool it was soon edible but would set hard and brittle so it was best to take it off the plate and pull it into narrow lengths and cut it into small pices as sweets. Care had to be taken in getting it off the plate because if the knife entered the mixture far from the edge it might all turn to sugar and although edible it was spoilt as rock. The best thing to do was gradually lift the mixture from the plate all round the outside and work towards the middle. When clear of the plate it was pulled into lengths then cut into lumps with scissors. We used to try and make some of it like the local fair people did by pulling half of it until it was nearly white then put beside the other half, which was dark brown, then twisted together and cut into sweets.

Apart from making rock at intervals during winter father had one special evening for this occasion. I think this was done by most families. I can't remember the date but it was near Christmas. As the rock was being made someone would be outside (usually mother) who knocked on the door and recited a verse which included "If any one wants some home-made rock. All the children must be in bed by eight o'clock". You may guess we were!!!

Father liked to dabble in various mixtures. Two of his favourites were beachams pills and zambuck ointment. After reading the necessary ingredients on the containers he tried his hand at making them up and the results were quite good. The pills seemed to give the same relief as bought pills and the ointment seemed to have the same healing effect so we had home-made for many years.

Although most of our winter evenings were spent indoors, we took advantage of times like bonfire night Nov. 5th. Usually we went into one of Farmer Bobs fields a few nights before where there were plenty potatoe tops and we took other rubbish to make a large fire. Most of the children in the vicinity would take a few fire works or gun powder plot matches which had about an inch of substance containing sulphur on the stick. They were usually struck and thrown into the air and would flare for several seconds. The fire works were mostly squibs bought for twelve a penny and a few catherine wheels and cannons. We all enjoyed these occasions and to make it more exciting we used some hollowed out large mangel wurzels we had made for Halloween night Oct. 31st. One side was made to look like a face by cutting holes for eyes, nose and gaps for the mouth and teeth. With a lighted candle inside some of these faces were rather frightening as we carried them around on a pole.

Later when we had carbide cycle lamps we used to get a tin (long as possible) and make a hole in the bottom and lid to which a piece of string was tied then we dropped a piece of carbide into the tin and spit on it and put the lid on tight. Gases soon formed inside and when a lighted match was placed against the hole in the bottom a rather loud explosion would occur and blow the lid off which we retained by holding the string. Several explosions could be made with one piece of carbide by spitting on it and replace the lid. This was cheap fun for us but it could be dangerous because it sometimes back fired through the hole where the lighted match was held.

During winter months we seemed to have longer frosty spells than we do these days. Often men were stood off work with no pay for several weeks. Some went skating, that is, if they could afford skates. My father could'nt and us youngsters had to be satisfied with sliding. Our hobnail boots were just the thing and it was no trouble to find long stretches of frozen fleet water in grass fields and slides were made on the paths along the river bank as we went to school. The two Alberts and I had many hours enjoyment on those slides.

I have mentioned that when work could be done we all did our share but Sunday was a day of rest and religion. No work was done in the garden only perhaps to get something for Sunday dinner. For some years father was church warden at Ten Mile Bank so the children had to go to church and Sunday school. Later father and parson did not agree about something so we stopped going to church but mother had been a member of the chapel in her younger days still liked chapel consequently us children went to chapel Sunday school. Once a year these Sunday schools gave all the children a

treat where they had games and competitions in a grass field. I well remember one year the church gave us a so called treat. With other children I walked to Ten Mile Bank where we joined church officials and members of the Sunday school. We all got into a waggon drawn by one horse and taken to Hilgay which was head of the surrounding churches. The journey in the waggon was uncomfortable but the excitement of being taken for a ride compensated for that. On arrival at the Vicarage we were given refreshments then went into the grounds where games and competitions were held. One event I remember was bags of sweets were hidden in bushes or rough grass near the roots of trees. Only one packet was allowed for each child. Small prizes were given to winners of other events. At the end we were taken back to Ten Mile Bank in the waggon to walk home.

We looked forward to these annual treats also to the village fair which came for three days in October and again in May. These were held in a grass field. It was fun to watch people enjoying themselves on the swinging boats and roundabouts and listening to the music also shooting for coconuts. Until I started work I could never afford to try my luck as I only had four pence to spend. I remember giving Mr. Turner (a farmer) a penny to try to knock me a coconut down. I had seen him knock several down and was I disappointed when he hit the cup and side of the coconut but it did'nt fall.

I was always fascinated by the rock makers pulling it from large hooks and making various colours and if I had the money I always bought some brown striped rock which was more like home-made.

We always looked forward to Christmas when all children hung their stockings on the foot of the bed. (Socks as we know them today were rarely worn. Our stockings were held up by inch wide garters). Father Christmas was a mystery for a few years but as we grew older we began to wonder why pieces of rock that father had made a few nights before found their way into our stockings. The contents did not alter much from year to year. Each item was wrapped in a piece of paper and at the toe was usually a penny, next an orange followed by a piece of coal then small packets of most kinds of nuts, always an apple and the rock.

The girls nearly always got a home-made doll and the boys perhaps a spring wind up toy. The long stockings were always full of something (if not much value). It was a real exciting time seeing what each one had got. An excuse for the rock was that Father Christmas had found it and made use of it.

Although we had to go through our front room (as the sitting room was known) to get upstairs we never used it except on Sundays during the winter and on Christmas day. A fire would be made during the morning so it was warm to go in after dinner. Very often on these occasions we had salmon for tea and it became a saying in later years. "Open a tin of salmon and go in the front room". It was cheaper then!!!

For a time a shepherd named Jefferson lived next door who smoked an ounce of Hills shag tobacco every day (or nearly). He had a son named Frank, about my age, who took a pinch of tobacco sometimes to try it. He and I had made a pipe each with a piece of Elder by taking 3/4 of the

pith out one end and pushing a piece of reed through a hold in the side. We had tried smoking binder string but it was hot to the tongue. Now Frank shared his real tobacco with me and we were going to enjoy it. Having filled our pipes and lit up we puffed away like men but soon I began to feel queer and was very sick. This was on one of those Sunday afternoon occasions when father was resting in the front room. He was in a sympathetic mood and was very concerned because I was ill. He laid me on the couch and thinking perhaps I had eaten something that didn't suit he gave me some whisky. Although I enjoyed it, it didn't help very much. Some weeks afterwards he found out what was wrong and said that had he known at the time I would never have had that whisky. I did not attempt to smoke anything for a long time after that.

During my younger days quite a number of Lighters or Barges moved up and down the rivers carrying all kinds of produce including corn, potatoes, coal, artificial manure, timber, sand and gravel for road making and many other things. Nearly every day boats of some kind went by. They were known by the owner or by the name of the boat. The chief ones that I can remember were Ball and Dye who owned a string of lighters - six or more drawn by a steam tug named Olga. They travelled from Peterborough to Cambridge via Kings Lynn with various kinds of cargo.

Jacksons were a horse drawn gang based at Stanground near Peterborough. They travelled across the fens by river or large drains via Denver Sluice to Cambridge and Ely going into various tributaries of the Great Ouse and river Nene.

Another gang owned by Dauer, also horse drawn, was based at Isleham by the river Lark, a tributary of the Ouse. They carried quite a lot of artificial manure from a factory near by also gravel and clunch from pits in the vicinity.

The horses drawing these lighters walked along the river bank where in some places there were tow-paths. Stiles with fences were placed at intervals along the bank to separate landowners property and the horses were trained to jump the stiles without difficulty. In some places such as tributaries with no bridge or buildings along the bank the horse had to be taken to the other side of the river. For this purpose a special small lighter boat was kept with the gang.

