

## Early Days

I don't remember very much about living down "Dumpling Bridge Lane", "Lakenheath", while living there, my father died of pneumonia aged 38 in July 1930, I was born 7 May 1927 youngest of 3 boys, Arthur 11<sup>th</sup> March 1924 and Edward (Ted) 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1921. About 10 yards from the back door was a well, from which we obtained our water, people living on the other side of the lane got their water from the "Lode" at Dumpling Bridge. Children were instructed to get water from the left side of the bridge, reason being, Fanny Rolph's cows used the right side on the way to their grazing meadow, they always stopped for a drink, while doing so, with feet in cold water they emptied out at the other end, flow being from left to right the polluted water flowed down stream towards the "High Bridge Pub", about ½ mile away. The people who kept the pub also got their water from the "Lode", by the time it got there the solids had sunk and the rest was well diluted.

Children would carry the water in tin baths, set on old pram wheels with a piece of wood floating on top to stop the water from sloshing out, or men with a bucket in each hand hanging on chains supported by a yoke draped over their shoulders, would trudge the half mile round journey. We read much about children in the third world having a struggle in obtaining sufficient water. Getting water from a dyke, stream, river, pump or well, was the norm in a rural area such as ours, toxic spray's and artificial fertilizers were not at that time widely used so pollution was not a consideration, piped water did not come to the village until 1939.

Soon after my "Father's" death we moved to "Half Moon Lane" about ½ mile from "Dumpling Bridge Lane", next door to my "Grandparents", it was to say the least, a fairly primitive dwelling, built of chalk and clunch, pan tiled roof, no felt or insulation, one room downstairs and two up, floor was crushed chalk rammed hard and covered with coconut matting or Lino on top of which pegged rugs were laid, these were made from old discarded clothing, carpets were unheard of in houses such as ours. In one corner of the room was a pantry, where food & water was kept, water was from a pump just outside my "Grandparents" house, a big improvement on the "Dumpling Bridge Lane" water supply.

Downstairs was, living room, sitting room, dining room, lounge and kitchen all rolled into one, furniture was 1 wooden table, and 1 bench seat, 4 hard backed chairs and 1 hard backed sit up straight arm chair. Heating was via the iron range, fuelled with coal and wood, helped by an oil lamp in the middle of the table, the lamp plus candles were the only lighting available. The table as in most houses was situated in the middle of the room and covered with what we regarded as a posh cloth, in the centre of which was the Oil Lamp, and in the evenings was the centre of our world, here we would sit and play cards and compete with each other at various board games doing hobbies etc while Mum would spend her time sewing, darning, knitting, patching items of clothing, it was very much a make do and mend way of life, our evenings were centred round the family, bearing in mind we had no wireless or T/V, nor newspapers. Ceilings were low, doors and windows small, and usually covered by heavy curtains, it was surprising the amount of heat given off by an oil lamp on the table

in the middle of a small room. At an early age you learned to shut doors behind you, to conserve what little heat you had, nowadays children and some adults, know how to open doors but have not yet managed to master the art of closing them. Paper spills were always on hand for lighting candles, matches were at a premium and only used first thing in the morning for lighting the fire.

Incidental furnishings consisted of the odd picture on the wall, mirror over the mantle shelf, which was covered during thunderstorms, a coal bucket, fireguard, hooks for holding everyday cloths, a linen line, cloths horse, toasting fork hanging beside the fire. Upstairs was accessed by wooden steps, (granary type) held in place by metal hooks and 2 large staples secured to the floor of the first bedroom, there was no landing or corridor, and you walked through the first room to the next. "Mum" slept in the smallest room, in a single bed, us 3 boys all in one double, apart from beds neither room was big enough for anything more than a metal chest (I've still got it) used for keeping clothing in, an orange box sufficed as a bedside table to keep the candleholder on. In the very cold weather, a brick wrapped in a cloth, the brick having been put in the oven for a couple of hours previously was used to take the chill out of a cold bed, the oven plates were also used as bed warmers. This then was our sleeping arrangement until we moved to a council house in 1938, by that time our ages were, Ted 17, Arthur 14 and yours truly 11.

Outside was one important facility at Half Moon Lane, the "Toilet", or as it was called at that time "The Closet" situated about 20 yards down the garden beside the rhubarb patch. Made of wood, well ventilated by means of knot holes in the weather boarding, an ill-fitting door, a 2" gap at the bottom and top, plus diamond shaped cut outs to further the ventilation, the business part consisted of side by side 2 adult seats, and 1 child's, toilet paper was old newspaper cut in squares threaded on a piece of string and hung on a nail, toilet paper didn't enter my life until I was much older. Our type of toilet was referred to as, "The Big Drop", due to the fact that underneath the closet seat was nothing but a large hole about 6ft deep, which was cleaned out every 1 or 2 years. Ashes we had plenty of, as the fire was raked out daily, some of these ashes were scattered over the result of you having used the closet, cinders were used to surface pathways. Toilet facilities inside the house were non-existent, except, for chamber pots kept under the bed, and used for urinating in during the night, at other times this job was done against a wall or behind the shed, bush, tree, or anywhere else that was convenient. Females had to watch out for stinging nettles. Another job for the house wife was slopping out, chamber pots which required emptying daily. There was no council refuse collections, nor dust bins, refuse was disposed of on the fire, food scraps fed to the hens ashes used in the closet, cinders to keep mud in control on the pathways. An outhouse across the yard, about 10 yards or so from the back door, in which was stored bicycles, coal, wood, garden tools and all sorts of bits and pieces, there was also a hearth on which a "Witch's" type cauldron was used to boil cloths, and anything else that required hot water. The Xmas puddings were cooked here.

Apart from the Xmas puddings enough mixture was prepared to fill three 2-pint basins, which after being cooked were wrapped in cloth and hung in the pantry labelled TED, ARTHUR and CYRIL to be used as birthday cakes.

My “Mother”, in order to augment her widow’s pension, £1-6shillings per week (£1-30p) did cleaning for a local butcher by the name of “George Lummis”. Part of her wages was half a pig’s head, from this my Mum would make pork cheese (Braun), this was the only meat we had, apart from the odd chicken past its useful laying life or neck of mutton for stews. I cannot recall in the 7 years living down half moon lane ever having a joint of meat, or a breakfast of bacon & eggs, we did on occasions have a boiled egg. Mum also went singling sugar beet for a nearby farmer and other casual work as could be obtained.

Any type of food was appreciated, so every opportunity to supplement our diet was seized upon, for instance water cress was taken from dykes and streams, pollution was not a problem as toxic sprays were not applied to adjacent fields in the 1920/30s. The cress was made up into bundles, placed in water, usually a small bath on pram wheels, and totted round the village and sold for 1/2d or 1d per bunch, this does not sound very much but, when you think my pocket money for the week was 1d, and possibly a farthing from my “Granny”, the sweet shops in those days would take farthings, I will not convert it into new money for you, it would run into too many decimal places.

In the early thirties “Lakenheath” was well endowed with “Shops” and “Public Houses”. There were 11 Pubs. “The Swan”, “Green Dragon”, “High Bridge”, “Half Moon”, “Chequers”, “Tap”, “Bull”, “Bell”, “Plough”, “Fox” and the “Star”. There was also 1 Licensed club, “The British Legion”, and 1 “Off Licence” at “Goward’s House” now the “Lakenheath Hotel”. 2 pubs had already closed before I was born, they were, “The Anchor” and the “Wagon and Horses”.

The pubs were fairly evenly distributed around the village and came into being to fill a need for labouring men as an escape from the daily drudgery of their lives. From an early age (11 + years) in order to survive, often 50 to 60 hours per week the only free day was a Sunday when the local powers to be expected them to attend Church. (Not sadly for the love of God, but the fear of God). It was instilled into them at an early age by the inscrutable gentry and priests that he was watching from above so know thy place. They often had to walk anything up to 4 miles to get to work. In many cases by 6 or 6.30am leaving home in the dark and returning in the dark to their abode which was little more than a hovel. 2 up and 2 down oil lamps or candles for light and 1 coal or wood fuelled stove, a house full of kids its little wonder that the pub was the only respite to their lives. It was even worse for the females who were not welcomed in pubs.

There were 24 shops, ( today only 4, the Post Office, Co-Op, News agent and Mobile Phones ). “ Mrs Drew”. Confectionery Tobacco and odd Groceries. “H Flatt” Bicycles, Fuel Oil, Household and Hardware goods. “Mrs Suzy Morley” Confectionery, Tobacco and odd Groceries. “Post Office” Usual Post Office items plus Drapery. “Buster Raven” Dairy Products and odd Groceries. “A A Coe” Bakery and Groceries. “Tommy Rolph” Batteries, Accumulators and various Electrical items. “Millars” Boots Shoes and Fishing Tackle. “Hammonds” Groceries and Tobacco. “Clifford Rolfe” Boots and Shoes, Barber and Cobbler. “Ezera Rolfe” Baker. “Doody Rutterford” Confectionery and Tobacco. “Co-op Wholesale Society” Bakery, Coal, Fuel Oil, Confectionery, Groceries, Household Goods, Decorating Materials, Drapery and Special Orders. “R Cash” Boots Shoes and Cobbler. “Hammonds” Bakery. “Widow Bailey” Confectionery. “F Leader” Confectionery and Tobacco. “Masons” Odds and ends. “Cook’s” Dairy Products. “Corner Shop” Confectionery and Tobacco. “G Lummis” Butcher. “Puppy Sizer” Butcher. “ Moore” Butcher and “Reeve” Butcher, all the Butcher’s did their own slaughtering. Coal was extensively burned, 4 pubs sold Coal as did the “Co-op”, they were “The Chequers”, “Bull”, “Fox” and “Star”. There was a Fish and Chip shop run by “Mr Sitford” situated on the “Back Way” (Street), “Mr Jack Bennett” sold chips from a caravan situated just inside the “Fair Ground” meadow opposite the pond, and a “Mr Spencer” sold “Potato fritters” from a room in “Church Farm” house cost of fish and chips from “Sitford’s” was 3d, a Penneth of chips and a Tuppenny fish. Today there are 2 Fish and Chip, 6 Restaurants offering all sorts of foreign food the 2 remaining Pubs also offer food.

Most of the young boys living in our area had their hair cut at “Clifford Rolph’s”, he was one of the old school, one style only (short back and sides), after climbing onto a high stool, he was a tall man and didn’t like bending very much, after tucking what appeared to be an old table cloth into your collar it was sit still or I will cut your ear off, this luxury treatment cost 1d, 240 haircuts to the £1.

Quite a lot of elderly men would come in on a Friday or Saturday for their weekly shave, the shaving soap bowl always seem to be on the oil stove ready and hot, after lathering them up he would hone a cut throat razor on the sharpening strap, then, would begin a scraping noise in removing a week’s stubble, which always seemed to be white, perhaps mine would be white if I let it grow for a week, cost for a shave was 3d. He also sold boots and shoes and did a bit of cobbling.

I refer to men being elderly looking back then were not as old life was much shorter then, their lot in life much harder than today, work started at a much earlier age, hours were much longer, homelife harder and less comfortable by the time they approached retirement they were in fact worn out. Retirement was not particularly looked forward to, it was towards the end of a useful life not a phase of life to be enjoyed as it is today.

Biscuits were always sold loose, weighed out from a large square tin into a paper bag the wholesaler would collect the empty containers when making the next delivery. Also sold were broken "Biscuits", and "Crisps", these are the ones we had, a shake from a vinegar bottle made the broken crisps quite nice, even so we only had them on rare occasions. Whole Crisps complete with dark blue paper twist of salt (Smiths) were also sold from returnable tins. Cereals were not part of our menu, it was porridge, or porridge, take your pick, this was cooked in a double saucepan and always seemed to be on the stove. With so much food wasted nowadays it doesn't seem possible that bread was not plentiful, I have often seen my mother measure out slices to make sure that there was enough for lunch the next day, I don't suppose it was so much a scarcity of bread that was the problem, as that of having enough money to buy the next loaf.

Birds fell prey to our food gathering activities, we would rob the nest of eggs, leaving one in the nest so as to encourage the bird to continue laying, those regularly robbed were "Blackbird", "Thrush", "Sparrow", "Pigeon", "Skylark", "Snipe", "Duck", "Moorhen", "Partridge and Pheasant, the last 2 we had to be very careful about as it was not unusual for game keeper or farmer to make you turn your pockets out knowing what we were up to. Stop and search is nothing new. Also collected were "Peewit" (Plover) eggs, these were too valuable for us locals to eat they went to Newmarket Stables where they were fed to "Racehorses". A "Mr Jonah Rolfe" would pay 1or 2d for them, he was reputed to sell them for 6d each, big money in those days.

A favourite way of carrying eggs was in your hat, everyone in those days wore hats the girls though, wore berets, older women peaked caps or bonnets. If you climbed a tree to a pigeon nest putting the eggs in your hat was the safest way to bring them down, in your pocket they were likely to get broken, sometimes if you had too many, you would drop them to your pal who would hold his hat out to catch them, if by chance they hit the peak he had a rather messy hat.

In fact, we are not so far from hunter gathers from the days gone by.

Birds of all sizes were also caught for eating, my aunt "Eliza" would often have bird pie, "Blackbird", "Sparrow", "Skylark", "Spink" (Chaffinch) and "Thrush", "Four and Twenty Blackbirds" baked in a pie was not a fairy tale. I can vouch for them being very tasty, perhaps being hungry had something to do with it. There were flocks of birds around especially where the corn stacks were, flocks of 100 plus sparrows were not uncommon. There were various ways of catching them, one way was to trap them in the back yard or farmyard, we made the traps by making a run out of wood, about 6" wide the sides 4ft, ends 21/2ft, covering the top with wire netting, one end would be held up by a stick about 15 to 18ins long tethered by a piece of binding string, long enough so that you could hide behind a bush tree or even in the closet(toilet), bait the trap with corn or something similar, as soon as the birds were busy feeding the string was pulled and the trap sprung. Another way was

to use “Hingles”, these were made from horse hair, long strands from the tail were joined together to form a long strand, a small noose with about a 6inch lead was attached every 6 inches or so, the whole thing was pegged securely to the ground, the area baited with corn, “Skylarks” would then, hopefully, get caught in the nooses.

Also collected in season were “Bullaces”, “Marabelas”, “Cobnuts” (hazel nuts), “Sweet Chestnuts”, “Blackberries” and “Elderberries” in fact anything edible was fair game.

Birds eggs were consumed in various ways, such as frying, small ones would sometimes be floated on top of a cup of tea where they would get gently poached, or swallowed whole, especially Partridge and Pheasant, this was because we were afraid of being caught by Farmer or keeper, practically everyone was capable of swallowing eggs whole, (hence the old saying don’t try and teach your Grandmother how to suck eggs). The exception to the different ways of consuming them, was eggs from water fowl, these were never eaten raw, or boiled, but always fried with the yoke broken, this was because from an early age we were taught that the outside of a ducks egg was poisonous, this of course was Salmonella, but we didn’t know that at the time.

Fishing was enjoyable and reasonably inexpensive. A fishing line, a packet of assorted sized tie on hooks a bamboo pole about 12 foot long was all that was required, all available at “Juddy Millars” shop in the High Street, bait was a chunk of stale bread and worms dug from the garden. The Lode from “Smeath Drove” to its joining the “Little Ouse” at “Decoy farm Sedge Fen” about 4to5 miles of navigable water which in the past was an important means of transportation for Lakenheath, there being several wharves along the Lode, one known as “Quay Bank”, a spur from the Lode and situated just south of what used to be te recreational and dining buildings for the “Womans Land Army”, now housing old folks in bungalows built by the local council. Another “Wharf” on the Lode was almost opposite the “Church” in the past it was referred to as “Laks landing stage”, this is how “Lakenheath” got its name, “LAK” was the name of the leader of those that settled here, “EINS” were followers, “HYTHE” was landing stage, thus, “Lakeinshythe” much later pronounced and spelt “Lakenheath”.

The last time this “Wharf” (landing stage) was used was to transport by barge, flint stones, picked out of the sand on “Lakenheath Warren” by out of work farm labourers, (no dole in those days and employers could send men home without pay during inclement weather conditions or when the farmers had no work for them) they were paid in vouchers to be spent in the local shops, these flints were used to face buildings or walls in places around Ely.

The "Relief Channel" whose course followed along the edge of the high ground and the fen, acting like a giant gutter, which channelled excess water to the outlet at "Denver", thus to the "Wash" (North Sea). The fens have not experienced any flooding since the channel was dug. The route of the channel took roughly the course of the now redundant "Lode", the consequence of this was that the local population being deprived of the right of way along the banks of what was the "Lode", a pleasant and relaxing walk, also local children used various places along the "Lode" for fishing, swimming and paddling, many ( I was one) learned to swim there. The powers to be failed to secure these rights enjoyed by the local population for centuries.

Fishing was enjoyed by a large number of children and was a wonderful introduction to serious fresh water angling, albeit their catches were mainly "Gudgeon", "Sticklebacks", "Roach", "Dace" and "Eel's".