There were two extra wide vessels named the "Kiel" and "Nancy" each were propelled by a small motor which could be heard coming along the river in the distance chug-chug-chug. These were known as the Tar Barges. Tar was one of their cargoes which they collected from gas works and took it to Kings Lynn returning with coal or other cargoes to various places along the rivers as far as Cambridge.

A small fishing shack owned by Mr. Green came from Kings Lynn every few weeks with cockles, mussels, shrimps, herring and other sea fish. During its season he also brought "Sanfor" a plant that grows on some river shores near the sea and a lot of it could be found between Kings Lynn and the sea. It grows about six inches and is similar to snake pipe that grows on some land. It has very thin wire like branches with green fleshy substance which comes off easy when cooked. After soaking in vinegar for a time it is very nice to eat.

When Mr. Green brought it along we always had some. It would keep a long time in vinegar. We often had cockles, mussels, shrimps and herring.

We used to call Mr. Green's smack the cockle boat. It had a sail which he used for power when and if the wind blew right, but often it was'nt strong enough to help him so another man was employed to pull or hale the boat with a line from Denver sluice to Ely. Between the Sluice and Kings Lynn they floated with the tide.

The sight of all these vessels were welcomed by people living beside the rivers. I was always interested in what they were doing and liked to watch them gliding through the water as they were being pulled by horses or tugs. Often local men were employed helping to load or unload their cargoes.

I did'nt envy the man who haled Mr. Greens cockle boat because I had some experience in haling a boat against the tide. Albert and I often haled boat loads of things from and to our land near Jim Kerridges engine. Father usually steered the boat because it needed experience and sometimes a lot of strength to keep the boat away from the shore.

I remember haling a boat filled with cabbages and other greens along the Wissey to Hilgay where father sold them to a man who had a small general stores.

All the rivers that joined the Great Ouse above Denver Sluice were none tidal which means that the water only moved one way - towards the Sluice where the doors were open. Sometimes after heavy rains the water seemed to be running

down the Wissey all the time. This reminds me of when I pulled a boat load of iron to Hilgay I was glad to ride in the boat going back.

When we first went to Hilgay Creek father had one rowing boat which would carry about one ton. As time passed he bought more boats of various kind. One was a punt. It was small and with its flat bottom was easy to move off the mud when the tide was low. Soon a pleasure boat was added which was often let to people on holiday. I remember two families from Downham Market named Ball and Dye who had a tobacco and fishing tackle business were regular visitors in the summer-time. They liked to fish for Pike and I often rowed them along the Ouse river on Sunday nearly to Ten Mile Bank. They would have a line with a spoon bait attached dragging behind the boat. We used to call it trawling. In many places weeds grew on the bottom of the river and often the Pike would hide among the weeds. As small fish or in our case the spinning spoon bait moved past the Pike would spring out and get caught. Sometimes two or more were hooked. They had the sport and my recreation was rowing but they gave me a few pence and perhaps a Pike so I didn't mind.

Ball and Dye formed a company and built the first cinema in Downham Market also at Kings Lynn.

Later another small boat was added which we called the cockle shell. It could be used with two oars or skulled from the stern. Often this was the only boat we had for our own use when the others were let to fishermen. Most of the people who hired boats were business men from Downham Market or Hilgay. Some of them liked to fish at night

because often that was the best time to catch Bream which, during the summer, moved slowly up or down stream in shoals or as we used to say in beds. When the surface of the water is calm it is fairly easy to see which way the Bream are moving because they make small rings on the surface and if watched closely one can determine the move. My father lived beside the river all his life and was used to their movements. When someone was coming to fish for Bream he would prepare a place by feeding the fish with a mixture of boiled potatoes, barley meal and clay rolled into balls which was dropped into the water, from a boat, about 100 yards in front of the moving Bream. The stakes were driven into the bottom of the river to which the boat could be tied by the fishermen and the bream were not disturbed. Boiled wheat was added to the feed from time to time and helped to keep the fish hanging around for several weeks.

Often the night fishermen had good catches and always left us as many as we wanted so there was not much need for us to fish for ourselves although we did sometimes for the sport of it.

I must say at that time most fresh water fish were very good to eat, especially where we lived because there was very little pollution in the river. We certainly had variety. I think, apart from Trout, Tench was my favourite because they had a taste apart from other fish. They have no scales so were easy to clean. Roach were a change but the bones are small. Chub were very nice but we didn't get many. Doctor Cross gave us some when he had extra luck.

Eels were often plentiful and could be caught all the year round. There are several different ways in catching them. During the winter they can be found in mud and often close together. In my young days father caught quite alot from the river with gleave which had four flat blades with jagged edges on the inside to hold the eels then they were pushed off into the boat by the foot. The best time to get eels by this means was when the water was low and they were found near the waters edge. The boat was controlled with the gleave. The use of the gleave has been illegal for some years.

As the weather gets warmer eels move about more and can be found in most parts of the river. The biggest eel could be caught on dead lines. This was using young birds, frogs or small fish as bait tied onto a strong cord at intervals of about three yards. Usually 10 to 12 baits on each line. One end of the cord was staked to the side of the river and the other end was tied to a brick then dropped into the middle of the river from a boat which was moved obliquely towards the other side. Albert and I often did this and had some good catches with some weighing up to three and four lbs.

During warm weather eels liked to get in bunches of floating weeds and sometimes we could get up to two stone in a few hours. This needed two persons, one to move the boat towards the weeds and the other with a net attached to an iron hoop fixed to a strong pole and as the weeds were approached the net was placed underneath lifting the weeds out of the water and as they were removed eels dropped into the net. If we got more than we needed they were sold and would make-up to one shilling a lb. Good money in those days.

Sometimes I skinned them for people living nearby.

Another good way to catch eels is with hives which are made with thin wood slats about four foot long fixed together to make a hollow trap so that eels would get in but not out. A bait is placed inside to attract them and the hive weighted so it sunk to the bottom of the river. I think professional eel catches still use this method in some places.

Not many people use a rod and line with the intention of trying to catch eels, unless they are longer eels, because they can be a nuisance if they swallow the hook or get tangled up with the line but odd ones do get on the hook sometimes. I used to think it good fun to catch eels by babbing. This was with a six foot length of wool with worms threaded on and tied into a bunch secured to a line long enough to reach the river bottom. The punt was best for this because of the low sides and at night when it was dark. Only a short pole was needed and it was easy to feel eels nibbling at the worms and when they had their teeth well into the wool I gradually brought them to the surface then slung them quickly into the punt and they would drop off then the bait was returned to the water ready for the next catch.

Sometimes when the water in the river Wissey was calm it was possible to see the bottom and odd eels moving about so we used to try to catch them with the gleave. One day a lad from next door, named Long, was pushing the punt along, I was standing on the end holding the gleave when I saw a nice eel. I jabbed at it but the water was deeper than I thought and the eel invited me in. Being able to swim a bit I managed to get out but to my surprise the eel was on the gleave.

During the summer Albert and I spent a lot of our spare time fishing for Gudgeon, a small fish about the size of sprats, which we used as bait on dead lines for eels. Sometimes the larger ones were used as live bait to catch Pike or Jack. We thought it good sport trying to catch these small fish because you could see them swimming around and the bait go into their mouth which was usually bread. We fished from a boat in an ideal spot at the mouth of the river Wissey where the water was about four foot deep. The best time for good results was during a thunder storm when they seem to give themselves up.