"Rookery Farm" was situated at the bottom of " Half Moon Lane", as a 3 year old with no father, the farmer and his wife, "Mr. & Mrs. Ebb Flack", a wonderful couple, who only had 1 child, a daughter, 2 years older than me, so it was probably inevitable that much of my time would be spent at the farm, which was a mixed one, no pigs and no sheep, but just about everything else, crops mainly were "Oats", "Wheat", "Barley", "Hay", "Sugar beet", "Potatoes", "Mangels" and "Swedes". A dairy herd of about 20 milking cows and their follower's, buds, calves, heifers and bullocks, also 1 bull, more about him later. "Horses", there were 3 "Suffolk Punch Mare's", 2 "Geldings" and one "Pony". The "Suffolk Punches" and "Geldings" did the heavy work, ploughing, harrowing, carting and so on, the pony was used to power the elevator, grinder, slicer, chaff cutter, slab cow cake cubing machine, and anything else that could be fixed to a pulley wheel. The "Pony" was tethered to a pole and would walk round and round driving the various belts and pulleys, (quite often our job would be to gee the donkey up if it slowed or stopped). The pony was also used to tote the farmer around in his "Dickey Cart". I was 5 when I was given the job of leading 2 of the mares around the paddock on exercise, when they were well advanced in foal, to anyone who did not know the temperament of a "Suffolk Punch" mare this would appear to be nothing short of madness, with me about three foot six and a fag paper, and the horses towering way above me, but they need not have worried, there are not many animals more gentle than a "Suffolk Punch" mare, I think they were taking me for a walk rather than me taking them on exercise, when I stopped they stopped, when I went, they went, anyway I got paid for it, all be it only a penny (240 to the pound). The average mans wage working on the land was 25 to 30 Shillings per 48+hrs per week, no paid holidays. One Shilling was worth 5p, 20 Shillings to the Pound, sorry to keep converting, but some readers may not equate the then and now difference in value.

It was rare for me to given pennies by Farmer Ebb rather they were given as a reward for performing some tasks (or imaginary ones). This I think was instilled in me that the only thing that is free in this life is love in all of its forms. Everything else must be strived for.

With 20 or so cows, milking was of course a daily routine, no milking machines in those days, everything by hand, milking was done sitting on a 3-legged stool. With a cow that was a bit fidgety, it was easier to adjust your position sitting on a 1- or 3-legged stool a milking pail between your legs and using no hands, as these were already occupied with a teat in each. The “Bull had a pen or yard of its own which of course was out of bounds except for “Ebb” the farmer, and “Stinger Flack” the stockman, local farmers who did not have a bull would bring their cows when they were bulling, ( in season) to be put in calf (mated), no particular effort that I can remember was made to shield us from what was going on, and I don’t recall thinking much about it at the time, it all seemed so natural. With chickens, ducks, cats, and dogs plus all the farm animals, it would have been very difficult, in fact almost impossible, to shield youngsters from what was going on, so it was leave well alone, and let nature take its course, which, on reflection was the right and sensible thing to do. One day “Alf (stinger) Flack” was in the bull pen without attaching the bull pole to the ring in the bulls nose, when it turned on him and pinned him up against the side of the pen, “Ebb” distracted the bull but by that time “Alf” had got several broken ribs, he was off work for quite a long time, it was reckoned to be a quiet docile bull, it just goes to show not all bulls can be trusted especially if they can smell females. I don’t think this applies just to Bulls, most animals are the same.

Harvest time was a memorable occasion, I suppose because it coincided with the summer school holidays, the most exciting time was the corn harvest, first was “Barley”, followed by “Oats” and lastly “Wheat”, after the corn was cut by the binder, it would tie the corn into bundles and eject them onto the ground, they were then collected and put into “Stooks” which were made by leaning 2 sheaves head to head, leaving a space at the bottom to aid air circulation, about 8-12 sheaves per “Stook”, and left to dry, how long depended entirely on the weather. It was common practice for people to turn up in time to try and catch rabbits or hares left in the standing corn, when the binder was down to the last round or two, rabbits would have to run when their cover had gone .When the sheaves were dry, came carting them to the farm stack yard, to do this in our case, 2 wagons and a tumbrel was used, it was quite a work of art loading the wagons in such a way that the maximum at a time was carted safely, because of the soft ground, in getting the carts and wagons from the field to drove, it was necessary to hitch up a trace horse to get the wagons moving, even so they had to be physically encouraged to exert their considerable strength in getting the wagons rolling, the soft ground and iron clad wheels didn’t help. On arrival at the farm, stacks were made in 2 lines, with enough room up the



middle of them for the “Steam Engine”, “Elevator”, “Threshing Drum”, arranged in such a way that made it easy for the tackle to get to the next set of stacks, also they would be facing in the right direction for leaving after threshing had finished. It was the custom when fields had been cleared of all corn sheaves that local people were allowed to go “Gleaning”, that is, gathering any corn heads which were left in the field after the sheaves had been carted to the stack yard, this was a source of grain feed for backyard hens.

After the sheaves were threshed the straw would go onto the elevator and thus to the stack, which would accommodate the straw from up to 4 corn stacks. The threshed corn was put into 1-coomb sacks (a coomb= 4 bushels, a bushel = 8 gallons) usually weighed about 16 stone. These were lifted up with a sack lift to a farm workers shoulder height, and then carted to the corn barn where they remained until sold to a corn merchant. “Chaff” or husk, from the drum was collected in extra large sacks and emptied into the chaff house, which was filled up to the rafters, because of the dust and of course the chaff itself which managed to get in your hair, up your nose, in your boots, pockets, in fact everywhere it shouldn’t, it was the most detestable jobs of the whole operation. “Chaff” was used mixed with slab, linseed cake, sliced “Swede” or “Mangols”, as a feed when grazing was not sufficient or was unavailable, mainly over the winter months. Occasionally I would be called upon to go to the “Half Moon” Pub at the top of “Half Moon” lane, to fetch cigarettes for “Mr Ebb”, directly in the front on entering the pub was a stable type door where off sales were done outside licence hours, a rap on the door would bring the publican or his wife to serve you, weather you were purchasing anything or bringing empty bottles back, “Mr Ebb” smoked “Player’s” he usually had packets of 20, they cost 11 1/2p my reward for the errand was the cigarette card and the half penny change out of the shilling.

My “Grandfather” died 21<sup>st</sup> May 1932 aged “69”, when I was “5” it was the first time that I had seen a dead person. It struck me how small someone looked when they were in a coffin. When he was alive I thought he was big and tall and I always looked up to him, laying in his coffin was the first time I had looked down on him, I remember taking hold of one of his fingers, I don’t remember anything more about it. My “Granny” died in 1936 aged “75”. I can’t recall any details about her funeral.

Having been born down “Dumpling Bridge Lane” we remained friendly with the people who lived there, next door to where we lived, was the Coleman family, Mr. “Sergeant Coleman” had a lorry and collected trash from “Beck Row” aerodrome, it was the time of the 1934 “Beck Row” to “Australia” air race, (won by Scott and Black) I was fortunate enough to be included in the lucky few who went to the race start, free of charge in the back of his lorry, I doubt if there is anyone left in “Lakenheath” who went to the start of that race. It was always “Beck Row”

aerodrome. “Mildenhall” didn’t claim it, till it became notorious during/after the “Second World War”.

I cannot recall much about my Father, I can however remember while coming from school down Wings Road, near what is now the junction of Wingfield Rd seeing a funeral procession, as was the custom, everyone stopped removed their hats in respect, until the funeral procession had passed, I recall saying to Sydney Coleman he was 2 years older than me, there goes my “Dad”, it was my “Father’s” funeral.

Due to my families circumstances I started my schooling at the age of 3 instead of the usual start age of 5.

My first class at school was the infants taught by Prissy (Priscilla Cooper spinster daughter of Pastor Cooper a preacher at the Baptist Chapel, he was also a school Governor). The infants’ class was equipped not with paper, pen or pencil as other classes were, but with slate and slate pencils, slates were rubbed clean for reuse. After lunch which we went home for, the only children who bought their lunch to school lived at Wangford and Undley as it was too far to return home and back. No food or drink apart from water was provided. After lunch we were encouraged to have a nap before the last lesson, 3.30 out of school half an hour before the other classes. The only transport was Shanks’s Pony or if available your brothers bike cross bar or sister carrier. (For those that do not know Shanks’s pony is you own two feet).

My first school photo 1930 aged 3



Second school photo 1932 aged 5



Many children were aware that their families were poor so were keen to earn, if at all possible, both my brothers had jobs whilst still at school

When I was 9, I had my first job, it was driving cows, 2 of them, from a farm at Anchor Lane (more of a small holding really), to a field about 1 1/2 miles away,

before going to school and driving them back afterwards. For this I was paid 1 shilling (5p per week) 5 days.

A bit about my Mother; she was born on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 1898 In Orwell Cambridgeshire, youngest of 7, her mother died when she was born. The oldest of the family, my Aunt Florie, living in Lakenheath having married a local man, Frederick Leader, it fell to her to fend for Alice her little sister. When my mother left school she went into domestic service in London, on her visits to Lakenheath she often cycled to and from Orwell to see the rest of her family, she stood about 5ft 2ins and weighed about 61/2 stone wet through. She married my Father in 1920 produced 3 boys, her mother died when she was born, her father 12yrs later, lost her Husband in 1930 he died of double pneumonia, her Father-in-law in died in 1932 and Mother-in-law in 1936. Her lot could not have been an easy one.

Mum was a good cook, it was a necessity to be able to make a tasty meal out of almost anything, in this she was a master, we all developed a liking for everything, for it was never what would you like my dear, it was, this is for dinner, weather permitting being outdoors rather than in, we were always ready for meal times, meals were always taken sitting at the table, without anything run on electricity distracting us from healthy family conversation, which was probably more entertaining than the programs dished up by today's media, and an essential part of binding families together, something sadly missing today.

Pets we had, but we didn't develop the modern trend of classing pets as one of the family, pets were animals, and treated as such, a dogs place was outside, a cat could come in but was always put out when we were all out, or when we retired for the night. More than one cat would have been a strain on available food scraps, and as happens female cats have kittens, it was not unusual for a cat to go missing for a few days then eventually turn up with 1/2 a dozen kittens trailing behind her, in order to keep the cat population under control, it was necessary to dispose of the kittens, in the absence of Vets (no one could afford them) it fell to Mum or Dad to do the disposing, in our case it was Mum, this was done without us knowing, kittens accompanied with a brick or similar weight, in a sack and placed in a bucket of water was a convenient way of disposing of them. On arriving home from school intent on playing with the kittens, Mum would say she (the mother cat) had taken them off again, it was many years later that when quizzed, Mum admitted that she had got rid of them, I had often wondered what had happened to them. Although it sounds drastic, it was never the less essential in preventing the countryside being overrun with unwanted cats. Vets were financially out of reach for most people, so do it yourself was the order of the day.

Looking back I recall having a happy childhood, it was probably a case of if you didn't know that something existed, you didn't yearn for it, any case the others hadn't got it so everyone was in the same boat, the difference was, I didn't have a father, but I did have a near Farmer (Ebb Flack) and other Neighbours that had sympathy for poor little me, plus 2 elder brothers who no doubt shielded me from the rough edges of life. All this I know now; at the time I was just a boy.

In 1938 my mother married Herbert Coleman a widower, his wife died in 1929, we moved into a new council house, so one day I was living in a fairly primitive house, and the next, in a new 4 bedroom council house, a step Father, Sister and 1 extra Brother our family now numbered 7, Edna my step Sister went to Luton to live with her Aunt Doll, soon after Mum and my step Father were married.

Mum & Dad slept in one front bedroom, step brother Harold and brother Ted in the other front bed room, Arthur in the largest of the back bedrooms and me in the smallest, it was like living in luxury, all be it we had no electricity, running water or bathroom, there was a sink in the kitchen but no tap, all hot water was via a kettle, or saucepan heated on the fire or oil stove. Water was obtained from communal pumps, there were 2 to cater for 40 houses one good thing about it we often met our neighbours for a chat when getting water, to many households this was luxury compared to well water or water from the river (lode).

At least the toilet was joined to the house, although to reach it one had to go from the back door past the washhouse to get to it. It was a Bucket toilet which, the council emptied once a week, with 7 in the family once a week emptying was not enough, additional empties were made using the garden into which it was buried. The garden was large, eighth of an acre with what the house stood on. The cart used by the council for the weekly empty was known as the Honey cart, the Bucket as the honey pot. A sewer wasn't operative in Lakenheath until 1963. Quite a few houses had a cess pit from about 1950 until they were connected to the main sewer. Cess pits were emptied once a year by the local council, if emptying more often than this was needed, you had to pay for it.

Electricity came to the village in 1936, street lights only, most houses were not connected until 1940/41, ours in 1940 previous to this our only source of light was paraffin lamps or candles during the dark nights we would play in the street under the lights, there was no fear of being run over as the only vehicle that was going to come along was the royal mail, and that was easy to see because its headlights shone very bright in the surrounding darkness, there was, so far as I can recall only 3 cars in the village, and they did not venture out at night, plus the odd motor cycle. Prior to electric street lighting there were paraffin lamps, in a lantern on top of a metal post 12 ft high, the lamplighter was a Mr Alwyn Barker, he was a saddler by trade,

near the top of each post was a metal bar about 12” long on which the lamplighter would rest the little ladder he carried for the purpose, it was not uncommon for a lad to climb the post and blow the lamp out once Alwyn was out of sight..

While living down Half Moon Lane my brother Ted worked for Walter Rolfe, whose farm was opposite the Half Moon pub, he was mainly a poultry farmer, apart from keeping ducks and chickens at the farm yard, his main flocks were housed up the rabbit hill (drift road), they were kept in fairly large wire netting pens, plus a hen house for roosting and laying eggs, usually about a 100 birds per pen. I was too young and much too busy running a farm (ha-ha) to take much notice of Ted’s work or social life. One thing that sticks in my mind was watching brother Ted make a wooden leg for a hen, apparently the hen had one of its legs broken about 1 inch above its foot, Ted cut through the skin exposing the broken bone, he then fashioned a piece of stick so that it would fit nicely up into the broken leg (a chicken bone is hollow), the stick fitted firmly into the leg, cut to the right length the hen strutted off comfortable on its wooden leg.

Brother Arthur had a paper round, my cousin Bill Leader, one of Aunt Florie’s boys, run the newspaper business in Lakenheath. I spent a lot of time with Arthur and friends, fishing, bird nesting, swimming, skating, dyke jumping, climbing trees, playing marbles and generally messing about, the whole countryside was our playing field, and I can’t recall ever being told off or reprimanded by a farmer to keep off his land, he knew that we would not go across a field of running corn, or leave gates open.

Our village didn’t sport a playing field, in fact it had countless playing places (field’s), any open space and there were many, that did not constitute an enclosure to a house, along with several copse and plantations where boys would hone their climbing skills, the easier to reach bird’s nests that frequented the many trees. Football was played in at least 6 different places, in the centre of the village is an area called Camping Close, so named because it was where the ancient game of camping was played, it was an early type of football, (pigs bladder instead of leather ball), there were no particular rules or playing positions, no referee and no laid down quantity of players on either side, if the visiting team fielded 25 players then the home team fielded the same number, so I am told it was not unusual to have thirty or more. No football boots, most wore Hobnailed one’s, in fact anything goes, injuries were quite common. There was nothing but pride for the winners, apart from cuts scrapes and bruises.

One day we were fishing in the lode near Olix Mill, (a disused water drainage windmill) previously used to drain that part of the fen where the lode branches off from the Old Lode and flows down to Botany Bay, where it joined the river Ouse,

the old lode ran down to the staunch near where the Green Dragon pub used to be. Barges were tied up there for the week end, they were used to transport gault, (clay) from Ely for shoring up the banks, they were empty at the time, so were 21/2 to 3ft above the water, they were about 30ft long x 9ft wide we used to play on and fish from them, we were about to get on when Arthur leaned on the side of one, which immediately started to float away from him, so that he was spread eagled feet on shore hands on side of barge, which was intent on getting away from him, the inevitable happened and in he went. Mum was not very happy when she found out. Further downstream from Olix Mill was a place called the Dock it was here that we used to swim, making sure that we didn't stir up the mud at the bottom of the river, if we did accidentally disturb it we had to wait until the currant had cleared the riley water away before we could carry on swimming. I was 6 or 7 at the time, I had previously learned to swim in the village Lode opposite the Church, at a place called the Willows, I can't remember when I was first able to swim, it was likely to have been when I started School at the age of 3. Not far from the Willows about 100yd's north was the original Lakenheath Landing Stage this no doubt accounts for there being in the past, a public right of way between the Cinema meadow and a cottage built edge ways to the High Street, the track leading from here to the landing stage is surfaced with flint stones. The Cinema meadow is so called there being a cinema erected there in the 1930's. It was eventually demolished a few years after due to lack of patronage, my first recollection of movies was in the Peace Memorial hall, I did not go very often as it cost 6p a time, there was always a weekly trailer usually about 8 or 10 episodes Tail Spin Tommy and Rin Tin Tin were 2 I can remember. The last time that the landing stage was used was for loading flint stones onto barges destined for places like Ely where they were used for flint facing buildings.

The landing stage referred to above helps make up the name of the village of Lakenheath as follows, LAK was the name of the Anglo-Saxon leader. AINSE was the name of the followers, and HYTHE was the name for the landing stage. Hence LAKAINSEHYTH which over the years was trimmed to LAKENHEATH.

Another Lak probably of the same family settled at the ford over the river Lark at LACKFORD. Another Anglo Saxon settled at Little Eriswell. The name is made up as follows: ERIS was the Leaders name and there are numerous fresh water springs which accounts for the WELL. Hence ERISWELL

The flints were the result from gangs of out of work men who were required to gather stones from Lakenheath warren, in lieu of dole money, (they were paid in Tokens or grocery vouchers) this was in the 20's.