We did most of our fishing in the river Ouse because the license did'nt cost anything providing sixpence was sent to Squire Stocks of Hilgay to cover the cost of postage and paper. Often we did'nt have one because no one ever asked to see it. Squire Stocks held the fishing rights of the river Ouse one mile above Ten Mile Bank down to Hilgay Creek then half the West side to Denver Sluice.

Squire Pratt's gamekeeper, Mr. Faller was rather strict on most people about the licence for the Wissey. He warned us several times especially when he knew the squire was coming.

Some business men, mostly from Downham Market had house boats which were more or less stationary because they had no marine and were secured to the shore where the owners and family spent holidays in the summer. Father looked after some of them during the winter. Doctor Cross had one and he was a regular visitor, sometimes he fished from his houseboat which was moored by the Ouse bank near the Fishing Cottage, but usually he used a boat and a place which father had prepared for him

with bait and tackle. His favourite place was at a sharp bend in the river Wissey nearly opposite to our house. In return for father's services we all had a free doctor.

When the houseboats were moved long poles were used for short distances and for long distances they were towed. If any major repairs were needed or tarred they were taken to the barge and boat repair yard at Denver Sluice owned by Mr. Brighton who was also the landlord of the Jenyns Arms near by. This yard is now a large lawn used by picnickers during nice weather.

Probably father gained some good tips from Mr. Brighton on boat repairing because he always did his own. There was a flat place on the river side where he pulled the boats out on rollers then turned them upside down. Every year he did at least one boat with tar on the bottom and if there were any signs of leaks he put patches of canvas on this pitch and tar. If wood repairs were needed he always used copper nails and usually made a good water tight job of it.

My father had two shot guns one was a muzzle loader which took a few minutes to load. First with a measure of gun powder followed by a wad of paper which was rammed in tight with a rod. Next a measure of shot and another wad rammed in tight. When both barrels were loaded a small cap was placed on each nipple. Care had to be taken with the hammers if the gun was not to be used at once. The other gun was a breach loader which was much better and safer because the cartridges could be taken out when the gun was not being used. Both guns stood in the corner of our living room. He also had a revolver and a 22 bore rifle. As I got man enough I tried them all out.

The revolver got me scared once. A tree trunk cut off about five feet high was used as a gate post at the end of the path from the house to the river bank. Standing near the kitchen door and my sister Harriett about two feet behind me with her back towards mine I took aim at a black spot on the tree trunk and fired. Immediately Harriett said "You have shot me". I thought that was impossible because I had aimed the opposite way, but soon realised that the bullet had hit a nail in the tree stump and recochettted back over my right shoulder and hit Harriett in the back.

Luckly she was not badly hurt but it gave her a nasty shock. It gave me a shock too and it was a long time before I attempted to fire that revolver again.

The 22 bore rifle would shoot quite a long way but I can't remember hitting anything with it except the Wissey railway bridge. Either the thing was'nt accurate or I did'nt aim straight. Anyway it was fun until a bullet got stuck in the barrel and I could'nt get it out.

As Albert and I were able to shoot with the other guns we shot an occasional rabbit and various birds. The first thing I shot with a 12 bore gun was a blackbird. I remember there was about 4" of snow on the ground. Father was in the house and being pleased I went in to show him the bird and he told me to be careful how I handled the gun.

When I was about 10 years old a family by the name of Butcher came to live in one of two houses known as the Rodham on Martins farm near the Top farm yard. There were two girls Dorothy and Edith and three boys (Ned Edward) Horace and Perce. Later

came Charlie and Elliot. Little did I know then that Dorothy was to become my wife. Meeting them at school I became friendly with them, sometimes I made an excuse to my father that I was looking for old bones near the Rodham so I could play with them. After a few months they moved into a new house by the river where there had been five other new houses built. I often rowed across the river to fetch a pail of swill from their house for our pigs. In return for it my father sent a few eggs occasionally. I remember going soon after Charlie was born and Mr. Butcher asked me if I would like to take him home. I said "No thank you".

One day Dorothy and Edith returned from an outing via the Fishing Cottage side of the river. Edith was sure that I would take them back over to their side of the river Great Ouse in the boat which I did, but on the way I rocked the boat Dorothy said that I splashed their frocks with water and vowed she would never go in a boat with me again but 12 years later she did quite happily.

Soon after the out-break of the first world war Mr. Butcher and two other married men on the farm joined the Army.

Ned was the oldest of the Butcher family and, like me, he sometimes worked with gangs of children but he was very fond of horses and at every opportunity he worked with them. I remember when he was taking a horse named Sweep, which was very high spirited and nervous, ran away. Ned who was riding on the cart, did his best to stop it by climbing along the cart shaft to get hold of the short rein when he slipped but managed to grab the collar and hang onto the harness as the horse and cart went into a dyke and got stuck. If Ned had dropped off he may have been ran over and killed.

He was rather shocked but not hurt nor was Sweep as mud in the dyke was soft and she sank into it. The harness had to be cut to free her from the shafts and she was pulled out of the dyke with ropes by several men.

At the time of the incident I was coming from the Fen yard with another horse and cart but could not help in anyway until Sweep had gone into the dyke.

The event did not put Ned off horses because later he looked after a pony and an ex-hunter with which he used to take the Martin Brothers to and from Hilgay Fen railway station and they often rode on them round the farm. Mr. Turner (the foreman) always used the ex-hunter to ride round the farm when the Martins were there and the pony and trap for outings. During 1915 the Butcher family moved to Ely and I never expected to see them again.

When I was 12 years old my sister Laura was born. I remember it quite well because it was a few months after having my first cycle, which was 2nd hand, and when my father knew a baby was on the way he told me to get on my bike and go to Downham Market for the doctor so I crossed the river Wissey and went to Downham via the Sluice road and Denver. I saw Doctor Cross who told me that he wanted my cycle to get him from the Sluice Road to the Fishing Cottage because he didn't want to go over the Sluice bridge and pay toll for his car. I was back on the Sluice road ten minutes before he came along in his car. He took my bike and went bouncing off along the rough river bank. It didn't take him long to deliver Laura which seemed to have been an easier job than riding my bike. As he returned he was cross literally as well as by name. He said "I have torn my trousers on the saddle of that bloody old bike".

Old or not I thought a third class ride is better than a first class walk and much quicker. I bought the bike off Teddy the baker who was at Ten Mile Bank. Teddy used to take bread and cake round the country side twice a week and sold bicycles in his spare time. At first the bike had low handle bars but were quickly changed to upright handles after father had tried to ride it and fell off into a bunch of stinging nettles resulting in rather foul language being used and Teddy the baker was no angel. However he said "I used to ride a penny farthing years ago so I am sure I can ride this". He tried several times along a nice path in the orchard but still those nettles got in the way and if there was a brick or any object within several yards of his path he seemed drawn to them like a magnet and had to run into them. This feeling seemed to remain with him for most of the rest of his life. Even after he could ride reasonably well he could not bear anyone to ride beside him. Sometimes I did it without thinking and he would swear at me and tell me to get in front or behind.

The first bike father had he brought from a man named George Stone. It had a back pedal break and always seemed to give trouble. At first father could'nt free wheel without pressing back on the pedal and of course that would stop him. Then it got jammed and the wheel would'nt turn. Father soon got angry and told George to put it right. Poor old George spent a long time trying to mend it and make it go without success. In the end he bought it back because it was during havest and he was losing time and money.

My bike was a god send. I had already learned to ride on Farmer Bobs family bone shaker and I used it during the last few months of my school days when my sister Edith rode on the handles bars. She was so pleased to ride and had no fear of riding along the river bank nor when we rode down the side of the bank and through the tunnel under the railway at Ouse Bridge. Looking back I sometimes wonder how I avoided running into the wall of the tunnel.

Before I had the bike my only transport was shankey's pony and on looking around there were various ways of getting away from the Creek, One by boat across the river Ouse and walk to Ten Mile Bank or cross the Wissey to the Fishing Cottage and walk to Denver railway station for Downham Market. Two, walk along our side of the Ouse to Ten Mile Bank. Three, along the Wissey bank to Hilgay. Four, over the Wissey railway bridges and walk along the railway to Denver Station but it was a trespass offence to go onto the line and for some years a man named Cross lived in the railway house at Ouse Bridge who was very strict. However the Wissey bridge was some distance from the Ouse so we used to take a chance and lookout for trains coming from each way.

My parents often went that way because it was the nearest way to Denver station where a tram coming from Stoke Ferry would take them to Downham Market. Tickets were bought on the tram.

As we grew older father or mother took some of us with them. I remember going with mother when on the way home she bought some doughnuts from a confectioner shop from Downham station. We had a few minutes in the waiting room before the tram came

so I asked mother if I could have a doughnut she said "No wait till we get home then we can all enjoy them" Eventually we arrived home and I could'n wait for my doughnut. Mother gave us all one each and as I took a bit I got a mouthful of ants. Most of the others had ants in too. Were we disappointed? It was too far to take them back.

As Albert, Harriett and I got old enough we went by tram to Downham Market on Saturdays and as the last tram back was at 6 pm, we walked home via Denver which made it another two miles but we didn't mind because it seemed fun when there were other boys and girls with us.

In those days most shops kept open until 9 pm. so we could buy things if we had the money which was'nt very often until after we left school.

I remember Harriett and I carrying our first sewing machine home from Downham Market. We were so anxious to try it out. Harriett soon found some material and I turned the handle while she made some knickers without frills. She used to make most of her under-clothes by hand.

When I left school I went to work on Martins farm at Ouse Bridge doing various kinds of work. Sometimes with gangs of other boys pulling weeds out of corn crops or picking up twitch of stones off the land. Sometimes I worked with horses on different jobs leading front horse for drilling corn or other seeds or for ploughing when three or more horses were on length. Then there was leading horse hoe.

There were times I worked one horse such as rolling or harrowing.

At intervals a corn stack was thrashed and at first I either had the job fetching water for the engine or charf tending or carrying. I never liked the charf because it was often a dirty job, especially if the wind was blowing from the drum when dust got in your eyes, ears, nose and throat.

Water carrying was much cleaner work but often had to be carried a long way in two pails with yokes on the shoulders. When a portable engine was used the water was poured into a tub close to the engine. Later sometimes a traction engine was used which made it much easier because they had a long pipe which could suck the water from the tub into the engine.

There was always one field of celery grown on soil which was black and I had one season helping to set the plants then hoeing and earthing them up and when they were ready to be taken up, I helped two men to get them ready for the market. One man dug them and laid them in a row. My job was to trim each head, that is pull all the decayed leaves off, and make bunches of twelve, then the other man tied the bunches with binder string. This was hard work and back aching but in spite of that I liked working with the men because it was piece work and I had a share of what was earned. The man who tied the celery was named Jack Howlett and he lived next door to us. He and his wife had been flooded out of their home in Southery Fen after the river Little Ouse bank had burst and flooded several thousand acres of fen land in 1915, again 1916.

Another job I did with two other men was spreading muck (farm yard manure). This was day work and the men were paid 5,- a day, while I received 1/9. As I did row for row with the men it seemed to me that I was worth nearly if not as much as the men. So when Mr. Turner, the foreman, came on his hunter I told him what I thought. He got rather angry and rode round and pointed out patches of ground which he said that I had missed. In doing so he had gone onto ground that the other men had done. After I convinced him he gave me another 3 pence a day but said that as I was only 15 I was'nt entitled to as much as the men.

There were many other jobs that I did but as each harvest came round I had to join the rest of the family and help to tie, shock, rake and serve thatcher. I well remember when the first world war started. On the 4th of August 1914, we were harvesting oats when Mr. Turner came riding into the field and said that six germans had been killed little knowing that many thousand on each side were to follow.

Many men soon joined the services including Uncle John Bower's son Harry (by his first marriage) who helped Uncle John on his land. Aunt Hannah did as much as she could to help but she had three young children to look after and it came too much for them so when I was nearly 16 she asked me to work for them and live in which I did.

Although it was mostly land work for me it was different because there were two horses and a cow to look after. There were seven acres of land near the bungalow in Southery and about 30 acres at Poppylot off the Feltwell road 2 miles from Southery. Some of the land was used to get

peat from. Every year Uncle John's brother Mark dug some peat and stacked it in rows to dry. Aunt Hannah burned nothing else but peat which had a not unhealthy smell that one quickly got used to.

Uncle John grew five to ten acres of celery every year and grew his own plants from seed. The growing plants needed regular attention and had to be pricked out in small beds. I got quite used to that job. After preparing the beds we had large boards and cushions to kneel on then made a small trench across the bed when we put the small plants in about one inch apart and covered them in with the fore fingers. If it didn't rain they were watered every day and after a few weeks were set out again in a field.

The land at Poppylot was very good for growing celery because the moisture kept in well which helped it to mature earlier and Uncle John started digging it in August before it was bleached. He found that hotel owners liked it green for making soups.

The celery was taken away in railway trucks from a siding that was the terminus of the railway line through Stoke Ferry and on the Downham Market. It ended at Poppylot and was quite handy for us.

The horses we used were little more than ponies so we had a pony and cart to take us to and from Poppylot.

The land there on the left hand side of Feltwell road was higher than Southery Fen itself probably because that fen had been cropped for many years before and had been drained much better.

Uncle John's land and other small farmers land was drained by the engine and Hunts Sluice near where we used to live.

The water in the drain was always fresh and clear and there was quite a number of fish. When Aunt Hannah wanted some fish Uncle John had a net which we put across the drain then had a splash pole each side some distance away and splashed towards the net. Usually we got some good roach and bream fairly quickly.

Before the war started Uncle John had a good side line in catching finches and linnets with a net and selling them as cage birds. He still had several in cages while I was with him but there was very little trade for them. Later they were protected.

When I first went to Southery the fen was still drying out from a recent flood and most of the houses scattered about the fen were still empty but after a few months the farmers returned and crops were soon flourishing again. Jack Howlett and his wife returned to live in a house not far from the one they had left 3 years before.

The time came when Harry Bowers was coming home to help his father which meant that I must look for another job. I had been quite happy there because Aunt Hannah was very good to me. It didn't take long to find other work because Mr. Fowler of Littleport had taken two big farms at Poppylot after the floods and was crying out for workers.

As it happened Jack Howlett was working for Fowler and living on the farm. I had got on well with Jack and his wife when they lived next door to us at the Creek and now as soon as I got a job I was welcomed to live with them.

This move made me somewhat better off because while living with Uncle John I received 10,- a week plus board and lodgings now I received 25,- a week plus extra for overtime and piece work.

At first 8,- a week was all Mrs. Howlett would take for my keep because she said that as she worked full time on the land there was'nt time for her to cook hot meals every day but some weeks later she took in another lodger and it was arranged that I should pay an extra 2,- and Mrs. Howlett stayed at home and cooked for us all which she did very well.