After Dad died Aunt Ethel one of Mums older sisters, they lived in a posh (at least we assumed it was posh) part of Hendon, London, her husband had a good job, only

one son named Philip, every year they would send us their discarded clothing by rail in a hessian sack, this was eagerly looked forward to as there would be many items we could not have afforded, although I was too small for these cloths, I benefited in that things would come to me via brother Arthur, hand me downs, a practice carried out by most families at that time, no stigma at all was attached to it. (I suppose we all looked a bit scruffy). So far as I can remember Philip was 2 years older than Brother Ted. Included sometimes were toys mainly games such as Ludo, Lotto, books and one year there was a Bagatelle. When it was getting close to the time of year when the sack was due to arrive, the often asked question when getting home from school was, has the sack arrived yet.

Yearly one of the local charities gave out boots to deserving children, I thought at the time that I had won a prize, I got some boots every year while we were living down Half Moon lane, I did not get any once we had moved house and our circumstances had changed for the better, it was then I realised they were dished out to poor families. I never thought of us as being poor. My Mother was a dab hand with a hammer and Hob Iron, she would make sure the soles of our boots were cleated heel and toe, also had the correct no of studs, to protect the leather from coming into contact with the ground, which was very uneven and rough, no kerbs, not nice and smooth as it is today, thus helping to protect the leather from wearing out too quickly.

Looking back, it's now that I realise what a wonderful women she was, in bringing us up on good basic right and wrong principals, when at times she must have felt that the whole world was against her, not once did she convey her troubles to us boys. I'm ashamed to say that it is only in recent years that I fully appreciate how good she was.

Holiday's were confined to a day at the Sea Side, the local churches used to lay on buses for their Sunday school pupils, the Church would go to Wells or Cromer, the Methodists and Baptists went alternatively to Hunstanton, Clacton, Yarmouth or Felixstowe.

Before I was born or old enough, the family went with the Methodists Chapel, by the time I went, it was with the Baptists, I don't know all the details, it concerned my brothers Arthur and Ted who somehow blotted their copybook at the Methodist Sunday school, Mum always said it was a misunderstanding concerning several boys, anyway, the upshot was, from then on we attended the Baptist Sunday school, so my memory is going with the Baptists, MUM continued to attend the Methodists chapel.. By the way, we attended Sunday school until we were 14 yrs old, we could then make our own mind up if we wanted to continue or not, so far as I can recall it was a no, in all our cases. I think Arthur was of the same opinion as Ted and I, that

the teaching of the Christian religion that related to the rights and wrongs, and the principal of do unto others as you would have them do unto you, is commendable, but the existence of God is questionable, many people who profess to be believers do so “Just in case”, like taking out insurance. I feel sure there are many more people living by so called Christian virtues who do not believe, than there are Church goers.

Picnics were very enjoyable and often taken up the Warren, the Warren extended as far as the Elveden memorial, much of which is now taken up by the Lakenheath airbase, in the vicinity of the Sand Galls, these were a series of holes or pits where sand and stone had been extracted for building purposes, road surfacing, sanding paths in frosty and muddy weather etcetera. We would have a whale of a time digging holes, and generally doing what children do when let loose with spade and pail, hide and seek amongst the bracken, sliding down the sides of the holes on old trays and anything else that was handy to use as sledges. These outings were frequently used to gather pine cones from under the trees growing on the perimeter of many fields they were excellent for starting a fire first thing in the mornings instead of using kindling.

With about 1,000 acres of warren, gorse, broom, heather, brambles, bracken, holes and various other indentations to hide in out of sight of prying eyes, it was a wonderful place for courting couples, before I was old enough to take advantage of such an ideal area, the airfield had been built, fences were not erected until the Americans came in 1950, the erection of fences curtailed locals use of the warren, also from the control tower there was a good view of the surrounding area, which no doubt had a damping effect on many couples.

Winters always seemed to be snowy and frosty, the paddock just behind “Rookery Farm” at the bottom of Half Moon lane, 3 to 4 acres in size was only about 2ft higher than the normal water level of the Lode, which ran on the west side, with the farm yard on the east, in winter when river levels were 2 to 3ft higher this area was quick to flood and froze over very quickly, and quite safe to skate on, it seemed to me at the time, that half the village used this field as a public skating rink, most of the male population employed by the large farms in the fen would be laid off without pay, during the hard weather except those involved in tending livestock, with nothing much to do but make the best of a bad situation, so it was out with the skates and join in. It was here that we learned to skate, I say we, because nearly every one could skate, when not skating large slides were made and aided by our studded boots or being towed by older skaters it was a very thrilling time.

When I was 11 or 12, I took to roller skating. Several boys also skated. We used the road and hill known at the time as Maids Cross Hill (the road is now closed by



the airfield). It was surfaced by tar and sand. Its nice smooth surface was just right for roller skates, we were quite good, at least we thought we were.

Another place much used by children and adults, was the “Mole” pit, a disused chalk quarry and lime kiln, situated in the middle of the village, it is now used by the Football, and indoor Bowls clubs, renamed, it is now called The Nest.

Chalk and clunch from this quarry provided the principal building material used in the construction of Houses, Farm buildings, Walls etcetera, another pit was situated near Maids Cross Hill, this pit has since been taken over by the district council as a rubbish dump. Near this pit was an area used by the local Scout and Cub packs, its location was known as the Scouts Pitch, and used for camping (bell tents) football and various other activities. Both pits were part of the estate of Lakenheath Hall named The Retreat.

There was a thriving Scout and Cub pack in Lakenheath, I was in the Cubs, when old enough, the scouts, we used to meet once a week in the Scouts den, a farm building part of Church Farm belonging to the Retreat, (The local Lord of The Manor). A large barn on the farm was used by the Lakenheath Silver Band which has always been strong in the village and is still thriving today.

During frosty weather large slides would be created in the School boy's playground, (health and safety would not allow it today, someone might slip over) by pouring water onto the playground, (this was supervised by male teachers) which had a natural fall from the School buildings to the bike shed, and gardening plots, the big boys and male teachers would help and run the whole operation. Another favourite place for an ice slide was the village pond which, in the winter time extended 3 or 4 ft onto the road, it was possible to get slides up to 30ft plus long. The bike shed was situated at the bottom of the playground and would accommodate up to 50 or 60 bikes. Cycling was the accepted mode of transport for most of the village population.

Winters are not as frosty as they were in the 1920's and 1930's. It was possible in some winters to skate down the Lode to the little Ouse then on to Ely. The last person I know to have done so was Rubin Coleman, we do not have winters like that anymore.

In frosty weather all paths were sanded before school time, there were 4 council road men whose job was to keep paths and roads clear of muck and rubbish, they were kept busy clearing up behind the various livestock going through the village to the Bury St Edmunds cattle market, from villages on the north side of Lakenheath, plus local farmers, driven by drovers, a herd of cattle would be accompanied by several drovers, who would take up position at gaps and gateways in order to keep the animals to the main road, lorries had yet to come into use. In the early 30's the only lorry we saw in Lakenheath was a steam one, used

by the miller at Mildenhall for delivering feed stuffs to local farms. It had solid rubber tyres, with roads far from ideal it must have given the driver and his mate quite a rough ride.

During my 11 years at Lakenheath School, (3 to 14 yr's), it was not closed for even 1 day, due to frosty weather. All the teachers lived locally and either walked or rode their cycles to school. The only heating was from a round Tortoise stove fuelled by Coke, in a classroom about 30x40ft. The children, boys in shorts, girls in dresses or skirts. The only ones to wear long trousers were the male teachers.

It was quite common to see boys of 16+ wearing shorts. I myself did not own a pair of long trousers until I was 15 ½. Incidentally pants did not enter my life until I went into the Army. Shirts were longer in those days at a young age we learned to tuck our shirt tails between our private bits before pulling our trousers up.

Easter was a time we looked forward to, especially Good Friday. Families would make their way to Maids Cross Hill which, not far from there was a place locals called Good Friday Hill, it was here that some of the confectionery shop keepers would set up, selling sweets, rock, their own make of ice cream, fruit and anything else they thought might take our fancy, Annie Hall's fish stall was always very popular selling cockles, whelks and winkles, pin provided for the winkle buyer. Races were held and various games, generally a good time was had by all. It was a good way of keeping fit working up a healthy appetite and getting to know one another, when we got home we were hungry, and ready to eat whatever was on offer, it wasn't a case of what would you like dear, you ate what was put in front of you, that's probably why we have a liking for almost anything today.

There were 2 other bands in Lakenheath besides the silver band, they were the Salvation Army and the All Girls Bazooker band, run by a Mrs Wilde, and very good they sounded too, as far as I can remember when Mrs Wilde left the village, it was the end of the Bazooka band. The Salvation Army would set up at various places in the village, play and sing their hymns, preach their beliefs, and generally provide us boys and girls (adults too I suppose) with entertainment, at the same time try and point us in the general direction of the straight and narrow, in this I like to think they were mainly successful.

Always the seasons seemed to arrive on time and in the right order, various games and pursuits were associated with different seasons. At the present time seasons seem to be all over the place, at times it is difficult to tell which one is in and which one is out.

Each year at School, clutching your medical card, on which was recorded a brief history of your health, we were lined up and paraded in front of the county council school Doctor, who carried out the usual examinations, listening back and front

through what always seemed to be a cold stethoscope, a quick look in mouth and ears, drop your trousers, a cough, alright, next, and that was you done for another year.

On another day it would be the turn of the Dental Surgeon, when he had finished his examinations, after a lapse of a few days he would return, to carry out extractions, milk teeth were never filled and anything else that needed to be seen to, we were quite certain they were learners, and out for a bit of practice, in any case, the end result was a lifetime dread of dentists. Today a visit to the dentist is relatively pain free.(so I am told) In the 1930's it was a bit different.

Next it was the turn of an optician, the follow up was that some children were prescribed glasses, fortunately we were clear of any problems, glasses were always standard round lens, and steel rimmed.

Finally, it was the turn of the "Nit" Nurse, most families had de nit sessions, using a comb made of steel which had small teeth set close together in order to tease out anything that shouldn't be there, this was used holding head over a piece of paper to catch anything that was combed out, always we were disappointed, the most we ever found was a grain of sand or such like when we would excitedly yell I have got one.

Tonsils, in the 1920 and 30's, it was the practice to remove tonsils at the onset of a hint of throat trouble, later this was confined to troublesome tonsils or adenoids. Brother Ted had his removed by the local Doctor Pickworth while sitting at the bedroom window in order to get the best light, using a pair of long surgical scissors tonsils were duly clipped, and that was that, ice cream not being readily available, custard and the like was the order of the day, I can't remember brother Arthur having his out. I have still got mine.

Firework Night, Bonfire Night, or Guy forks Night, call it what you will, it was a highlight in our lives and eagerly looked forward to, however it was confined to November 5<sup>th</sup> except when it fell on a Sunday, not like today, weeks before and weeks after, rather than being an anniversary of poor old Guy. No houses that I knew of had a built in bath, bathroom was in front of the kitchen fire, and the bath was of galvanised tin, when not in use hung on a wall outside. This being the case there were usually plenty of old tin baths about that were ideal for building a fire in, to be dragged up and down the high street. Old tyres, mainly bicycle (no car tyres available) were very good for a bonfire as they burned for a long time, pollution wasn't an item then. To augment fireworks Carbide was extensively used, 3 or 4 nuggets of carbide in a treacle tin, a nail hole in the bottom, moisture, usually spit was put on the carbide which activated it to release acetylene gas, the lid put on as tight as possible, a flame applied to the hole in the bottom, the lid would be blown off, accompanied by a loud bang that equalled a thunder flash firework, other uses

were a few nuggets in holes in the capping tops of walls, sometimes it was not possible to spit directly onto the carbide, so we would use what was available, we peed on it, after all water was water, wherever it came from. The legitimate use of carbide was in acetylene gas lamps, sidelights on Dicky Carts and Bicycles etcetera or driving Moles from your garden to someone else's.

Disposal of household waste is one of today's major problems, in the 20 and 30's Lakenheath had no such problem, table scraps were few and far between, what there was provided tit bits for the backyard hens, dog or cat, anything burnable was disposed of in the fire, ashes from the hearth were used to surface paths, or scatter over the waste in earth toilets, were it not for cinders and ash it would have been a muddy journey to the toilet, other rubbish went on the compost heap. Many families were not fortunate enough to have a garden, in one area at Dumpling Bridge Lane on a piece of land 20yards X 40yards there were 12 houses arranged on the north, east and west side, leaving the middle for toilets, wooden framed over a big drop these were arranged so that at the rear of them was room for an Ash Pit into which everything not burnt on the kitchen fire was put, this included waste from the chamber pots from under the bed, these ash holes as they were called were emptied once a year, or sooner if full. Not all houses had their own toilet some shared with others I will leave it to the imagination of the readers to conjure up a picture of someone news paper squares in hand, patiently waiting for a neighbour to emerge from the throne.

There were 5 places in Lakenheath where the living conditions were similar to those in Bridge Lane, they were Deaths Lane, Anchor Lane, Bull Lane and Top Yard so called, because it was situated on the extreme eastern side of the village opposite the Cemetery, there were sufficient of these slums to fill the 40 council houses built by the local council. All the new houses had about 1/8 of an acre, with what the house stood on. Most men became enthusiastic gardeners, having both front and back gardens, for the first time in their lives, in our case moving house coincided with mum marrying my step father, Herbert Coleman who previously lived in Anchor Lane with no garden. We at Half Moon Lane had a large garden, and along with my Grandparents enjoyed the fruits from an orchard, containing Pears, 2 types, Apples, 4 varieties. Plums, 2 sorts, Greengage, Damson, Black and Red Currents, Gooseberries and the proverbial Rhubarb patch next to the big drop. This may account for my brothers and I continuing throughout our lives being enthusiastic gardeners.

It is noted that Deaths Lane now bears a sign that reads Bridge Lane. There has never been two Bridge Lanes, Deaths Lane is a dead end finishing at Death House, in my day occupied a by a smallholder a Mr Rolph.

Many people believe that the place name “Lakenheath” is derived from the words Lake and Heath the lake part being the Fen side and Heath the Warren side, this is not so. The original settlers were led by a man by the name of Lac he and his followers disembarked and established a landing stage somewhere opposite where the Church is, this was called Hythe (landing stage) followers were called ingas, hence Lac ense hythe, Lacs Followers landing stage. Now called Lakenheath. A man named Eris settled his followers at a spring (Well). This place is called Eriswell. Another by the name of Lac settled at a crossing of the river Lark, this is called Lakford, (Lac’s Ford).

A bit more history of Lakenheath, opposite the Post Office, at the junction of Wings Rd, alongside what is now a fish and chip shop, where Ravens Dairy used to be, is a piece of land approx 15ft x 15ft which has never been built on, being in a prime position, it would have been an ideal plot for a corner shop. In 1937 when the original electric posts were erected, a Mr H Coleman and a Mr Bert Mackender, dug holes for the posts, in doing so, they came across a large lump of something that turned out to be Lead, they thought their luck was in, it was their intention to eventually sell it for scrap, however, before they could do this, Mr (Buster) Raven came out of his dairy shop, and insisted that the lump of lead be reburied, stating that this piece of ground is sacred, and the lump of lead was the anchor for the “Gibbet” that once stood there. So far as I know the lump of lead is still buried there, and the plot of land is still vacant and should remain so, it is common land. Down Anchor Lane was where the local Pound was situated, next to where the Anchor Pub used to be.

As with many country women Mum, was adept when it came to preserving fruit and vegetables surplus to our needs when they were in season, from the garden would come Pears, Plums, Gooseberries, Currents (black and red,) Loganberries, Raspberries, Cauliflower, Beetroot and Red Cabbage, wild fruits such as Bullace, Marabelas, Elderberries and Blackberries, there was always something being preserved, the only jam we ever had, was home made. Chutney, Piccalilli, Pickled Onions, and Walnuts on the savoury side were firm favourites. Root vegetables, Potatoes, Parsnip, Carrot, Turnip and Swede were preserved in clamps, as some people called them, onions which didn’t need much protection from frost were hung in the shed, shallots were widely used in cooking and more widely used for pickling than onions, and much nicer. Wine was made and consumed along with Stout and Beer main ingredients used for wine making were dandelion, (flowers only) cowslips, sloes, elderflower, elderberries, beet root, parsnip and potato. On special occasions such as Anniversaries, Xmas, Easter and similar festivities not forgetting funerals, about the only drinks on offer would be Ruby Wine or anything homemade, for youngsters it was Tizer, Quencher or homemade lemonade.

The school had a large area which was split up into plots about 10ftx40ft, these were tended by boys of 13 assisted by a 12-year-old, yearly they would move up 1year, leaving age was 14. Many types of vegetables were grown there was great pride amongst the boys all trying to attain the most successful plot. An asparagus bed was maintained collectively along the back of the plots. The headmaster whose house went with the school must have reaped huge benefits from free vegetables. His house had cold running water, 2 of the elder boys were delegated (water monitors) who's job was pumping water up to a tank in the roof of the house which gravity fed the wash basins and sink. A horticultural teacher used to lecture us on the rudiments of gardening. On wet days the time would be taken up learning seed recognition depth of planting, spacing of plants, fertiliser requirements, single and double digging etc. Sadly, Bungalows have been erected over these plots and gardening is no longer a part of the school curriculum. Girls were taught cooking both theory and practical. Many people nowadays rely on supermarkets for their vegetables, and depend on takeaways for many of their meals, with little understanding or knowledge of the benefits obtained from preparing and cooking fresh produce and adding their own ingredients. Gardening and Domestic science is no longer taught in school, even though a third of one's life is taken up with buying preparing, cooking and clearing up after meals, no wonder it has become necessary to earn that extra £1 in order to buy so called convenience and over spiced foods which is giving our country so many health problems. At the present time there appears to be no concerted effort or resolve by governments to correct the situation, I suppose that is understandable as it would mean tackling big businesses who are mainly responsible for the problems facing the N H S.