By now I was well passed 16 years and growing stronger. Although I was'nt as good a man as Jack, I worked with him most of time and we did quite a lot of piece work together. Naturally he took a few shillings more than me on some jobs but when it came to carting the corn harvest he volunteered to pitch the shoaves onto the cart in the field all the time if I did the loading. I quite agreed with the idea because loading was the easier job and Jack was'nt very keen on it so I had the same money as he did. The crops grown on the farm were much the same as most farms in the area except several acres of onions were grown. Not many farmers grew them at all. There was a large hall on this farm known previously to the floods as Poppylot Hall and no doubt at one time had been occupied by some Squire, but since the floods it had been ruined but it was a good place to store onions, at times all the rooms were stacked full.

There were several young women from Feltwell working on the farm. I remember one of them asking me what I did in my spare time and I told her I went home at the weekend which I did. I was very shy where girls were concerned at that time having never been out with one. The only girls living near us about my age were, Tom Fletcher, the foreman's daughters who used to bring the families laundry to be put through Mrs. Howlett's mangel every week as Mrs. Fletcher had'nt got one. I turned the handle for them and helped to carry the basket of laundry back to their home and still being shy I went straight back.

Like most out the way the only place for recreation was the pub which was the Poppylot Ship. Jack liked his beer and went to the Ship most weekends but I never saw him drunk. He was very good company in a pub and would oblige with a song and a step dance or over the broom stick occasionally.

Emma, Jack's wife went with him once in a while and she could sing too. Her favourite song was about a baby named Jim with a very big mouth. I can't remember it all but some of the lyrics were: what a mouth, what a mouth, what a northern south cord, lummy what a mouth he's got His mummy had to feed him with a shovel!

It was probably one that Billy Williams used to sing - by Eddison Bell? I have never heard anyone else sing it. Every one who heard it were very amused.

I went to the Ship a few times with them and although I didn't drink much I had a very enjoyable time.

While I worked at Fowlers the first tractor I saw was being used which was an Overtime. One of the first kind to be used in England. They were not very reliable at first but soon others were introduced from America such as Fordson. Land girls were trained to drive them and later one of these girls drove one for Fowler and did quite a lot of ploughing.

After the floods in Southery fen a lot of the dykes were nearly filled with mud. Jack and I cleaned several of them out. In some places a new dyke had to be dug. Although I had seen father do a lot, this gave me some practical knowledge of tool work.

When I was about 17 1/2 years old and working with other men doing the same as them, I was still getting 25,- a week while the men got 30,-. This went against the grain somewhat but the unwritten rule to be entitled to mans pay was you must be able to carry corn and so far I had not carried a coomb (18 stone). I knew several men older than me who came under the same rule. However the day soon came when I was able to prove my ability. I was sent with another man to load a truck of wheat at Poppylot siding. We had a horse and cart each and took the wheat from the farmyard and I carried coomb for coomb with the other man from the cart into the railway truck.

At the first opportunity I asked the foreman, Tom Fletcher about an increase in pay. He would not agree because I was still under 18 so I decided to leave.

Although the war had finished five months previous most farmers were short of men and it didn't take me long to get a job on one of Fred Heam's farms near Hilgay fen railway station not many miles from home where I went back to live. I started working with Arthur Cornwall cleaning out a dyke. We called it dyking. This was piece work and we averaged 36,- a week. Quite an improvement on Tom Fletchers pay. In a way I was sorry to leave Jack and Emma because they both had been very good to me.

Arthur Cornwall was a good man to work with. He had been a toolman for many years and he taught me a lot, especially in keeping the correct angle of the dyke sides, which could differ with the width and depth.

Fred Heam started farming with a few acres and soon increased them to several different farms. His main crops were potatoes and soon after the first world war started, he secured a large contract to supply potatoes to the British Forces. With this regular and certain income he bought up to ten large farms, all fen land, growing mostly root crops such as potatoes, carrots, celery, and later sugar beet. For each of the farms he had foremen who were hand picked for their experience and knowledge of farming. In addition he had a head foreman who was known as the riding foreman. He literally rode on horse back from farm to farm supervising the crops and work.

Mr. Heam had a room in each of the foremans houses where business was conducted and it was rumoured that the foreman's wife was expected to entertain Fred in more ways than one and those rumours grew after a few years when people began to say that some of the foremans children were dead spit of Fred?

After the first world war Mr. Heam was honoured with a knighthood for his efforts in helping to supply food for the troops and there after he was known as Sir Frederick.

Now back to work! After some weeks of dyking I joined two other men, Slen Ward and Joe West, and started potatoe riddling. The tools for the job were: potatoe ladle, stand, riddle, hopper to hang two bags on, and weighing machine. I used the ladle to half fill the round riddle with potatoes. Slen riddles the potatoes on the stand then copped them into the hopper and Joe took bags off the hopper and weighed them in one cwt (8 stones).

Slen Ward lived with Jim Kerridge so I cycled with him and crossed the river in his boat to and from work. Slen was very good with the riddle so Joe and I changed jobs sometimes. The potatoes were in long champs or heaps. At the beginning of the season they were fairly easy to handle. It was just a matter of the size of riddle needed. The larger ones stayed on the riddle while the seed and smaller potatoes and dirt fell through. Any bad ones or stones were picked off. Sometimes we did up to ten tons a day. This was done by piece work and the riding foreman, in our time, Mr. Barrett, bargained with us at the price per ton. He was a reasonable man and we always earned good money. I said "earned" because it was hard work. When it rained there was no shelter so we could'nt work and like most other farm workers received no pay. Usually we went into a shed and played pitch halfpenny. A knife was pushed into the ground and each player pitched coins usually pennies from a distance to the knife and the nearest one to the knife picked up all the coins and tossed them in the air. All coins falling head upwards were his. Then the next nearest took his turn so on until all the coins were won. The number of players varied from three to ten or more. Nobody won or lost very much but it passed the time away.

A light railway had been laid connecting three of Mr. Hiems farms with Southery siding on the main Kings Lynn to London railway. The trucks were about two feet high with a board at each end and no sides. They carried about two ton. A number of these trucks were pulled by a horse which could trot with ten tons or more. One of these lines was laid beside the potatoe heap and each day potatoes were collected and taken to the siding.

It didn't take long to load our days output, usually about ten ton.

Other products and material were carried on the trucks to and from Southery siding. It was a cheap means of transport.

Potatoe riddling lasted several months and as the summer approached chits on potatoes grew longer, sometimes through the straw and earth covering the heap which made harder work for us and it took longer to riddle them but we got extra money per ton.

When the old potatoes were finished we had a few weeks doing various jobs such as hoeing celery or between the new potatoe crops.

During July some early potatoes were ready to dig so I had to buy a new fork to join the gang of diggers. I had not done much of this work before and it didn't take me long to learn it was back aching and hard work for me to keep up with the others who were used to the job. Each man had a woman or girl picking for him and I have Arthur Cornwalls daughter with me who was about my age. Like me she didn't say much but she was a good potatoe picker and appeared to be a very nice girl so after a time I plucked up courage and asked her what she did in her spare time, her answer was that she went to church and didn't encourage me any further.

Since working for Mr. Hiem I had been in the habit of going to the Jolly Anglers at Ten Mile Bank for a drink with other lads on Sunday evening after which we walked around the village in anticipation, like most other young people did. The girls paraded up and down after going to church or chapel.

During one of those evenings I met Ethel Cornwell with another girl who had been potatoe picking on Hems so I walked home with them. The other girl, Beattie Butcher, lived on the farm but Ethel lived along the Hundred foot river bank. Having left Beattie at her home I became lost for words, but I managed to learn that Ethel had been friendly with a lad named Gooch who had been killed in France while in the army. It appeared that she was very fond of the lad and could not forget him. Although we became friends and she liked me to walk with her. Perhaps because it was a long way, she still lived with the dead. After we arrived at her home I still had nearly three miles to get to the Creek. This was my first experience of escorting a girl home and as I walked along the Hundred foot bank, at first, I was walking on air but before I arrived home my thoughts were "Is it worth it!" The round trip was nearly eight miles. However, I went again the following Sunday evening where it became plain it would'nt work because Ethel was still living in the past, so we agreed to break it off.

Digging potatoes continued until the corn harvest was ready. Although we worked longer hours, I found that tying and shocking the corn was not so hard work as digging. Later I joined the carting set until the harvest was finished.

At this time the promise that after the war the government would make Britain a place fit for heroes to live in, seemed to be coming true because there was plenty of money floating around. Some of the forces were coming home with large quantities and various jobs were being created for the boys in many parts of the country. An Aerodrome was being built at Feltwell for the airforce and big money was to be had which gave me food for thought.

A youth about my age name Les Walker whom I had been friendly with was like me, looking for big money with less work. We had heard that living accommodation was supplied at the Aerodrome and a canteen was nearby, so we gathered a few necessary things and off we went on our bikes. On the way we had to pass through Poppylot where we stopped and had a few words with Jack Hewlett and Emma who wished us luck.

At the Aerodrome we were both given a job and shown to our quarters in a hut with four other lads. My job was fetching chalk and clunch from a pit at Hockwoldcum-Wilton, a small village about two miles along the road to Lakenheath. I had one horse and cart which was taken right into the pit where two men filled the cart with loose chalk and clunch then I took it to the Aerodrome hanger to make the foundations.

We soon settled down with the other lads in the hut and had most of our meals in the canteen. One of the girls serving there had worked for Fowler at Poppylot when I was there. She soon recognised me and gave me several extra helpings which were very acceptable.

For about two months Les and I received very good money. There was plenty overtime to be had and we made hay while the sun shone. We didn't have time to go into Feltwell and it seemed this was a land of milk and honey. Then without warning a strike was called. Everyone, except those on contract, stopped work. Les and I didn't belong to any union and we couldn't understand it all. During the day two men, who had been contracted to put sheets of corrugated iron on the roof of the hangers, wanted two men to lift the sheets onto the roof for them while they nailed them on.

They offered more money per hour than we had been getting, so Les and I took the job. For three days we worked hard. On the morning of the fourth day our experts didn't turn up and we soon learned that they had disappeared. We had worked three days for nothing.

There was an oil stove in the hut and we sometimes cooked a snack for ourselves, so with time on my hands I made some light dumplings and put them in the sauce pan in anticipation, then went outside for something. As I went back I saw smoke coming from a window and soon realised the hut was on fire. I shouted a warning to men in surrounding huts and grabbed a bucket to fetch water from a nearby washhouse. Soon scores of men were on the scene with buckets, bowls or anything that held water. The roof had started to flare as water was thrown through windows, the door and onto the roof. In about five minutes it was under control and was out when the camp fire engine arrived. But what a mess! Les's and my beds were soaked as were most things on the floor. There was a gaping hole in the roof. Some blamed me and the oil stove but the mystery was that my saucepan was still on the stove with the dumplings half cooked.

The stove may have flared up or a cigarette end may have started it?

It put an end to my cooking, I took the dumplings outside and threw them into a bush nearby where they hung in strings.

It also put an end to our accommodation. There was no other huts available and the strike was still on, so Les and I decided to go home as there was still plenty of work about.

After collecting what money was due to us, we salvaged most of our belongings, mounted our bikes and steered for home. As we went through Fettwell we saw an old oak tree reputed to be the one that King Charles I hid in? Looking back we were perhaps lucky in getting away without having to pay for the hut.

Back home we took jobs where we could earn the biggest penny, mainly piece work of any kind on the land. In the winter time we had long spells of tramping thrashing. That was following thrashing tackle from farm to farm where one, two or more stacks were threshed. Usually I worked on the corn stack or looked after the corn.

As the 1919 harvest came along I worked for Mr. Flowers who farmed next to Martins. My sister Harriett came with me. There was'nt much mowing to do so we tied and shocked the corn together. When that part of the harvest was finished I joined the carting set, during which time I had been promised the thatching, but as we were building the last stack Eaves Walker (Les Walkers father) came into the yard with his thatching gear and asked me to help him to put the thatching ladder up the stack. Not blaming Eaves I asked the foreman what was going on because he had broken his promise to me. He made the excuse that Mr. Flower^s wanted to get the stacks thatched as soon as possible and at the time I was in the carting set and he wanted me for other work. I said "Tell that to Eaves Walker". I finished at the end of that day.

As it happened there were plenty of stacks to be thatched on other farms and the next day I started thatching for Mr. Bliss only half a mile from the creek and my sister Harriett served me. Like my father I carried the bunches up the stack. This was my first thatching job I had taken on myself although I had done some with father for Mr. Bliss before and he was well satisfied with my work. Harriett and I got on very well together. Apart from carrying the bunches, I thought she worked as hard as I did and as it was when we tied and shocked in the field together I gave her nearly half what we earned. She was very surprised and said that I had opened her eyes because father never told her how much they earned and he only gave her a few shillings and accomodation. She was sorry when our thatching was finished.

After the war a few more cars and motor cycles began to appear on the roads, also an ever increasing number of bicycles. Most teenagers had one and cycled to Downham Market from the surrounding villages and country side on Saturday, especially now most people finished work at one pm. on that day. Many youngsters went to the cinema where a running serial was shown every week, which usually finished during a very exciting incident to be continued next week which acted like a magnet on most of us. Two of these serials were "The laughing Mask" and "The Iron Hand" and our heroes were usually Warner Oland and Pearl White. The supporting picture was a cowboy with Tom Mix. They were all silent pictures with what the actors were saying written on the screen. A piano was played during the performance.

Albert, Harriett and I often went together during the winter because it seemed more convenient to walk along the railway line to Denver Station then get on the tram for Downham. On the way home we would stop in Denver to see Aunt Alice and have a cup of cocoa made with milk. Uncle Fred, having died a few months after they moved to Denver, so Aunt Alice being left with young Eric was pleased to see us.

When we first used cycles the law was a white light must be carried on the front after dark. This was when trouble could start because the lamps burned paraffin and it didn't take a strong wind to blow them out. If you turned the wick up hoping to get a better light it would smoke and perhaps fly on fire. One consideration it being in front, one could keep an eye on it, but when a red rear light was added we had to keep looking behind to see if it was alight and never could be relied on. That was another reason why we often walked. Later we had carbide lamps which were a great improvement but good control of water to the carbide had to be maintained or it would quickly flood and put the light out.

I remember taking my cycle to Downham Market for repair. Having no lamps I hoped to get back before lighting up time but it was getting dark when I collected it so I decided to go home via the river bank, where the law regarding lights did not reach. Starting off walking towards the river where the bank was less than 100 yards in front of me, I put one foot on the pedal and

skipped along. Before reaching the bank a policeman stopped me and charged me with riding a cycle without lights. My excuse was in vain and I was fined 10,-. When I got to the bank my hopes of riding were soon shattered because the back wheel, which I had paid 10,- for repairs, stuck fast and I carried it all the way home (three miles)!! What a night out?