The garden area just described was sold off by the Education authorities for housing. Growing food its preparation and cooking was left to so called experts who had a captive audience as most people's minds thought of food about 3 times a day. The result of these experts is OBESITY and all its associated ailments.

Fair (carnival) time, something we looked forward to all year, talked about, and measured against year on year. The Fair at Lakenheath always fell on Thursday, Friday and Saturday the first week in July. It was set up in what was called The Fair Meadow, situated between the British Legion and the old Co-op. When the Fair was due to arrive many children would go as far as the first wash near Caudle farm to meet the traction engine, towing three or four trailers carrying the Joy cars (dodgems) Jollity farm Swings etc, we would excitedly escort them (generally get in the way) to the fair ground.

Watching the Steam Traction engines manoeuvre its trailers through the narrow gate into the fairground was quite something to us boys. Lorries pulling the various trailers and caravans nearly all with solid tyres, and thrilling to see so many lorries in one go (all of 4 or 5) as many as we would see in 2 or 3 weeks, one of those seen regularly was a steam driven lorry used by Parkers the millers at Mildenhall, for delivering meal and various animal feeds to farmers, the other frequently seen vehicle was the delivery truck from the railway station, by the time I was 6 or 7 vehicles with pneumatic tyres were more common, even so it was still safe to walk in the road when the paths were a bit rough. There was no kerb stones marking the

division between path and road, there were however, in certain places large stones marked the edge of the path, in the majority of places there was just a shallow depression indicating path from road. In rainy weather it was in places better walking in the road dodging the various nasty's (cow pats etc) than using the path, there is little wonder that most houses had foot scrapers outside and thick door mats just inside the entrance. The usual cry to children on entry was wipe your feet, a cry rarely heard nowadays.

Power for operating the various rides and side stalls was produced by generators and dynamos driven by the Traction engine and Lorries. For many people fair time was their annual holiday, this probably was a hangover from when it was the practice of farm labourers being bonded to farmers for the following year, it was certainly a time when people let their hair down and enjoyed themselves, the first time that many had experienced electric light, and years before candles and oil lamps were no longer in general use. For children the fair was a glimpse into another world, what with the dodgems, jollity farm, swings, cakewalk, wall of death and various side stalls, rock making, cockles, whelks and of course the proverbial fish and chips, in fact all the fun of the fair.

Most houses had means of cleaning mud and other foreign matter from boots and shoes, either with free standing scrapers, or in the case of houses that fronted the high street, built into the wall beside the front doorstep, in order that footwear could be scraped clean of mud and anything else that may have accidentally been trod in, before entering the house. The cry from parents to children entering the house was wipe your feet, just inside the door there was usually a coconut matting door mat for this purpose. Roads and paths were badly maintained and always seemed to be muddy. One very important part of a person's house was, the Front Step and Foot Scraper, one of the first tasks the house wife undertook each morning was to scrub the front step, and apply Red Cardinal polish or something similar, clean and Black Lead the scraper after having removed the previous days debris. I suppose this was a statement by the occupant in the pride they took of their few processions and family cleanliness.

Pubs were mainly beer houses, and was a gathering place for working men to relax away from the relatively primitive conditions in which they lived, it was somewhere to go and get away from really drab surroundings, bearing in mind there was no electric light or electrical equipment, very few people had radio's, newspaper's or magazines, most could not afford them anyway, many could not read. By the mid 30's there were many more newspapers, magazines and comics available. Women were rarely seen in public houses, World War II changed things and it became accepted practice for Ladies to visit public houses even without a male escort.

The town crier was Mr Luke Coleman he would make announcements such as Council meetings, Property and Livestock sales, various events such as Fetes and other important functions. He would at strategic places in the village, after ringing his bell, make the appropriate announcement in as loud a voice as possible I can't recall him doing his stuff after 1936, when I was nine years old.

Soon after moving into our new house I took over my brother Arthur's paper round which belonged to my cousin Bill Leader, it entailed delivering newspapers, periodicals, magazines and comics etc, before going to school, not many of the papers survive today, the Daily Herald, News Cronical, Daily Sketch and Tribunal have long since gone. On Saturdays the money had to be collected, the price of newspapers was stable during the 31/2 years I collected money, it was 1d per paper all papers were the same price 6d per week, plus 1d for delivery, 7d for the week. Roughly it would take 34 newspaper deliveries to make £1.00. For those who cannot remember it took 240 old pennies to make £1. I enjoyed my time as a newspaper delivery boy which I did until I left school and started full time work; this was 2 weeks before my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Most of our attention was focused on Lakenheath warren, which, early in the war was laid out as a Dummy aerodrome with runway lights, dummy aircraft etc, as a decoy for Mildenhall which as the crow flies is about 4 miles away, and well charted on most maps. There was some 300 plus bombs dropped on the dummy airfield, before the Germans realised it was not Mildenhall they were bombing, it was then that Lakenheath was turned into a functional airfield. As the Crow flies our house was only 3miles from the airfield, we were issued with a Morrison Air raid shelter, this was constructed like a table about 3ft high x 6ft6ins x 5ft, 4ins x 4" heavy angle iron legs and a 3/8<sup>th</sup> ins steel top. It was not used very often as it was much more exciting outside watching the German planes.

On one daylight raid, our next door neighbour a Lt in the Home Guard. set his Lewis Gun up on the gate post outside his house, and had a shot at the German Bomber, a near neighbour a Home Guard Captain quickly ran and confiscated the gun from his Lt, shouting you xxxxxxxx fool do you want him to return the fire, half the local population was out watching the German planes, while it lasted, it was quite exciting.

When the second world war was declared I was 13it was a very exciting time, I knew enough to realise the gravity of the situation.

My eldest brother Ted and my step brother Harold both just 18 when war broke out volunteered and joined the R A F, they were never stationed at the same place. Ted spent most of the war in the Middle East, Harold in South Africa on Sunderland Flying Boats hunting German U Boats in the Atlantic. My step father wounded in



the 1st world war at the battle of the Somme, joined the Observer corps, my step sister worked in a munitions factory in Luton. My Mum was a member of the Womens Institute and the Womens section of the British Legion. My other brother in a reserved Agricultural occupation was in the Home Guard; I was in the A T C (Air Training Corp). We had a young evacuee from London billeted with us, Black outs Food and Cloths Rationing, Identity Cards and various other restrictions, the events and effects of the war was constantly with us.

Cycling was the accepted mode of transport, buses were few and far between, it was Bury St Edmunds Wednesday and Saturdays, Newmarket Tuesdays, and Ely Thursdays.

School leaving age was 14, when you were expected to find a job and henceforth pay your way. It was reasoned you were also old enough to go to a Cinema, not having one in Lakenheath we went either to Mildenhall 6 miles, or Brandon 51/2, or Newmarket 12 miles, the cinemas in these places had a small parking area which was largely taken up by large Cycle sheds, most of their customers came by Bike. Frequently you would see a family of 4 or 5 cycling to the pictures, one child sitting at the back of Mum the other 2, one on the back carrier and one on the front seat fixed to the handlebars of Dads bike.

My first job was with a firm called Fitzpatrick, engaged in the cons-----truction of Lakenheath Aerodrome, Gleason & Co Ltd was the other main contractor, mainly Irish workers, my job was with the surveyors, making tea, generally keeping the office and drafting room tidy, accompanying the surveyors with an armful of wooden pegs, Theodolite, Dumpy Level and anything else necessary for setting out buildings etc, for this I was paid £1.12s.6d per 48 hour week, at the time I was still in short trousers, and of course boots. As was the practice in those days you handed over your pay packet to your mother, who would then give you pocket money. As soon as I had saved enough, I bought myself, a pair of long trousers it was quite a time before I could afford a pair of low shoes. It was not uncommon to see boys in shorts at aged 16 or even older. You were not paid for bank nor annual holidays and you could be sacked at a minuets notice, there was a shortage of labour so that didn't matter much except you lost a few days pay until you found another job, hours were usually 7 until 12.in the morning 1hour for lunch and 1until 5 in the afternoon Monday to Friday, 7 until 12 on Saturdays.

My next job when I was 15 yrs old was at Weeting, the Hall, an old country estate house that was being converted into a military Headquarters, and a large number of Nisson and Quansit huts were to be erected in the extensive grounds, to house commonwealth troops of an armoured division, (Canadian) Prior to the invasion of occupied France. We, Harold Cash a local lad and I, teamed up with a Mr Samuel

Armsby an old fashioned no nonsense carpenter of the old school type, who was not slow in administering a bit of corporal punishment whenever he felt it was needed, I must say however that he was never vindictive, it was usually because we had misused his tools, or was slow in understanding his instructions, he treated us as though we were his apprentices, looking back the discipline and training I received from Mr Samuel Armsby (definitely not Sam) was invaluable, and has proved so all my life. We cycled to work, in the winter time it was dark when we left home, and dark when we got back, it is about 7 miles to Weeting, sometimes we would go via Brandon other times via Hockwold depending which way the wind was blowing, hours were 7.30 to 5.00 Mon thru Fri, 12 o'clock on Sat. After 18 months the contracts had finished during which time I learnt much about carpentry. My next job was with The Ouse Drainage Catchment Board, more of that later.

During my time at Weeting, the Lakenheath Airfield had become operative. When I was 14 I joined the ATC, with high hopes of eventually joining the RAF, we were issued with uniforms and once Lakenheath was up and running had a fairly free run of the place there were no fences to restrict our movements, the cemetery road used to join the Brandon Turnpike part of the road cut across the perimeter track, on our way to work at Weeting we used about ½ mile of the perimeter.

I experienced my first aeroplane ride at 15 yrs old, in a Stirling Bomber, it was the practice of some of us to don our uniforms, cycle onto the perimeter, wait for an aircrew bus bringing aircrew to one of the planes on a dispersal stand, bike like mad and cadge a ride, most crews were sympathetic to the pleas of a 15 year old, they were taking part in a bombing mission that night, during the day they would take the plane up to test the various instruments etc; before the ground crew loaded up with bombs, out of 30 planes taking part it was not unusual the following morning to count only 22 or 25 there may be a couple fly in the next day, having landed the night before at another airfield. We had many flights during this time, crews used to use the many pubs in the village, one in particular E for Eric used the Chequers pub, my Step Father also drank there, during a conversation I was discussed (unbeknown to me), and my ambition to join the R A F, later my step father said to me that if I went to the dispersal point for E for Eric at about 10am Saturday morning, I could possibly have a ride. All excited, I was there before 10, when the crew arrived, after checking various things, it was, hop aboard young man, I was taken by the observer to the nose of the plane and told to lie down in the bomb aimers position, then it was take off, I must admit that I closed my eyes as the plane accelerated up the runway, at what appeared to be a terrifying speed, I was a bit too close to the concrete below me for comfort, when I did open my eyes, in the position I was in, all I could see was the ground flashing by, the next thing it felt as if the floor was trying to push me up to the front gunners position directly above, the runway dropping away beneath me and we were away. I had no idea where we were going, I thought it was the usual

short flight to test the various instruments, apparently I was wrong, because looking down from about 3,000 ft I could see water, quite a lot of it, in fact we were over the Wash, before I got my bearings and my stomach back in its right position, the Pilot started various manoeuvres that I could have sworn was impossible to do in a Sterling Bomber, another surprise was in store, no sooner had he straightened up I heard the clattering of machine gun fire, it was then that I noticed things floating in the sea, these turned out to be targets for the 3 gunners to practice their gunnery on, at the same time the pilot was throwing the plane about simulating taking evasive action from imaginary enemy fighters. After the gunners had fired of their allotted ration of ammo, it was ready to go home, as I was to find out, not the easy way, at least not for me. Apparently we took a roundabout way back to Lakenheath, and where I was laying, in the nose of the plane, hedgehopping in a cumbersome Sterling Bomber was not the most pleasant of experiences, I had no idea where we were, trees churches electric pylons and the like were coming towards us so fast it was impossible to recognise anything, by this time I was beginning to worry about my stomach it didn't feel as though it was in the right place, I started worrying where it would be when I stood up. We rose to a reasonable height and I recognised Ely Cathedral, the next thing was a shuddering right through the aircraft, afterwards I was told that it was when the wheels were lowered and locked in position, the landing was uneventful, actually I was not in a condition to tell if it was good or bad, by this time I was beyond worrying about anything. After taxiing round to our dispersal point, we finally came to a stop. Time to get up and go, normally the easiest thing in the world, but right now things were not functioning as they should, by the time I managed to get in a sitting position one of the crew had come, with his help we headed for the centre of the plane where the door and steps onto the dispersal point were, we got as far as the mid upper gun position, when I was quite uncontrollably sick, at last my stomach had finally had enough and gave in, when I attempted to move I slipped in my own mess, grabbing anything I could get hold of, in my case, it was an hydraulic pipe that serviced the mid upper gun turret, the next thing was oil pouring out, however it had not prevented me from falling in my own mess, aided and abetted by slippery oil, someone took care of the leaking pipe and I was helped out onto the dispersal point, at last I could get myself straightened out, after a minute or two I headed for my bike, when I heard a voice shout "where do you think you are off to", come back here you have got some clearing up to do, you made the mess, you clear it up. I don't think I made a very good job of it but I was eventually allowed to go.

Much later my Step Father asked me how I got on, oh ok, was my reply, would you go again he asked, by that time my stomach had returned to normal and I felt fine, my answer was a definite yes. It was quite some time before he confessed that it was

a put up job between, him and the pilot, to give me a rough ride to try and discourage me from wanting to join the RAF.

Our unofficial and unlogged flights were eventually stopped, when one of the lads mother complained that her son had flown without a parachute, From then on we had to have written permission from our parents and A.T.C. commanding officer, check in at the orderly room, draw a parachute, be allocated to a particular plane, at a certain time, on a specified day, this was quite a longwinded process, and all sorts of excuses and stipulations were made, that made it almost impossible to meet. These flights stopped altogether when 3 boys in the A.T.C. I don't know where they were from, were killed, when their plane crashed on takeoff.

Before all this happened I had one particular flight with D for Donald. "Fighter Affiliation" this entailed a fighter plane, in our case a Hurricane, meeting up with the Sterling at no doubt a prearranged height, once there, thumbs up and away the fighter peeled, (I had been fitted up with head phones connected to the intercom) next thing I heard was the rear gunner calling to the pilot "bandit on our tail corkscrew to the right, there was a pause after which the gunner rasped out "Go" the resultant evasive action taken by that Sterling, was unbelievable, had I not been strapped in I would have been thrown all over the place, this sort of thing with the fighter coming in at various angles continued for about 20 minutes, in order to test the reaction of all the gunners, and of course the pilot.

The Mildenhall squadron of the ATC of which we were a part of, went to Bircham Newton an RAF station in Norfolk, on a 2 week camp in 1943, while we were there we had several flights in a Tiger Moth, they were used for training, for those who don't know a Tiger Moth, it is a single engine Bi plane, twin seats, front seat was for trainees, this to me was the ultimate in flying, because of its slow speed everything could be taken in and experienced with relish. The Air Field was of grass, take off was a bit bumpy, after reaching a couple of hundred feet or so, we banked to the left, which gave a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside, it felt as though the left wing was stationery and we were just twisting round it. The Tiger Moth was a very manoeuvrable plane as I was to find out, it was on my second flight that we looped the loop, in a plane with an open cockpit was quite an experience.

While at Bircham Newton we went to the small town of Docking, it was their sports day, we asked if it was open for anyone to compete, they indicated that it was ok, little did they know what was coming, Jack Flack (Smea) entered all the sprint races 100, 200, and 300yds, which he won comfortably, Reg Bennett and myself entered the ½, 1, and 2 mile races, Reg came first and me second in all three, I never managed to beat Reg he had longer legs than me, and he was taller, all three of us

had been in training for some time and had taken part in Suffolk county races for the last 2 years.

Hunstanton was not far away so we paid it a visit, most shops and attractions were closed and boarded up, barbed wire and other obstacles seemed to be everywhere, we didn't stay long as there was nothing much to do.

Reg Bennett and myself were both interested in navigation, but was lacking the necessary skills in maths, at that time an elderly teacher was at Lakenheath School replacing one who had volunteered for the RAF, he agreed to give us tuition in the evenings after we were home from work, we were 16 at the time, and attended his evening class to hone up on our maths, it cost us 1s.6d per hour. Looking back it was probably the best money I ever spent.

My social life was quite hectic, like many others I was one of a gang of boys of about the same age 14/15, about once a week we would cycle to either Brandon, Mildenhall or Newmarket to the pictures (cinema), having booked our seats with a 2d phone call from a red phone box, there were 3 in the village at that time, later there were many more, when the operator put you through after pressing button A you were in touch with the booking clerk, if the operator was unable put you through pressing button B you got your 2d back.

Opposite the council houses was a grass field which stretched from Undley road to Smeath drove, it was mainly grazed by Cooks dairy cows. Where the children's play equipment is now, there used to be a pond, more about this later. This field was used as a playing field by all and sundry, the first third was the local football ground. The second was the village cricket ground, the third, opposite the council houses was used by anyone who wanted to. In my day it was used by various gangs playing football, coats or anything else would be put down as goal posts, people coming after the start would play with one side or the other depending on how many there were, teams would be made up of all ages and any quantity it was not unusual for there to be 3 of 4 games in progress at any one time, no referee, so no final whistle, the finish was when it got too dark to see.

At this time 1941-2 there were many manual workers mainly Irish living in temporary accommodation on the Lakenheath base, during its construction. Like many sites and factories throughout the country efforts were made to keep the workers happy, this led to the setting up of Workers Playtime and ENSA which was an organisation set up for the sole purpose of entertaining the many workers channelled to work in armament factories and remote locations such as Lakenheath, it was made up of professional, amateur and part time artists, many local people worked on the base and were allowed to attend the various variety shows that were put on, mainly Saturday or Sunday nights, these shows were very popular and well

attended, always they ended with playing both the English and Irish National anthems. All too soon these shows came to an end when the base became operational.

One of my pals Jack Flack ("Smea" as he was called) lived in a cottage about 200yds down Smeath Drove which is situated opposite South Rd. In front of his house ran a Ditch (Dyke) in order to access his house the Ditch had to be negotiated, this was done by walking over the Dyke on a plank like a railway sleeper about 12" wide, it's surprising how confident we became at walking the Plank, even carrying a bike. This cottage like most in the village had no internal plumbing, electricity or water, water was obtained from the Dyke which was spring fed, lighting was candles and paraffin oil lamps. It was in this cosy atmosphere that I was introduced to cards (gambling I suppose) the stakes were quite low a halfpenny a time (480 to the £) games played were 7 card whist, whist, pontoon, brag, and newmarket, with stakes that low it was not possible to win or lose very much.

Boys and girls usually stuck to 2, 3, or more of their own gender, it was seldom that boy and girl went out together until they were seriously courting, I suppose it was a case of safety in numbers, especially in a village as close knit as ours, where everyone knew everybody else, where they lived, where they worked, which pub they used, how old they were, how many children they had (whether they were all theirs or not), what sort of bike they rode in fact it was difficult to do anything untoward without someone knowing.

Back to the pond near Undley road, in 1943 or 44 I'm not sure which, a Sterling 4 engine heavy bomber just taken off from the Lakenheath air field and heading towards Undley failed to gain sufficient height, and after tearing off the chimney of the house the south side at the entrance to Broom road on its way, crashed in the area where the pond was, a local man, a Mr Fred Bullen rescued some of the crew, a very commendable act for which he was awarded a bravery medal. No damage was done to the road that I can recall.

Before the youth club hut occupied the site near where the children's play equipment is, it was originally situated just inside the wall surrounding the Retreat estate, near to where Palmers drive is. During the time I was a member, a boy's choir was formed, I don't recall the man's name but I do remember that he was from somewhere in Europe and had been interned for the duration of the war. The main pieces we attempted were Negro Spirituals and pieces leaning towards the Religious. Our choir master was quite religious he was also a conscientious objector (not everybody's cup of tea especially as many young men in the village were in the forces,) nevertheless he was a good teacher and we reached a stage where we thought we were quite good, all too soon he suddenly went away we never saw nor

heard any more of him and the choir died a natural death. During this time, 1942/3 a Mr's Fisher resided in a house not far from the youth hut, it used to belong to Mr Presland a local builder, there was upstairs in this house a very large attic type room with dormer windows, which she used as a dance school, when she opened up, the cost was 6d a session, quite a few boy's and girl's of around my age enrolled in what we thought would be a golden opportunity to get better acquainted with the girls, Mr's Fisher was wise to this, during the first 3 or 4 lessons no contact whatsoever was entertained, even then it was arms length hands resting on partners shoulders, music was via a windup gramophone, dances we endeavoured to master were Waltz, Quick Step, Foxtrot, St Bernards Waltz, The Barn dance, Valeata, also general ballroom etiquette such as, which way round to go so as not to impede other dancers, how to approach a prospective partner for a dance, bearing in mind boy's would be on one side of the room girls on the other, except for older dancers. There was always a scramble to get a partner for the last waltz, for this dance the floor was crowded, on occasions the lights were even dimmed. Nowadays it's nothing but gig around to Jungle music, real dancing seems to be a thing of the past

With football, athletics, ATC, cinema, variety shows, cards, youth club, dances, pubs and the excitement of the war with Germany there was never a dull moment.

Pubs, most young boys at 15+ frequented pubs played darts or dominoes, mainly no later than 8.30-9.00 o'clock, we were restricted to the odd small bottle, it was usually shady, never shorts, out of the 11 pubs in Lakenheath only 4 sold spirits, the remainder were beer only pubs, there seemed to be an unwritten agreement among the publicans to keep us restricted because we were never allowed to drink very much and if we went from one pub to another they always seemed to be aware of it, the bush telegraph in this village was very efficient, unless of course it was because everyone was nosey.

At the age of 18 my brother Arthur was friends with another Arthur, Arthur Tuffs, they did a bit of poaching, both had dogs, fold up shot guns (4tens) they were also deadly with a catapult brother Arthur could hit a match box on a post at 20 paces, no bird perched up a tree on a frosty moonlit night was safe. Catapults were homemade, the rubber was 3/8" square 2 pieces roughly 9" long secured to a crotch cut from a Hazel bush (tree) a piece of soft leather was attached to the other ends in which to cradle a stone.

As I mentioned earlier, my next job was with the "Great Ouse Catchment Board" assigned to a local gang, 12 in number, all of whom I knew, Reg my running mate being among them, our job was building and shoring up banks of the Little Ouse River with Gault (clay) brought by barge from clay pits near Ely, usually 4 or 5 towed by a tug, the barges, about 30 ft long 10 or 12 ft wide were unloaded by a

steam driven Grab Line, mounted in a special barge which incorporated a coal bunker. Also part of the Grab Line set up was a house boat, this was used by the Grab Line driver or his mate, whose job it was to remain at their place of work overnight, in order to stoke the boiler early in the mornings, to make sure there was sufficient steam for a 7 o'clock start. Reg and I would occasionally stay weekends, to keep the boiler going and a head of steam ready first thing Monday morning. We would spend our time fishing, and going to the nearest pub, there was always one within walking distance, especially where there was a crossing, most of the river side pubs were beer houses only, didn't have set hours nor did they bother very much about what age you were, how much you drank depended on how much money you had, in our case not much, the nearest pub to us at the time was the "Green Dragon," no electric, no piped water, no internal plumbing, very cold beer, brought up from the cellar as and when required, to warm it up one put a poker in the fire and when nice and red plunge it in the beer, or when old Nat (Nathan) was not about, stand your mug (pottery not glass) beside the fire, I said when old Nat wasn't about, that was because he was a tobacco chewer, and like all tobacco chewers he was a master in the art of spitting, if he happened to be sitting the opposite side of the room to the fire, you might suddenly hear a hissing noise when one of his brown saliva projectiles flashed across the room into the fire. Apart from this he was a likable old devil, who had wonderful stories to tell, like many wise old fen folk, he was good at dressing up even a half good story into a really good one, sadly the likes of Mat are getting few and far between, this is probably due to people not having time to listen to the older generation, in my young days older people were looked up and listened to, nowadays they tend to look upon us as though we were never young, nor understand the modern world and all its electronic gadgets.

At about this time, Bomber Harris launched his 1,000 bomber raids on Germany, it was a sight that will never be repeated, we at Lakenheath are within 4 miles of Norfolk, in the other direction was Cambridgeshire 5 miles, with something like 35 airfields per county, on a 1,000 bomber raid, 25 plus planes per aerodrome all taking off and circling using their particular flight paths, slowly gaining height, this took quite a time due to them being loaded with maximum fuel and bombs, within 10 miles as the crow flies from Lakenheath were 7 operational airfields, everywhere you looked and in any direction were planes, mainly Sterling and Lancaster's, gradually gaining height, the noise of so many piston engines was quite something, in all directions the sky was full of aircraft, in an area such as ours there is a lot of sky, then as if by magic, without exception they all turned in a south easterly direction, they then looked like a flock of rooks returning to their roosts, after what seemed like hours they were all gone, after which there was an eerie silence. Next morning we were up early (before going to work) to see what planes were missing, it was easy to do this, from a local spot called Maids Cross Hill, our village is only



about 1 ½ miles as the crow flies from the airfield, separated, by a hill that runs the length of the village, from there one could see, spread out before you the whole airfield, it was quite easy to tell which planes were missing, out of around 30 it was not unusual that 5 or 6 had not returned, or one had crash landed on the waste ground to the east of the airfield, the reason planes used this area to crash land on was, they were not allowed to use the runways in case they prevented planes not crippled from landing. There may also be an odd plane that had to put down at another airfield, and returned later in the day.



Aged 17

### **Called Up**

While I worked for the Great Ouse Catchment Board, I was summoned to take a medical examination to determine my fitness for military service, I was 17 yrs 9 months old, I was A1 and fit for service. In May my call up papers arrived with a railway warrant, I was required to report at Gibraltar Barracks Bury St Edmunds on 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, just 1 Month after my birthday, and so begun 3 years that completely changed my life, and for which I shall always be grateful.

I managed to get a lift to Lakenheath station which is 3 ½ miles from the village itself, and is on the Liverpool Street to Norwich line, next stop Brandon, then Thetford, where I changed line for Bury St Edmunds, on arriving, I walked to Gibraltar barracks, presented myself to the sentry at the gate, saying, “please I’ve come, is this the right place”? Come inside said he, so here I was, well on the way to becoming a soldier. In the next couple of days I and many more went through the rigmarole of being kitted out, one of the first items that we were dished out with was, a canvas palliasse and bolster.

Our quarters were a wooden barrack room, one end partitioned off for the platoon corporal and his 2 lance corporals, the remainder of the room was ours, containing 30 beds, on each were 3 brown blankets, beds consisted of 5 slats of wood each 6ft x 6 ins x 1 inch spaced 11/2” apart held together by 3 cross pieces, 2 iron trestles about 15 inches high. This plus our palliasse bolster and blankets completed our sleeping

gear, above each bed attached to the wall was a metal box, in which to stow items needed for daily use. Things we had brought with us and our civilian clothes were placed in our kitbag ready to take home with us on our first leave, then it was outside with our palliasse and bolster marched to a shed containing bales of straw and told to fill them up, on our return to our barrack room we were paraded outside once again, then marched back to the quartermasters store to be kitted out with our uniforms etc, we slowly past the quarter master, who called out to his underlings what he considered was your size, you were duly dishd out your items of clothing, which consisted of 2 battledress, 2pr trousers, 2 shirts, 2 vests, 2 pants, 3 pr socks, 1 hat, 1 greatcoat, 1 groundsheet, 1 set of denims, 1 cap badge, 1 belt. 1pr puttees, 1 scarf, 1 housewife, 1 mushroom, 1 kitbag, 1 haversack, 1 nap sack, 1 set of ammunition pouches, 2 pr boots, 2 towels, 1 flannel and soap, 1 set Dixie tins, 1 knife, fork and spoon, 1 enamel mug, I'm sure I've missed something out, I'll no doubt think of it later. We then marched, or rather staggered back to our barrack room, there to take stock of our new possessions, everything stunk of moth balls or something much worse, and was well creased, trouble was the creases were all in the wrong places. The barrack room was lit by 4 bare bulbs, a single switch on the wall near the door of the corporals' room, no doubt so it was close to them at lights out, in our case 10 O'clock, they had a separate switch, and a different lights out time. There were no sockets in our room, so anything electrical was out of the question, an electric iron would have been very useful, our corporal was quite helpful, he said put your trousers between mattress and bed boards this will get them creased while you sleep, a few days of trial and error and we managed to get a decent crease in our trousers, not all the lads were capable of adapting to our changed lifestyle, country boys seemed to adjust more quickly than those from towns, possibly because army life was more akin to country ways than from towns.

We had 1 hour from reveille to breakfast parade in which to use the various ablutions they consisted of toilets wash basins and showers, no baths, this was no hardship for many of us country boys as we were not familiar with bath or showers. At the breakfast parade we were inspected by our platoon Sgt, some lads had not shaved and tidied themselves, they received a nice polite military dressing down for not doing so, and were told in no uncertain terms what was expected now that they were in the army, and so to breakfast. Next parade was 8 O'clock. More kit, a pr of pumps and shorts, for use in the drill hall.

For the first 4 weeks (primary training) we undertook various exercises, aptitude tests, rifle drill, square bashing and related type tasks, which apparently were designed to assess our coordination, and reactions etc. During the last week of our primary training, we were interviewed by Personnel selection officers, whose job was to channel us into various regiments and trades, such as catering, mechanized transport, infantry, pioneer core, artillery, armoured division and so on, at the end of

which, we were assigned to various regiments corps etc, and given 7 days leave with instructions to take our civilian clothes with us, leave them at home, and report to our allotted regiments when the 7 days were up.

I was assigned to The Suffolk Regiment so I did not have far to go, their Headquarters and training battalion being at Bury St Edmunds, about 16 miles from my home, with little traffic on the country roads it was difficult to hitchhike, so I cycled to and fro when leave would allow.

Having settled in our new barracks we now faced 12 weeks of intensive training, dubbed, corps training, handling Rifles, Sten guns, Piat antitank guns, Bren and Lewis machine guns, 2" spade mortars, 3" spigot mortars, Grenades and grenade launchers, Bayonet close quarter techniques, Land Mine recognition and how to disarm them. Each time we practiced with any of the weapons, we had to strip them down, (take them to pieces), reassemble and prime them ready for firing, our training required us to carry out this process blindfold.

Once a fortnight we would go on a 10 mile bash (walk), the first one was a testing time for lads who had not been brought up with boots as their principal footwear, 10 miles on a hot metalled road was quite a trial, we had strict orders not to remove footwear when we stopped for a rest, and to get our feet up higher than the rest of the body, the pace of the bash was set by the platoon Sgt, who would be at the front his corporals at the rear, urging on the stragglers. There was no rest after the ten miles were up it was straight onto the firing range to put into practice our weapon training, or onto an assault course.

Initiative and reliance tests were coupled with bivouacking for a period of one or two nights, we were told to pair up, issued a shovel to dig a slit trench, by which time dinner would be served, I teamed up with a lad from Isleham, both of us capable of wielding a shovel, and had our ground sheets rigged up over our slit trench fairly quickly, way before many had even got the semblance of a trench dug, dinner was served to each pair of hungry boys, to the dismay of many it wasn't cooked it was raw, ½ lb potatoes, 2 carrots, 1 swede, a little pack of salt, 1 oxo cube, 1 large onion and 1 lb of beef, all raw, and told to get on with it. In our case while one prepared vegetables, the other collected dry grass and dead wood for a fire, out with the Dixie tins, with those sort of ingredients we decided stew was the order of the day, I'm afraid some of the lads hadn't got a clue how to fend for themselves, maybe they had too much laid on a plate for them by their parents. It was at this period of my army life that I shook off much of the inferiority complex I felt, at being a country bumpkin, among so called wide boys from the towns.

Reveille at 6 am, first parade 6.45am, breakfast at 0700, all except those who thought that being in the wilds exempted them from presenting themselves in an

acceptable condition, they were required to parade again at 0730, after which they were allowed to get their porridge.

The climax of our training was taking part in manoeuvres involving Tanks, Antitank Gun Carriers, Artillery, Airborne, Para's and Infantry troops. The exercises were carried out on the Stanford Battle Area, which covers an area in excess of 30.000 acres the Defence Ministry compulsory purchased the whole area in 1942, which included the villages of Buckingham Tofts, Langford, Stanford, Tuttington and West Tofts it is still used by the military today. The villagers have never been allowed to return to their homes.

Live ammunition was used throughout, and it was reckoned that there would be a 1% casualty rate, by the conclusion of the exercise, not all dead I might add, but would include wounds, scrapes and nervous breakdowns, and lads who were upset by big bangs. Our task in the exercise was to attack and establish control of a particular copse. Having been given its precise map reference it was determined that we were about 5 miles from our goal, we had already been briefed that an artillery barrage would be laid down, which would creep forward at roughly the same pace that we the infantry were advancing, they were positioned a long way behind us, which meant their salvos would come directly over our heads. Everything was going fine, until suddenly we heard a terrific swooshing noise like an express train rushing by; it was the first salvo of shells on their way to the target ahead. I think we were all silently hoping that the girls in the munitions factory had put the right amount of explosive in the shell cases, so none would fall short. By the time we were in sight of our target some 65/70 minutes or so later, the barrage had stopped, we took up a position near some trees about 3 or 4 hundred yards away, and were ordered to target fire on the left side of the copes, after 10 or so minuets we advanced under cover of a smoke screen laid down by the 2" spade mortars after taking up new positions they, (the 2" mortars) followed up with high explosive bombs, this was done by 3 teams, 2 men to each mortar, all was going well when there was an almighty explosion above one of the teams, the boy holding his mortar did not notice the spade of his mortar digging into the ground, resulting in the barrel tilting it a bit more upright with each bomb being fired, the result was, one bomb had come in contact with a branch of the tree above, 3 of the six boys were injured, fortunately or unfortunately depending how you look at it, lying on their stomachs with back pack and steel helmet, the only vulnerable part was their back side and legs, which were liberally peppered with shrapnel, their injuries were not life threatening, they were patched up and taken away, we heard later they were alright but had been taken off the list for the next posting.