But to give me strength I stopped and had a pint of beer at Denver Sluice.

During my late teens, like many other lads I had got into the habit of going to the pub at weekends. One or two pints of beer were my limit, occasionally I enjoyed a glass of port which was the most common wine around in those days. We always had a quart bottle of Tarragona port for Xmas. It cost 2,- to 2/6. The slightly better Rare Old Daro was 4/6 for 1 1/3 pint bottle. It was a mistake to mix it with beer. To my sorrow I found this out while with some more lads at Downham Market. One Saturday night we all had some beer following with two glasses of port and then went to the fair where we had a go on the swings. Minutes afterwards we dashed behind a tent and were soon like automatic pumps spewing one against the other. Never again were my thoughts. Port is rather heavy!

On Sunday evenings sometimes we went to a pub in Denver where we often played on a slot machine which was much more generous than the one armed bandits of today. At times we won free drinks for the evening.

Occasionally we went to the Golly Anglers at Ten Mile Bank and played darts. A regular customer there was a deaf and dumb man name Scott, who lived with his sister, also deaf and dumb. Somehow he knew all the local news including scandal. One evening as we entered he seemed excited and holding his arms like a cradle he swung to and fro then making noises he pointed in the direction where a girl known as the Botany Bay filly lived.

It was common knowledge that she was pregnant so we guessed that she had got her baby. Perhaps Jose Scott knew more about it than we did.

As men and woman were being discharged from the forces, most towns and villages were making efforts to mark the occasion of winning the war. Meetings were held in the old school at Ten Mile Bank where it was decided to start a Social Club and the Infant school room was allocated for this purpose. The most important thing in most peoples mind was to free the toll bridge over the river, but it was privately owned and quite a lot of money needed to buy the rights. It was argued that the natives were not the only people who used the bridge and it was'nt fair to expect them to pay all the money. A few years later the Government helped with a grant and the bridge was eventually freed.

Not many years previous the bridge had been the scene of some very awkward moments when a gang of youths occasionally came from Hilgay to fight youths of Ten Mile Bank. My uncle Harry often looked after the toll collecting during evenings.

I remember one incident when he shut the big gates across the bridge and the Hilgay lads tried to climb over the top, but Ten Mile Bank lads with the help of some men drove them back. Quite a number of the men returning home after the war went back to their old jobs and a lot of them having spent their gratuity were anxious to settle down, consequently big money jobs began to decrease so I took a job with a gang working in the drains for the Littleport and Downham Drainage Commissioners. A man named Theobald acting as engineer, was in charge of internal drainage of about 30,000 acres for the commissioners. He tried to copy the Martin Bros. in dress and thought himself just as important.

When he went into Hilgay Fen to visit workers he travelled by train to Hilgay station from Littleport taking his bike with him then cycled to the vicinity of work being done.

At first I joined three others in widening a section of a drain. We all had a say in how much we would do the work for and made a reasonable bargain with Mr. Theobald and he was satisfied with our work.

Then we joined a gang of 20 men in another drain being made deeper. Mr. Bell was the ganger in charge. The sides of the drain were too high for one man to throw the clay onto the top so a man, known as a jack baller, stood half way up the side and caught clay from the digger then threw it onto the top.

This work was done for an agreed price per chain (22 yards) and we all discussed it with Mr. Bell who acted as spokesman for us all when Mr. Theobald came to bargain. It was soon noticed that Bell was accepting less than we thought reasonable also that he met Theobald every time a bargain was to be made and later it was discovered that Bell visited Mr. Theobald at his house occasionally and was receiving a good tip for keeping us under paid.

The next time Mr. Theobald visited us he did his usual walk along the drain side to inspect our work and asked us how we were getting on. I told him that we would be more satisfied if he came and discussed the price per chain with us all instead of Mr. Bell meeting him 50 yards away from us. When he found that all the men agreed with me he said that he would carry out our wishes. A few weeks afterwards the number of men on the gang were being reduced and I was among the first to get the sack.

During the previous six months the government had been creating jobs for the heros to come back to. They opened labour exchanges where people could sign on in every town and some dole money were promised.

Various ministries were formed including the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. It was the latter who started what promised to be a big and long job in the Great Ouse river at Denver Sluice and working up towards Ely and above.

Captain Crowther was in charge of the work. Four dredgers, six barges and a tug boat arrived from Kings Lynn. Several huts were erected for some men to live in, stores and an office. Bill Larken was skipper of the tug and Fred Acred his mate. They lived on the tug during the week and went home to Kings Lynn at weekends. Both had been in the Merchant Navy and were what might be called "old salts"!

The work was beginning to take shape when I finished in the drains and as I lived quite near, the job night watchman fell into my lap. Bill allowed me to use the tug for rest periods and the weekends.

Three dredgers started making the river deeper near the Sluice and as there was a road on the top of both banks for some distance a lot of the road and clay was put into barges and taken to a flat pasture between the Creek and Ouse Bridge where it was unloaded by the fourth dredger.

I had the use of a large rowing boat which conveniently had a sail and a false keel and it could be sculled at the stern. I found this the best way to get from one vessel to the other.

If the wind was favourable at weekends I used the sail on visits to the dredger near Ouse Bridge or to go home occasionally.

Being used to the river this job was right up my street and with the weekend overtime I was getting good money. When the work was in full swing between 60 and 70 people were employed and it seemed that I was in clover for a long time to come, but all good things come to an end and so did this with a shock to many people including the Great Ouse Drainage commissioners because the job was handed over to them, but they had'nt got the money to carry it on. In fact they were trying to get a grant from the government to do urgent jobs elsewhere.

During the war Great Britain had received aid through the Marshall plan from America which was, have war material now and pay after the war. Hardly had the noise from the guns died down when America, like Skylock, demanded their pound of flesh but Britain was practically bankrupt so it was agreed that interest should be paid until such time the loan could be paid back but it was a struggle to pay the colossal amount of interest. Soon the land of milk and honey promised to our war heroes became the country of many disappointed people.

As it happened harvest was nearly ready and I got a job with Mr. Bliss helping him to get his corn harvest in and did his thatching and a few other small farmers including Dibber Brandles. Father and I had been doing his for several years but this particular year I did it after which he asked me to help tie and shock 6 acres of Brank (Buck wheat). Les Walker and I took the job and we did half each.

Brank straw being soft made it easy money.

Shortly afterwards Dibber discovered that a lot of the Brank had fallen to the ground. It was over ripe when he cut it, but it was a typical Dibber who said "they come there, young and strong. Did it in no time and knocked most of the corn out"!!

Francis Palmer of Hilgay ran a business of thrashing corn, straw pressing and chaff cutting. He had four sons who often worked a thrashing set each with a traction engine and did most of the repair work themselves. All the family had a twinkle of mischief in their eyes and were a bit on the rough side but were very good natured and good employers.

I had several spells of tramping thrashing with them and one of straw-pressing. They had a contract with the government to press straw for the army horse transport during the war and a year or so after.

The two youngest sons, Doug and Algie took turns in driving the traction engine and feeding the press. We went from farm to farm and pressed straw that was not needed for the farmers use. My job was to tie two wires round each bale. A board was placed in between each bale, by the feeder, to separate them. I stood on one side of the press and threaded the wires through grooves on the boards and a woman on the otherside threaded them back for me to tie. I had to judge the length of the bale necessary for the weight (four stone).