2 days after returning to our barracks we were given 14 days embarkation leave, there was a lot of speculation as to which battalion we were bound for, we deduced

that it was Malaya, India or Egypt, as it happened it was India. Once again we were paraded at the quartermaster's store, this time it was to be issued with 2 pr shorts and a pith helmet (I thought these had gone out of use with the demise of Lawrence of Arabia). The next day was a disappointment a lad from Royston and I were taken off the draft list, because we were not yet 18½ yrs old, which apparently you had to be before being considered eligible for an overseas posting, 2 days later the boys were gone. Our disappointment was short lived, we were told that we would be included in the next overseas draft both of us would be old enough in a few weeks. Meanwhile we would be attached to a garrison platoon doing general duties, after 3 weeks we appeared on company orders along with about 30 more for another 14 days embarkation leave, on our return, we were told our destination was the First Battalion The Suffolk Regiment, 8 Brigade part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division stationed in Egypt.

## **Egypt**

The journey to Egypt was to me, very exciting, though a bit un-comfortable, to be quite honest the excitement overrode the discomfort for most of the time, we travelled from Bury St Edmunds by army lorry 20 boys per truck to New Haven, where we embarked on the "S.S. Daffodill," a paddle steamer pre-war Pleasure Boat/Ferry, at least watching the paddle wheels going round went someway to taking the mind off a churning stomach, our destination was Dieppe northern France. On arrival we could see evidence of the unsuccessful commando raid, carried out previous to the invasion of mainland Europe. The night was spent in a bare barn like room, no beds, in fact it was as though no one knew we were coming; evening meal was cheese sandwiches and a cup of very thick Cocoa, the alternative drink was water.

Next day we were up at dawn and marched to a nearby railway station, given yet more sandwiches, with tea this time. After about an hour we boarded a train, carriages were not too bad, in fact they were better than those on the L N E R line, the only ones I had previously known, as we boarded the train we were dished out more sandwiches and tea and bottled water. In no time at all we arrived at Paris, no time for sightseeing, ½ an hour was all we stopped for, apparently to change engines. On the way to Toulon in southern France our eventual destination, we had 3 stops to take advantage of the very primitive toilets and be fed and watered. We stopped a couple of miles outside the town of Toulouse, spending the rest of the day and all night on the train, next morning we continued on our way to Toulon, on vacating the train we were once again fed and watered before embarking on the troop ship HMS Battleaxe an American Built Liberty boat. Our quarters was the lower aft deck, our home for the next 3 days, the vibration of the screw shaft, smell of diesel, no natural light, we were below the water line, the confined space, was to

say the least a bit uncomfortable, we were allocated a table for 4 over which our hammocks were slung, getting settled down for the night amid a seething mass of bodies trying to get into unfamiliar hammocks, was a lengthy business, and not a pretty sight, after much hilarious, over ripe and colourful language, peace reigned, apart from the occasional release of methane gas, I think you could have run the lights on the gas floating about if you could find a way of piping it to a mantle. The peace was soon broken by boy's dashing to the toilets I think quite a few stomachs were rebelling against the Mediterranean cruise, laid on for us, courtesy of H M King George VI, we hadn't yet cleared the toe of Italy, it was going to be a long three days to Alexandria.

The galley staff must have had a wry sense of humour, on the menu was porridge and kippers for breakfast, those who lined up with only one mess tin, found it difficult in keeping the two separate, not surprisingly we could have seconds, there were plenty of kippers to spare, apparently quite a few stomachs were not sympathetic to kippers.

Troop ships were not built for luxury ocean travel, there being too many troops on board for all to be on the top decks at any one time, we were therefore allotted certain times when we were allowed up for much needed fresh air.

The remainder of our Mediterranean cruise was uneventful, except on the second day we were beginning to feel the heat; sun from dawn to dusk, no clouds and no misty mornings was something we were not used to.

On arrival at Alexandria we were marched, to a nearby square where military trucks were waiting to take us to the Elliopopolis transit camp, situated 2 or 3 miles outside Cairo. The camp consisted of a few wooden buildings housing those responsible for administration, the rest of the camp was tents, accommodation for up to eight soldiers per tent, being a transit camp it comprised of the minimal items consistent with staying only a few days, until such time as the various units claimed their new arrivals. In our case we were collected, 3 days after we arrived and transported to Moascar Garrison, which was situated just outside the town of Ismailia, not far from Lake Timsa, adjacent to the Suez Canal. While at the transit camp a party of six of us spent a day sightseeing in Cairo. To see at close quarters the Egyptian way of life was quite educational, the living facilities left a lot to be desired, although everything at home was far from perfect, it was much better than that of the Egyptians. During our visit three of us had our photograph taken by a street photographer see below.



Cairo 1945

Life as a soldier in an infantry battalion, was somewhat different to soldiering so far experienced, I was assigned to "A" company. Starting from the top, it consisted of a Major, the commanding officer, his adjutant a Captain, a company Sergeant Major, a Lieutenant and sub-Lieutenants according to how many platoons there were, each platoon had a Sergeant, 2 corporals, 5 to 8 sections, consisting a lance corporal and 10 to 20 men depending on how many men were available at the time, there were 6 or 8 platoons per company, total of 100 to 150 men subject to availability. The battalion consisted of 6 or 8 companies, plus motor transport, Bren gun carriers, medical, cookhouse personnel, quartermaster, 3" mortar and Headquarter sections, about 1,000 – 1,500 men headed by a Lt. Colonel, second in command a Major, The Regimental Sergeant Major and a Quartermaster Sergeant plus various admin staff.

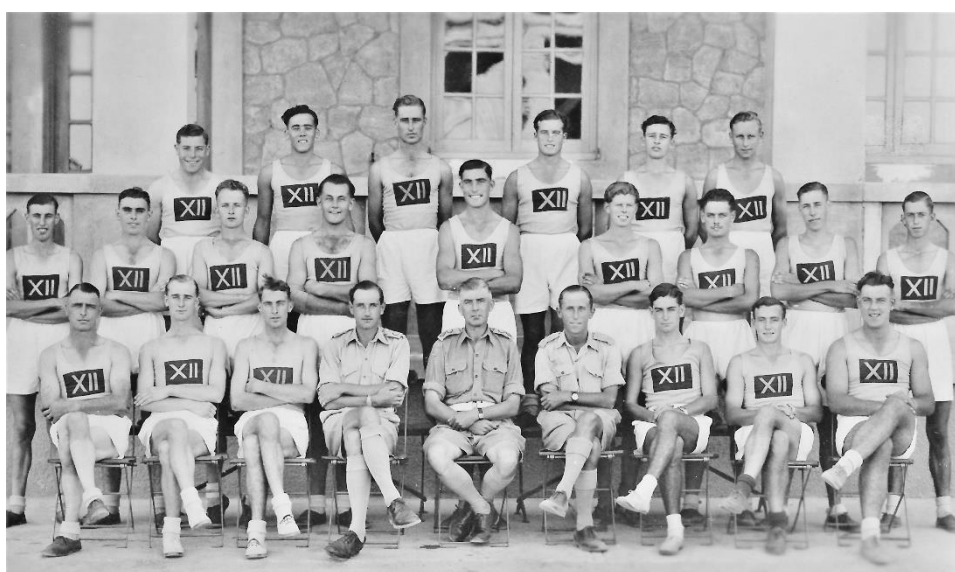
Our duties were not very arduous, reveille was at 5 o'clock and we were reasonably free from about 2 o'clock onwards. We spent most afternoons at Lake Timsa, lounging on the sandy shore and swimming, the Suez Canal was about ½ a mile away, the water being quite warm and very salty, it was pleasant to be in. Swimming to the canal and back was a common occurrence, our company Sgt Major, Buster Tyler was his name, broad Suffolk, not only in his talk, he was built like an Ox, the sort of man who would always be up front and who you would follow anywhere, in

our swims to and from the canal he always seemed to be in the right place, if anyone was in any sort of trouble.

Parallel to the road leading to Lake Timsa, was the Sweet Water canal, water from this canal was channelled through nearby adjacent dwellings collecting waste material, including human waste as it made its eventual way back to the canal. Anyone falling in would be required to have all the injections available for any known disease as the waters contained just about every disease going, It certainly lived up to its name, it was not unusual to see carcasses in a blown up condition, floating by, I suppose it was much easier to dump a dead animal not suitable for food in the canal than bury them.

Sport took up a lot of time for those who were interested. Football and running anything from ½ to 3 miles on a track, 5 to 15 miles by road or cross country was my interest, I soon found out that being in the Company and Battalion football teams, and athletic squads, had definite advantages, especially when it came to night guard duties and meal times. Football pitches were not of grass the surface was made up with Camel dung.

Battalion Athletic Team Moascar Garrison 1946



Near the entrance to the Lido at Lake Timsa was a transit camp for wives waiting for transport to Australia, and New Zealand, they having married members of the forces of those countries, they were mainly Italian, using the same lido as us we came in contact with them quite often. One particular girl stood out from the rest (at least I thought so), she hadn't got dark hair like most of the others, she was blond, blue eyed, and had typical Aryan features, after several days, much to my surprise she came over to where I was sitting and said hello, her pronunciation didn't sound quite



right, I discovered that she could only speak Italian, we spent all afternoon communicating as best we could, helped by illustrating our thoughts by drawing in the sand, I found out her name was Yolander, lived in the north of Italy, where they had snow for at least a quarter of the year, that she was able to ski since the age of 5, had been in the transit camp for 6 weeks, and their respective governments didn't seem to be doing anything much to help them on their way, been married for 5 months before leaving Italy, was just 21 years old, I was not yet 19. The camp they were in was well run, a strict curfew 8 in the morning to 6 o'clock at night was observed. We enjoyed each other's company and spent many happy hours on the shores of lake Timsa, even though communication was difficult, all too soon their transport arrived and it was goodbye to a pleasant episode in both our lives, we had not exchanged addresses so we never heard from each other again, I like to think that everything went well for her in her future life.

On 4th January 1946, I was pleasantly surprised to be promoted to Lance Corporal the down side was being transferred away from my friends and assigned to the section running the Officers Mess. My first job was a barman, no money was involved, I was supposed to know the names of the Officers who patronized the bar, what they drank, with whom, and charge it to the correct account, at the end of my first shift I endeavoured to bring the entries in the account book up to date, I'm certain that several officers at the end of that month received mess accounts they did not completely understand, after a while I became, or so I thought, a reasonable barman. Maybe I wasn't so good, because, after 3 weeks the Mess Sgt decided I should have a go at waiting table in the Officers main dining room. The ritual and protocol observed in an Officers Regimental dining room was quite something, it would take many pages to explain all that went on, especially on a full gala night, when dress uniform is a must, and the regimental table silver was used, many lowly Lieutenants wanting to leave and go to the cinema, or where ever, dare not move until the Colonel rose to take coffee in the ante room, they would then make a dash for the door, if this happened too often the Colonel in quite a loud voice would ask no one in particular, where Mr so and so had gone, knowing full well that someone would convey his remarks to the erring Lieutenants, who would be reluctant to go next time. I didn't like waiting on table in the Officers Mess, and made my feelings known to my company commander Major Rawlings, who promised to see what he could do, 2 weeks later I was back in the platoon.

## No 2 Second Row 1946



Moaskar Garrison was very large, housing anything up to 20,000 troops, nearby was a prisoner of war camp containing 1,000's of ex Rommell and Mussolini desert troops, many of whom worked in the military hospital and the various camps that made up the garrison.

Our time was taken up with guard and escort duties. Most of the camps were enclosed by wire fences, so apart from having guards on the main gate 24hrs a day, the entire perimeter had to be continually patrolled, many of the native population were expert at gaining entry, once in, it was simple to slit the side of a tent and slip inside, at night it was fatal for anyone to lean their kit bag leaning against the side of the tent, and next morning to discover a slit where the kit bag had been, stealing was a way of life for many Egyptians, with very few possessions, and poor expectations, their moral code was not very high.

2 armed men soldiers were detailed to be in the back of any vehicle leaving the camp, to prevent anyone jumping in and throwing the contents out to accomplices, some who would slow or stop the trucks progress on some pretext or other. Certain sections of the railway lines, roads and stretches of the Suez Canal, had to be patrolled to ensure they had not been tampered with. We often escorted sappers if locations such as bridges which had to be inspected and cleared of suspect material,

Near the end of August the battalion left Moaskar Garrison and transferred, to a place called Fayed, which was next to the Bitter lakes, further along the Suez canal toward the Red Sea, our platoon was part of an advance party charged with the task of setting up the new camp, we apparently did a good job, as a reward we were offered a 1/2 half hour trip in a Dakota, which was operating from a nearby air strip, I didn't enjoy it very much, it was rather a bumpy ride, lots of air pockets over the

desert and the Sinai mountains, we had no seats just the bare floor, there were straps along the sides that we could hang onto, the plane was used mainly for carrying freight.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1946 I was promoted to full corporal and transferred to another platoon, 3 weeks later I was sent on a NCO course to Port Tewfik a place near where the Suez Canal enters the Red Sea, concentrating mainly on mine laying, mine recognition, various types we were likely to come across, which ones could be disarmed, and those requiring an expert knowledge for disposal.

Nothing very exciting happened during the next few months, it was swimming, guard duty, patrols, athletics and football, it is the later that is worth a mention, on Saturday 21st December 1946 while playing football for A company on a Camel Dung surfaced pitch, I slipped, putting my left hand out to break my fall, it didn't, my hand finished up under my shoulder, Captain Cat, referee at the time, called over one of our company medics who confirmed that my elbow was dislocated, I thought it had snapped in half, they decided I should be taken directly to the hospital, they got me to my feet, gingerly moved my arm into a more manageable position, and carted me off.

On arrival at the field hospital, similar to the one's depicted on the television series Mash. I had to wait to be attended to, because they were busy setting some poor guys leg, it was quite an eye opener, the waiting area was purely an extension of the operating room, so you could see all that was going on, first they put him to sleep, then one orderly held his shoulders while another pulled on his foot, the doctor stood by the patients side feeling the broken bones, and giving the foot holder instructions to pull and twist this way or that, until he was satisfied the bones were lined up, splints were then applied, the Doctor left the orderlies to apply a plaster cast turned to me saying, what can I do for you young man. After what I had just witnessed I didn't want him to do anything, I just wanted to go home, anyhow I was laid on a table, football shirt cut off, chloroform was applied to my nose and mouth, he said count to ten, I can't remember reaching ten, I woke up in a strange room containing about 30 beds but only 6 were occupied, after a minute or two I was offered a cup of tea by an orderly who turned out to be a German POW, apart from the medical staff the whole hospital appeared to run by them, and very efficient they were too

With Xmas coming up I wanted to get back to our camp to be with my friends, but was told, no hope, at least a 14day stay. I was issued with a sky blue uniform, this was so you were easily identified as a hospital inmate, and could immediately be spotted by the Military Police if out of the hospital grounds after 5 0'clock.

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec: two friends came to see me, I enquired as to what was laid on back at camp over Xmas, apparently nothing special at all was planned, apart from

the usual Xmas fare, plus a bottle of Stella beer and a tin of 50 cigarettes from the Red Cross, we had a long discussion about what we could do, the ward POW orderly invited us to accompany him to his camp who were holding a Xmas eve party, with only hospital blues I said I wouldn't be able to go anywhere, my friends said if they could come to the camp with me they would smuggle my uniform into the hospital, everything was agreed, at 4 o'clock they arrived, when visiting time was up, 3 left instead of 2, we were met by our ward orderly who escorted us to the POW camp.

Boy oh boy were we in for a surprise, they had joined 4 marquees together, dug down to create plenty of head room, formed seating at the sides out of the hard sand, foam rubber for cushions, about 20ft of the left side was made into a bar, we were asked what drink we would like, as we walked toward the bar we asked, what have you got, their question what would you like, was not as silly as it sounded, there was at least 6 different types of beer, 10 optics containing various whiskeys, gin and brandy's, sherry, port and liqueurs were on a shelf underneath. After 1 or 2 drinks, trays of food appeared, opposite side to the bar which I hadn't noticed before was a small stage, onto which 5 men with their instruments set up and began to play, not Oompha music, but all the latest Vera Lynn, Ann Shelton and Bing Crosby hits, after another couple of drinks things became a little hazy, we were fast reaching the stage of having one too many.

Lights out back at our camp was 11 O'clock, so at 10 O'clock my friends set off to get me back to the hospital, with the intention of them then going back to barracks, on arrival one of them Jeff Sawyer, flopped out on one of the vacant beds, in no time at all he was fast asleep, the German orderly settled him in the bed and indicated to my other mate, Don Housden to another of the beds, saying he would wake them up early enough for them to be gone by the time the duty medical officer did his morning rounds, true to his word they were woken up with a nice cup of tea. We were invited back to the POW camp for New Years Eve in the meantime, my uniform was hidden in one of the vacant beds.

New Years Eve proved to be even better than Xmas eve, there seemed to be more of everything, more food, more drink, and more entertainment it was the best New Years Eve I had experienced, neither of us were hardened enough drinkers to stomach all that was offered, but we still managed to drink enough so that we needed escorts back to the hospital, this time it was 2 POW's plus the orderly, my friends stayed the night and were gone by the time I woke in the morning. Nothing much else happened during the rest of my stay in hospital, I was finally discharged on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> January 1947.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> January I was put on light duties by way of convalescence until January 20<sup>th</sup>.