At times we worked several miles from home when we lived in hut on wheels that was kept with the set. Most weekends we went home and took back some food, but vegetables were cooked in the hut.

All the Palmer family were fond of poaching. Doug and Algie were no exception when we were in the fens. They didn't seem to have any trouble in catching a pheasant, partridge or hare which was cooked and enjoyed in the hut.

When we were at home they occasionally went into plantations around Hilgay and caught pheasants alive which were pinioned and sent away. I remember Doug and his elder brother Ron were charged with such a case while we were pressing and Doug thought they might get a prison sentence but were clever enough to get away with it.

Before cinemas controlled the largest share of entertainment throughout the country, theater groups and variety concert parties travelled around to towns and large villages where the programmes changed most weeks. Maria Martin and Murder in the Red Barn were among the many plays that were put on. I went to several of them and enjoyed them at Downham Market.

In those days a horse drawn vehicle known as a carriers cart took passengers and parcels to the market towns from outlying villages.

During my late teens, like some more of my contemporaries, I got into the habit of gambling with cards occasionally and nearly every Sunday morning and perhaps afternoon a party of us met near or under Ouse Bridge and played Banker or Pontoon. The luck swung both ways so none of us won or lost much.

Sometimes on the way home from Downham market on Saturday night, four of us would stop and play Pontoon in a railway hut. One night I remember when we stayed all night.

It was very cold so we lit a fire and burnt all the wood that a railway gang had prepared for themselves at their breaktime or if it rained. One of our party was Bill Wilson, who's father was ganger or foreman of that length of line. He must have known who it was that burned the wood but we never heard anything about it. Perhaps Bill took all the blame for us.

On Christmas day 1920 George Long from next door joined us in a drinking party which went on until the early hours of Boxing day when George and I were feeling a bit merry and not at all tired. The rest of the family except father had gone to bed. We went outside where the stars were shining in a moonless sky. Just a night for poaching I thought so I asked George if he would like to go with me and he agreed at once. Albert had acquired a sawn off shot gun and had put a white beard on the muzzle which helped to take a quick aim. I took the gun and some cartridges while George carried a sack and we went over Ouse Bridge and along Picture's drove until we arrived at the farm where there was a small plantation.

A family named Hill lived in the farm house. Mr. Pictures; having retired after a cycle accident had moved to Ten Mile Bank.

Jim Hill the oldest son and I had been friends for some time. His youngest brother George used to sing loudly as he walked home along the drove when it was dark as though he was afraid to be alone.

I thought of them, hoping they and the rest of the Hill family were sound asleep as we entered the plantation.

Looking up into the trees I soon spotted a bird sitting on the branch rather high up. It seemed a large target with a clear blue sky in the background as I took aim with the white bead and pulled the trigger. The bird hit the ground with a dull thud. As George picked it up he said "It's a pigeon". We moved on quickly and soon came to a larger target which proved to be a cock pheasant. Four more and two hens were soon in the bag. After the last shot we listened and all was quiet, so we hurried out the other end of the plantation and along the drain side which led us back to the river and over Ouse Bridge.

Back home we found father asleep in a chair by the fireside. He did that sometimes on Saturday evening after having a few drinks. I remember going home one Sunday morning about one a.m. when he was asleep. The back door was locked, which we always used. The front door was rarely used and I was surprised to find it unlocked but a heavy arm chair stood against it. I gradually opened the door and moved the chair so that I could squeeze in without making any noise. After having some supper I went to bed leaving father still asleep in his chair.

When George and I returned with the pheasants father was getting ready to go to bed. He was pleased to see the birds but when he knew where they came from he said "If Martins get to know about this there will be trouble". I told George to tell his mum not to tell anyone. She agreed and was pleased to have two pheasants and the pigeon. Mother cooked the rest for us and we enjoyed them. After several weeks went by we never heard anything said about it so all was well.

During my later teens some of my contemporaries and I began to get around more. We cycled to Kings Lynn occasionally, which was our nearest large town, to visit the theatre or Mart. We also went by train to Ely fair.

When I was fifteen I went with mother by train to Uxbridge to see Uncle John Kerridge, Aunt Maryellen, cousins Will, George, Maud and Hilda. We travelled to Liverpool Street, London and then went to Uxbridge on the district railway. Aunt Maryellen and mother were very fond of each other but owing to the distance and expence they did not often meet. Frequent letters were exchanged so we kept in touch and when any of us could afford to travel we were made very welcome.

Uncle John worked for a brewery and used to help to deliver beer and spirits to various public houses. He was rather deaf but could usually understand what anyone said and he always had a tale to tell.

When mother and I were there Will was in France where he was badly wounded but recovered reasonably well. He married but his wife died a few years later leaving a son. 20 years ago Will had a stroke leaving him paralysed down one side. He spent several years in hospital where he died aged 82. Mother and I returned to Liverpool Street by tram on the top deck which had no covering. We had a good view of the countryside and places we passed through. Mother seemed to enjoy the ride until we passed under some bridges near the centre of London. One seemed to be so low she thought that we would be hit by it so we went down to the lower deck. I had never been to London before and it was all very interesting to me.

After Christmas 1920 the country seemed to be rapidly getting into financial difficulties. Soldiers coming out of the forces soon found there was no work for them apart from those who returned to their old jobs.

A lot of farmers could not afford to have their dykes cleaned out or hedges trimmed. Even tramping thrashing jobs were hard to find. I had been used to getting these jobs easily but now I was in queue like many men.

Eventually I went to the labour exchange and signed on. Downham Market was the only exchange in the area where it was necessary to sign on every day including Saturday unless one lived over three miles, then it was twice a week. There was no benefit for the first three days.

Squire Pratt was head of the drainage commissioners around Denver and work was being done in the catchwater drain near Denver Sluice so I went to Ryston Hall and asked to see the Squire. I was shown into a large drawing room where he was talking to another gentleman on the far side. I stepped into the thick piled carpet and seemed to sink in over my ankles. I had never seen such a lovely furnished room and feeling rather embarrassed I staggered across the carpet to tell Mr. Pratt that I was looking for a job. He politely told me to go and see his bailiff and directed me to his office.

The bailiff, a smartly dressed business like man, said "Yes, I have work for a toolman and the wages are 25,- for a six day week". What a shock and I thought an insult after having received not less than 35,- for over two years. I said "No thank you" and left him.

After that I managed to get a few days tramping thrashing or other work for a few weeks at different places but things seemed to be getting worse. Many men from the forces had spent their gratuity and were now out of work.

Les Walker, whom I had worked with on various jobs, was in the same boat as me and we didn't fancy the dole. I had only signed on once. One day I saw Les and we agreed to either try and get in the Police Force or the Army. The next day we cycled to Ely. On the way we talked about the Police and decided to try them first but when we arrived outside the station neither of us had the courage to go in. Thoughts came to me of the only time a policeman came to our house, I was so frightened I hid under the table.

Our only hope then must be the Army so we made our way to the recruiting office in Silver Street, where we met Sergeant O'Neil, a very smart man who welcomed us because recruits were needed to replace many who had died during the war or had left the Army after the war. He took our particulars and said that if we returned the next day he would give us a railway warrant to take us to Bury-St.-Edmunds in Suffolk as that was the nearest depot.

We went to the nearest pub and had some refreshments then cycled home with anticipation and high spirits of seeing something of the world. We agreed to meet at Hilgay Fen station the next morning which could be a new chapter in my life.