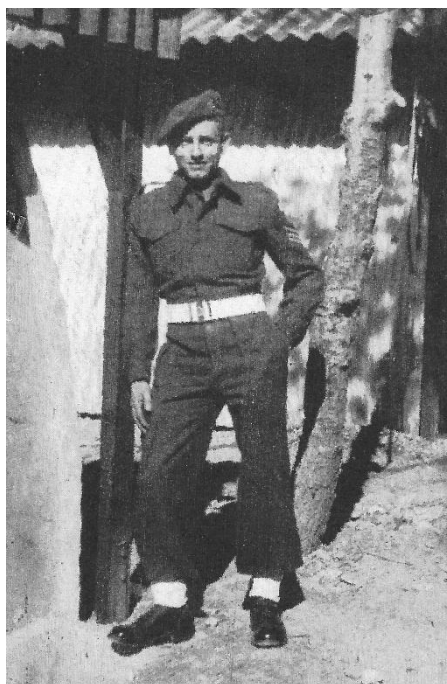
### **Palestine.**

11<sup>th</sup> Jan an advance party, about 150 of us left Fayed to set up camp at a place called Quatina in Palestine. We set off at 4 o'clock in the morning to cross the Sinai desert. After covering several miles ahead of us appeared to be what looked like a heavy snow storm, the whole sky was full with what looked like large snowflakes, as we got closer what we thought was snowflakes were in fact Locusts, thousands of them, hitting the sides of our truck, they were anything from 2 to 3 inches long, as far and as high as you could see was nothing but Locusts, it took the best part of 11/2 hours at a convoy speed of about 15 miles an hour to get clear of them, I had of course heard about locust storms from my Sunday school days, causing Plague and Pestilence in Biblical Palestine and Egypt, but the size of this storm was absolutely awesome. We arrived at Quatina at 1am 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, next day we started erecting tents in preparation for the arrival of the Battalion who were due on 18<sup>th</sup>, on Mon 13<sup>th</sup> it started raining, the first rain we had seen since last April, it rained steadily for the next 3 days making things very difficult to erect tents, on day 4 I was taken off tent duty and assigned 1 L/corporal and 2 privates to escort a political prisoner to Sara Fand a place in neighbouring Jordan and hand him over to the Jordanian police, this done we returned to camp in time to welcome the Battalion to their new home. It started raining again, and did it rain, it was the sort of rain you get at home during a violent thunderstorm, only difference was, it lasted for the next 3 days. According to my diary the continual rain had turned the camp into a sea of mud. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan our Company Commander had all the company NCO's on parade and gave us a dressing down for having muddy boots, and looking untidy, that it had rained for several days and everywhere was a sea of mud, tents pitched on a sloping site no roads or paths was no excuse, NCO's are always required to set an example and be correctly turned out, he was a nice enough chap but from that day on he didn't quite tick all the boxes, yet, looking back, it would have been the easy way out to let the mud win. I came off light duties on 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 1947. Two days later I was summoned to the company commander's office (tent) and was informed that as of Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> Jan I was to take on the duties of Company Orderly Sg't until further notice, it turned out that until further notice was 16<sup>th</sup> March.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March we struck camp, our destination was Jerusalem, the following day saw us on guard duty at A Zone. Jerusalem was divided into 4 zones A, B, C, and D, no one was allowed to pass from one zone to another unless in possession of a special pass. It was a tense time, it seems both Arab and Jew were intent on killing one another we had the unthankful task of keeping the two sides apart.

In A zone was Government House, the residence of the Governor of Palestine, General Sir Alan Cunningham. It fell to our platoon to provide security for Government House, our stint was 24hrs on and 24 hours off, the house stood in about 10 acres of shrub and wooded grounds on a hill overlooking Jerusalem. It was surrounded by a 10 foot chain link and barbed wire fence, the entrance was manned continually, the surrounding grounds were patrolled at irregular times using different routes. On his, General Sir Alan Cunningham's return from Sundays church service in Jerusalem, it was routine for him to call out and inspect the guard, I duly lined them up complete with a bugler, we presented arms and the bugler sounded the General Salute, Sir Alan waited until he had finished then said, now the correct one bugler, the correct one being the Royal Salute because, as Governor he was representing the King. Apart from guard duties at government house, we were called on to man road blocks at the various zone access points, also prowler patrols mainly at night, which is when the illegal Jewish immigrants were most active, they appeared to be the main instigators of troubled Palestine, their future and first prime minister was a very active and was undoubtedly the prime cause of the many British casualties suffered during 1947 and 8. One of our officers summed the situation up, when he said, Palestine is being taken by the sword, and one day will lose it by the sword. If every ethnic group claimed the piece of dirt their ancestors originated on, the whole world would have to be reshuffled.

#### Jerusalem 1947



Blowing up the King David hotel in Jerusalem in which many service men died, was a prime example of Jewish terrorist activity, as was the callous murder of 2 Sergeant

who were kidnapped, my diary tells me that some 10,000 troops were employed on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1947, in the search for them, they were eventually found in an orange grove near the town of Nathania, hanging from a tree, not satisfied with that, they were booby trapped and the finders were injured retrieving the bodies, the ironical realization of all this is, it was western money, mainly from America that was financing so called good upright persecuted Jews.



We had a trip to the Dead Sea 2<sup>nd</sup> April, roads were very poor winding and steep, secretly I was quite relieved when we finally arrived. Our attempts to swim in the Sea turned out rather comical we soon discovered that it was fatal to wipe your eyes because of the very high salt content, to swim was almost impossible, due to it being so buoyant. The journey back to camp was much better than going down, probably due to the fact that going up was slower and there was less likely of us running out of road at one of the many hairpin bends. Evidence of vehicles running out of road could be seen below at several of the bends.

A bit on the brighter side, I had a little too much to drink on my 20th birthday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1947; I can't recall any details so I must have had a good time. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1947, I was promoted to Sgt, it was a nerve racking day wondering what devilish things were in store for me on my first visit to the Sgt's mess, many of the members were old hands and were quite ready to belittle a newcomer and have a bit of fun at the expense of a new member, as it happened I need not have worried, the Regimental Sgt Major, RSM Tradinni sent his runner to bring me to his quarters, and from there he took me into the Sgt's mess, no one would dare rag me while the RSM was there. I often wonder what would have been my fate had it not been for an understanding RSM.

On 15<sup>th</sup> August I was informed my UK leave had at last come through, it had been due since 1<sup>st</sup> March. I was to be at Port Said (Egypt) transit camp on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August. I went via Gaza arriving at 0430hrs, next day at 1700hrs we embarked on

the Arundal Castle a Passenger liner plying between Australia and Southampton, it was after experiencing the troop ship Battleaxe very luxurious, there were 4 Sgt's in our cabin and I was to experience a cruise of a lifetime. Calling at Malta on 25<sup>th</sup> August, Gibraltar on 27<sup>th</sup>, finally docking in Southampton on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup>. The weather was good during the journey, even the Bay of Biscay was quite calm, apart from large rollers which gently swayed the ship upsetting a few touchy stomachs. We disembarked Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>; I got as far as my Aunt Mary's at Barnet where I stayed the night, finally getting home 1500hrs 1<sup>st</sup> September 1947

Nothing much happened while I was on leave, it was the usual round of beer, women and song, in that order, nothing very serious, just testing out the water so to speak, not the beer, I knew what that tasted like it was the other that I knew very little about, however I was a willing pupil, even so I returned to Palestine not very much wiser in that respect than when I left.

14<sup>th</sup> October 1947, embarked the Liner Otranto in Southampton 1100 hrs left at 2300. *A pod of Porpoise* entertained us for a couple of days, they seemed to enjoy putting on a show for us, we did not call at Malta, but went straight to Port Said where we arrived on 19<sup>th</sup> 0700hrs, got to Port Said transit camp 1330 hrs, went on guard duty 1800 hrs 20<sup>th</sup> until 0600hrs the 21<sup>st</sup>. Next day we left for Palestine going via Gaza arriving at Lyda 0930hrs Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>, then on to Jerusalem.

12<sup>th</sup> Nov, a bomb exploded in the Ritz hotel causing lot of damage and many casualties. Apart from minor clashes between Arab and Jews, with us in between trying to keep the peace, guard and check point duty, nothing much happened up to Christmas which came and went with not so much as a mention in my diary, it must have been an uneventful occasion, at the moment I have been unable to locate my 1948 diary.

Enjoyed a few days leave mid January, visited the main high spots in Jerusalem such as the Wailing Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Garden of Gethsemane, on another day we paid a visit to Bethlehem and Nazareth, apart from site seeing, guard duty, night patrols and escort duty nothing very exciting happened during the remainder of my stay in Jerusalem, in February I was on my way home on demob, this entailed another cruise through the Mediterranean calling at Malta and Gibraltar, finally docking in the port of Liverpool, from there the next stop was Aldershot Barracks, where we were issued with civilian clothes, in my case and that of many more it included a navy blue pin striped suit, stinking of moth balls, the word stinking is quite deliberate as the word smelling was not strong enough, actually it wasn't a bad suit, at least that's what I was told, for myself I was not in a position to judge, it being the first suit I had ever owned, From now on I was a civilian and responsible for, though not always in charge of my future.



One thing is for sure, going in the army a country yokel with a huge inferiority complex, I came out, having discovered that the so called wide boys were not so wide after all, and that my earlier upbringing had prepared me to become independent and resourceful, which stood me in good stead and made me determined in making the most of life.

End of part 1

## Part 2

For almost three years of army life where most decisions were made for me, I was not prepared in any way to suddenly become a self starter, that is until my demob money had all but disappeared, I'm ashamed to say, mainly on beer, playing football and eying up the 150 young Land Army girls in the Lakenheath hostel, which, incidentally was the largest land army hostel in the country.

I was about 6 weeks into my leave before I met Betty, my future wife, in the meantime I had socialised with several of her contemporaries, in that short time, and my horizons and knowledge of the fair sex had broadened considerably. It was at a football match that I took notice of a group of Land Army girls, standing on the touch line cheering, one girl in particular was having difficulty in keeping her blouse (I believe satin) tucked in her skirt. The match finished, I changed, collected my cycle, and as fate (luck) would have it I caught up with the cheering girls, the one with the slippery blouse was on the outside of the gang who were taking up most of the road, there were not many cars around in 1948, when I got nearer they started cheering once again, the one with the slippery blouse, I tried to avoid, but accidentally went too close, I stopped to apologise, I was quickly surrounded by taunting girls, I found things a bit daunting, I don't really know what happened next but I found myself talking to the girl with the unruly blouse, getting a few yards behind the others, we were being subjected to much banter and laughter, the upshot was, the girl with the unruly blouse and I arranged to meet the next evening, thus started a courtship that was to continue for over 60 years. Incidentally 2 of those girls were bridesmaids at our wedding on August 6th 1949. Our first meeting was sometime in April 1948. Betty was 18, 19 on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1948, I was 20, and would be 21 on 7<sup>th</sup> May.

One of Betty's jobs at the time was tending live-stock (young Bullocks), housed in a stock yard situated at Christmas Hill Farm, not far from Lakenheath railway station, the farm comprised of a range of buildings, several enclosures about 100yds x 100yds in which were cattle mangers and hay racks, the hay racks were situated and attached to the side walls, mangers were dotted around in the enclosure. A cart horse was saddled up and backed between the shafts of a tumbrel, taken to a haystack to collect hay, then to the stock yard to be forked into the hay racks and mangers. After filling the first manger Betty got down from the cart, to lead the horse to the next manger, even so, the cart was bumping into them, I said, why don't you stay in the cart, and call to the horse to stop and start as you want, her reply was, if you can do it better why don't you try. Bless her, at that time she had no idea I had spent much of my young life in and around a farm yard where horses were the main course of

power. She was amazed that this young man, just out of the army, was able to control the movements of a horse simply by word of mouth, I felt quite smug about this, and definitely thought I had scored some brownie points.

Betty left school aged 14, her first employment was scullery maid at a local farm. Her Mother reasoned that this was a better position than the alternative, which was Smedley Foods, jam and preserve factory located in the village, (Garr Vale Chesterfield Derbyshire) all other occupations (the village was predominately a coalmining community) was associated with coal and it's by- products. Her next job, again arranged by her Mother, was kitchen maid (live in) on the Duke of Devonshire's Chatsworth estate, in the house of Major Hartops, agent to the Duke occupying Chatsworth House at that time. Her mother came from Nottingham, and although her husband worked, apart from 1<sup>st</sup> world war service in the army, in the mines all his life, she had a distinct dislike of mining, which was probably due to the fact that her grandmother had worked underground from (like many of children at that time) the age of 12. She seemed determined that none of her children would work in the mining industry.

Betty Aged 16 No 2



Betty Aged 17 No 3



From her mother and being kitchen maid at Major Hartops, Betty learned the cooking skills that I reaped the benefit of later on. Her next job at the age of 16 was assistant cook (again live in) at the Derbyshire Miner's convalescent home at Skegness.

Betty aged 17 at Skegness



Betty in the Land Army 1947



Betty, right, Womens Land Army

Sitting on Hostel Wall Betty middle.





1948 Betty on the left

18 Months later. January 1947, she joined the Land Army and was posted to Lakenheath. At first, she did various jobs, usually in gangs of 5 or 10, weeding, hoeing, potato picking, bird scarring, harvesting and general agricultural work. After about 3 months she was assigned to Christmas Hill farm about 1/2 mile from Lakenheath Railway station which was 3 miles from the village, there she was taught to drive a Fergusson tractor, which was used for various duties around the farm, however this was not a fulltime job, the rest of her time was taken up with mucking out the cattle yards, feeding and watering the stock, etc. It was working round the farm yard and tending cattle she was doing when I came onto the scene.

Betty on a Ferguson MAY 1948 wearing my redundant tunic



My wayward way life continued for another 3 weeks, before I realised, I must find myself employment, my demob money was fast running out, which was another incentive for finding a job.

Holland Hannon and Cubitts, a construction firm based in London, were contracted to erect several barrack blocks, along with roads and other support works, at R A F Lakenheath. I cycled to the site office, and, duly applied for a job, being qualified in handling various types of weapons, didn't count very much on a building site, I was offered a labouring job, which I accepted. I presented myself promptly at 7 o'clock the following Monday, and was assigned to a concrete gang, I found that I was the only one with brand spanking new overalls and wearing a tie, I must have stood out like a sore thumb, the tie was in fact the idea of my eldest brother, who maintained that if you want to get on, "wear a tie", as things turned out he was absolutely right. On the Wednesday of that week, the site foreman came looking for a likely body to be assistant to the storekeeper, I was called over and offered the job, on a probationary basis, of course I accepted, it appeared my brother's advice to wear a tie was working.

The job entailed allotting equipment and tools required for the workmen to carry out their various tasks, ordering cement, sand and ballast, as indented for by the different gangers, altogether it was much more interesting and easier than pushing barrows of concrete around. Our incentive to keep the gangs supplied with the necessary materials was that our bonus was linked to that earned by the gangs. 2 weeks into the job, I was informed that, the storekeeper was leaving and going to another site and that I was now the storekeeper. This job lasted for about 2 years, with the contract finished, I was now faced with finding alternative employment.

In the meantime, following on from my first date with "Betty", our lives had continued to become entwined, to the point that I paid a visit to her home, to meet her parents, who lived in Carr-Vale, Chesterfield Derbyshire. Betty's Dad was a coal miner and spoke broad Derbyshire, when talking to me he made an effort to cut the thee, thine and thou's out, I must confess that I found it difficult at times to follow him, I only hoped my yes or no's were in the right place. I accompanied him that night to his working men's club for a drink, where it sounded like everyone was speaking a foreign language, occasionally I was brought into the conversation, I hope my nod and probably sickly grin made sense. The weekend over, I returned to Lakenheath leaving Betty at her home until the following week. By June of that year (1948) I had figured out in my mind roughly what I wanted to do with my life, first things first, I needed a partner, without doubt the finest and most important decision I would ever make was asking Betty to marry me. She said yes, I then outlined what we were in for, (1) I wanted to work for myself, (2) own my own place, (3) raise a family, and (4) be happy doing it. My assets at that time hardly measured up to my

ambition., they were about £20 in cash, nothing in the bank, a bicycle, football gear, a set of Sunday, work, and casual clothes, a job paying £5-10 shillings a week including bonus payments, but before deductions, and no hope of a windfall from my parents.

With stars in our eyes and no fear of the future, we decided there and then to get engaged. Next step was to tell our parent's, mine were no problem, Betty's parents were a different kettle of fish, being of the old school, apparently it was necessary for me to formally ask her Father for her hand. On my next trip to Carr-Vale in July, I was faced with this daunting task, in the event everything turned out ok, the many things I had rehearsed over and over in my mind I promptly forgot, I was reduced to that of a dithering fool, I was rescued by her Father who must have been previously put in the picture, for he cut me short and said, Ay lad you can get engaged, but let it be engaged mind.(I wonder what he meant).

2 weeks later we decided to go to Bury St Edmunds to choose a ring, we chose one, it depleted my £20 somewhat, in fact by £8-10shillings, from now on it was courtship on the cheap, desperately trying to save enough money to get married, we soon realised that waiting until we had enough was not an option, so we set in motion the process of setting a date for our wedding. After discussions with all concerned, we settled for August 6<sup>th</sup> 1949, where we would live so far as I can remember, was never discussed, we quite naturally assumed that we would join the family and live at home. The family living at home at the time consisted of Mum and Dad (stepfather), my eldest brother and his pregnant wife. Looking back it all seemed quite natural and expected, there being a chronic shortage of houses at that time, waiting for one to rent was out of the question, and in any event, we all lived together quite happily. Looking back it was no doubt due to my Mother's diplomacy and good management.

Our courtship had followed, I assume, a normal pattern (anyhow we considered ourselves quite normal), we had the usual frustrating moments that I am sure most couples experience, one particular obstacle, particular to the Land Army uniform was corduroy breeches, complete with the usual flaps and numerous buttons, this was something most courting couples have no experience of, but once mastered, it was one frustration out of the way

We were married at Bolsover (Chesterfield) parish church on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1949 our reception was held at the Carr-Vale working men's club. The members were going to Hunstanton on a day trip the next day 7<sup>th</sup>. We had made arrangements to have our honeymoon there, and were offered a free bus ride, which, with money being pretty tight was very welcome.

## WEDDING 6<sup>th</sup> August 1949

## Honeymoon



On our return we were given use of the largest of the 2 back bedrooms, our union was soon proved fruitful, Betty fell pregnant 2 months after we were married, our first son was born 18th June 1950 while we were still living with my parents, oldest brother, his wife and son, who was born the same day as Prince Charles. The following year we were fortunate enough to rent 2 rooms, one up and one down, from a local farmer living at Chalk Farm 13 High Street at a rent of 10 shillings per week. None of the rooms had a power point, we had one put in the downstairs room, I purchased a Baby Belling Electric Cooker which we placed on top of a table, it had 1 square plate and a small oven, it was our sole means of cooking, water was obtained from a pump situated at the back of the house, water for making Tea, washing up, in fact for all tasks where hot water was required was heated either on the Belling cooker plate or on the open fire, which was the only means of heating, there was no way to heat upstairs, no bathroom, in fact no indoor plumbing, toilet was situated at the back of the house, all a bit antiquated by today's standard, but at least we were on our own.

Moving was not a problem as our possessions were few, for a small fee a friend offered the use of his pony, and cart, the job was completed in one trip.



Soon after moving I had a change of jobs, it was working for the American Post Exchange their equivalent of NAAFI, except they sold everything from chewing gum to motor cars, the Americans arrived at Lakenheath in 1951, it was at the height of the cold war, B52 Atomic Bombers were in operation at that time, my job was in a warehouse helping to make up and book out goods as requested by the Lakenheath and Mildenhall Post Exchange (Shops) managers. I was in this job for about 9 months when I was summoned for an interview with the officer in charge of the Post Exchange, a Captain Grimshaw who was a Pilot in the USAF, I was offered the position ( on probation) of accountability clerk, which entailed keeping accounts relative to the two exchanges, I accepted, and immediately received a rise from £6-0-0 per week to £8-0-0, it was quite a rise, it must have gone to my head, for I paid a Mr Barley Porter of Thetford, a deposit of £30-0-0, being 10% down payment on a cottage that was shortly coming vacant, a decision I was later to regret.

Later that year 1952 25<sup>th</sup> July our 2<sup>nd</sup> child; a daughter, was born. As we had not got basic toilet and bathroom facilities Susan was born in Newmarket hospital. During this time not once did Betty complain or bemoan her lot, with 2 babies living in 2 rooms, minus basic amenities afforded plenty to find fault with, I take comfort from the fact that when it came to selecting a mate, I was spot on.

At about this time Sir Charlton Briscoe, owner of the Hall Estate, was selling 1 acre plots of building land, at £125-0s-0d a time. This was something I couldn't miss, the only trouble, was, much of my wealth was tied up as a deposit on a cottage I no longer wanted, after much discussion we decided that I must bite the bullet so to speak, get on my bike, and cycle to Thetford, 14 miles away, find out where Mr Barley Porter lived, and politely ask for my deposit back. After hearing my reason for coming to see him, he gave me back the £30-0-0 deposit I had paid him, wished me good luck for the future, and hoped it would not be too long before I was able to build my dream bungalow. Cycling back to Lakenheath with the £30-0-0 in my pocket, the journey home didn't seem half so far.

That year a friend of mine, he was my eldest sons God Father, offered me his part time insurance agency for the Royal Exchange Assurance, 10% commission on all premiums collected, it sounded good to me so I accepted, it was very profitable and interesting, it lasted just on 10 years. I had the use of a piece of garden from the farmer whose rooms we rented, for growing vegetable's, it was on this plot of ground that I ventured into the business of flower growing, my first effort was not very successful, full of anticipation, I received my first return from a salesman at Covent Garden, it was a No sale accompanying it, was a note which said Flowers were nice, please leave the storks on next time, apparently I had cut them all far too short, I wondered why I had managed to get so many bunches in the box. I also had the use of a disused cow shed, which I turned into a workshop. I had previously

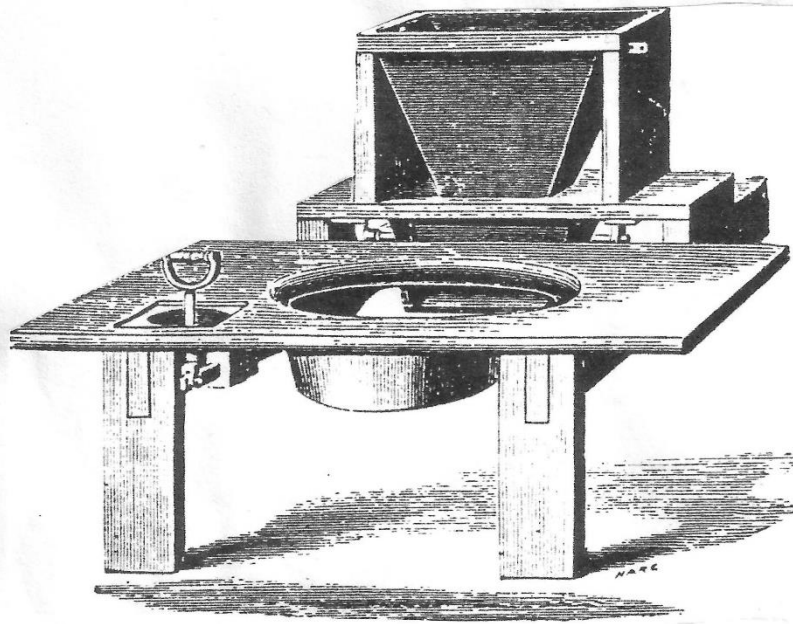
enrolled in a woodwork course at our local school. I was interested in working with wood, after having worked with Sam Armsby at Weeting Hall when I was younger. My first effort was a Baby's Cot, it turned out quite good, and it was certainly robust because it saw service for all 4 children. These were spread out over several years, 1<sup>st</sup> John was born 18<sup>th</sup> June 1950 weight 61/4lbs, next "Susan" born 25<sup>th</sup> July 1952 weight 7lbs, followed by James born 9<sup>th</sup> July 1960 weight 9lbs, the last, Paul was born 4<sup>th</sup> October 1964 weighing 11lbs.

Easter 1953, we are on the move again, this time about 1/2 a mile to the land army hostel where Betty was billeted when in the Land Army, the buildings had been taken over by the Mildenhall District Council who turned them into flats, it was pure luxury, a kitchen sink with hot and cold running water, bathroom and flush toilet, my first experience of living in accommodation so equipped. Again, we were moved by my friend and his pony, but with his 4 wheeled cart this time, it took 2 full loads, so during our time in rooms we had accumulated quite a lot.

The next-door neighbour to our new home worked for a Mr Rolph who owned the property I would eventually buy. One day during conversation he mentioned that Mr Rolph was thinking of selling up, it being a large holding, in all, some 3.15 acres, he was in his 70's and living alone. To attain my ambition of working for myself this was the ideal property. It stood in the high street about 160ft frontage, the house consisted of 4 bedrooms, 4 rooms downstairs, kitchen sink, cold water on tap, a lean-to veranda, running the length of the house, which was 30ft long x 8ft wide, (the veranda not the house), a door at either end and one in the middle, this led to the back lawn which was about 40ft x 40ft, a summer house opposite the veranda was completely covered in a Montana clematis. Coming out of the back door, turning left to the veranda side door, led directly to the outside bucket toilet there was no indoor plumbing, from this door to the toilet was trellis work covered appropriately with Honey Suckle, and we later found out a large Nelly Moser clematis, the toilet itself was a wonderful contraption, a box like affair, behind your back as you were sitting down, was, an ornamental wooden box galvanized lined, a hinged lid along the top, for filling with saw dust, when sitting and handy for your right hand was a handle, when pulled up, the mechanism scooped a measured amount of the saw dust over the result of you sitting there, this toilet is at present in the Mildenhall museum.

Old Toilet:- This was boxed in with a hinged door at the front giving access to the bucket.

## Old Toilet



The other veranda door led to a large yard approx 50x50ft, this was completely enclosed by a row of sheds, and 6ft high gates adjoining the high street, opposite them was a large agricultural barn, we later turned it into a garden shop. Looking to left of the summer house was a range of outhouses, which stretched to the bottom of the kitchen garden just beyond the summer house, they comprised a stable, complete with manger and hay rack, above this was a hay loft. The whole no doubt was home for the family Pony and Dicky cart. Adjoining this was the Wash House complete with a copper, copper, and a large mangle, which had 8-inch rollers, and stood in a cast iron frame, total height about 5ft 6inches. Next was the meal shed, in which was kept in different bins, meal of various sorts, Koss toss (made from maize and flaked, very much the same as corn flakes), and bran etc. The tool shed was next, in which were kept a lawn mower, roller, garden, hedging, DIY tools, and work bench. Next was a range of cattle sheds, where house cows would have been stalled. Beyond this was a gate leading to the orchard, in all, from the toilette to the cow sheds, was about 120ft, the whole, which was not bordered by barn, sheds and house, was fenced by a privet hedge 6ft high, the kitchen garden was about 40yds x 70yds, complete with raspberry canes, strawberry and asparagus beds. The pathways were edged with Box hedging about 12 inches high x 8 wide. In all the domestic area covers 0.420 acres, ordinance survey map number 879.

Going through the gate mentioned above led to the orchard, in which were many varieties of apples and plums, there were Beauty of Bath, Worcester Pearmain, French Worcester, Cox's Orange Pippin, Ellison Orange, Blenheim, Egremont Russet, Bramley Seedling, Lord Derby, Laxton Superb, Newton Wonder, Discovery, James Grieve and growing on the side lawn a very old Apple tree that no one knew the name of, the fruit remained on this particular tree until frosty weather dislodged them, only then were they edible, even so they were not very nice, but good for making Apple Jelly. Winter visiting birds mainly Red Wings helped by local birds cleared them up.

Plums, there were, Green gage, Golden gage, Victoria, Czar, Marjorie Seedling, Monarch and Damson, in all, the Orchard covered 0.928 acres ordinance survey map number 878.

From the orchard which was bounded by a row of Poplar trees, the house name is The Poplars and a five barred gate which led to a grass field, called The Paddock, 1.798 acres. Ordinance survey No 837. Continuing westward it was bounded by a row of willow trees beyond which was an area known locally as The Hanglings, this was a waterlogged area, the result of earlier peat diggings, and had been used locally as a rubbish dump, this led to a stream, called the Lode, the lane from the High street to the bridge was called Dumpling Bridge Lane, the name dumpling was probably derived from the peat diggings which was used as a Dump, the lode joined the river Little Ouse at the Stauch near Sedge Fen and was navigable from there to Eriswell, as is evidenced by the bridges en-route which are all built so that barges conveying merchandise can pass underneath.

Situated between the Half Moon Public house, Rookery farm, and Quay Side houses is an area known as The Quay, where a branch of the Lode used to run as far as the High street and was used by boats to be unloaded, loaded or moored. A 5 Barred gate on the north side of the Paddock led onto Dumpling Bridge Lane providing a back access to the property.

The following is an extract relative to The Poplars, from a booklet produced by The Right Rev Mundy a Latin Scholar, our local vicar, who produced various booklets on the history of Lakenheath, from information he had gleaned from the Bury St, Edmunds and Cambridge archives. He writes;

At the North end of the street, on its western side, was a large cottage with 8 rooms and outhouses belonging to Thomas Troyse. Its yard bordered the Hanglings, where Matthews's nurseries are now. When Thomas died in 1652 an inventory was made of his possessions. Quite clearly, he followed a number of profitable pursuits. He cultivated the arable land in the Open Field belonging to two messuages (one was

the Parsonage Land see Simeon Styward at Lakenheath 400 years ago, page2).In addition he was a stock-breeder, a dairy-man, and brewer, he also caught fish for sale. One of his fishing grounds was, the then much larger stream now called Crooked Dyke on OS maps. The stock of bricks, together with fuel for burning them, and the timber in his yard, suggests that he was also a builder, ready to do repairs for his fellow villagers, or even to build their cottages. He certainly sold linen, sheets, pillow-cases, tablecloths and so on, making them up from linen he purchased from weavers in towns such as Mildenhall. Flax was very widely grown in this neighbourhood. It provided a profitable cottage industry. On his death:-

Thomas's listed possessions were.

Ready money£40.0.0 wearing apparel £5.0.0. Then, listed room by room. In the Parlour; - 1 frame-table, 1 form, 5stools, 1 bench, 3chairs, 2 cushions, 1 chest, and 1 hutch value £1.0.0. 1 post-bedstead, 2 feather beds, 2 bolsters, 2 blankets, 3 pillows, 1 coverlet value £6.13.4. In the Hall; - 2 little tables, 5 old chairs, 4 stools, 1 cupboard, 1 old hutch, £1.0.0. 4 kettles, 2 brass posnets (three legged saucepans), 1scummer, 4 brazen candlesticks,1chaffing dish, 1 warming pan, 2 little skillets, £6.0.0.27pewter platters, 4 chamber pots and other small pieces of pewter, £2.6.8.1 little copper, £1.5.0. 2 iron pots, 1spit, 2 pairs pot hooks, 21 hakes, 2 grindstones,1 firepan,1 pair tongs, 2 pairs cob-irons, 1 frying pan, 30shillings. In the "Buttery", 2 hogsheds, one empty and one full, 1 barrel, 2 kilderkins, dishes, spoons, trenchers and other small things, £1.16.4. In The "Chamber", 1 half-headed bedstead, 1 flock bed, 1 bolster. 2 pillows, 1 blanket, 1 coverlet, £1.5.0. In another "Chamber", 1 trundle bed, 2 feather beds, 1 feather bolster, 2 pillows, 1 coverlet, 1 blanket, £4.0.0. 2 hutches, 1 little coffer, 2 tubs, 10shillings. Cheeses £8.0.0. Malt £4.0.0. In another "Chamber", 1 flock bed, 1 bolster, 1 blanket, 1 coverlet, 10 shillings. In a "Low Room", 1 feather bed, 1 flock bed, 2 bolsters, 1 pillow, 1 blanket, 1 coverlet, £2.13.4. Also, Rye in the chamber £2.13.4. Cart, and cart gear £1.13.4. Linen, 35 pr's of sheets, 20 pillow-books (cases), £15.18.0. 4 table cloths, one-and-a-half dozen napkins, 2 cupboard cloths, 6 towels, £2.0.0. In the "Dairy", 1 cheese-press, 14 milk bowls, 5 shelves, 1 stool, 6 cheese boards (for covering the vats), 1 churn, 1 trivet, £2.11.8. Brewing vessels and other tubs to be used in the Dairy, 1 pair malt-querns £2.0.0. 1 swine hog 16 shillings. In the "Cow lodge", 6 steers £33.0.0. 23 cows and one "bull", £50.13.4. 2 year-old bullocks £18.0.0. 10, year old cow beasts £10.0.0. 16 calves, £6.12.0. 3 mares, 2 foals £12.0.0. 7 horses, a 1 year-old colt, £30.0.0. Fodder, hay and fuel for the fire (peat) £30.0.0. Sedge and brick wood £18.0.0. Fishing nets £1.10.0. Bricks in the yard £7.0.0. 3 Pieces of timber in the yard £1.6.8. Lodges standing on crutches £4.0.0. 1 Keel (barge), 1 litter, 5 small boats with their tackling belonging £40.0.0. Benefits of leases, the

last half-year paid, £26.0.0. Bills, bonds and mortgages £114.0.0. Lumber forgotten, 10 shillings. Total, £516.11.0.

A Kilderkin is a cask holding 16 to 18 gallons. A Coffin is a small box for containing valuables.

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A very short History of Lakenheath. By J T Mundy.

Lakenheath or Lacinghythe, as it was once spelt, it was the Hythe (landing- place) of the Ingas (followers) of Lac. These Anglo-Saxon invaders (settlers) founded the village in about 690 AD. They were settlers from the other side of the North Sea who made their way here along the fen water-courses. Four hundred years later, after the Norman Conquest, there were three owners in the parish; (1) the largest belonging to St Etheldreda's Benedictine Priory at Ely, the income from leasing the property was used for their running expenses, the monks did not farm here; (2) the second, also part of Lakenheath, but only worth about a third of the first, belonged to the de Clare family (who lived at Clare); (3) The third was Undley manor which belonged to the Ely's prior, its income being used for his personal expenses.

At the doomsday Survey the church was endowed with 60 acres of land but Ely's prior was the Rector and so owned the land. To do the church's work in Lakenheath, the prior always appointed vicars ('vice-rectors') who had the use of 25 out of the church's 60 arable acres. As rectors the priors always received the 'greater' tithes (the 10ths of lambs, wool and grain); only the 'Lesser' tithes (of chickens, eggs, hay and so on) were received by the vicar.

On the East side of the church stood the priors Tithe Barn, where their tithes of grain and wool were stored. Alongside was a manor Court or Hall where the prior's manor- court met every three weeks or so. A manor-court was very 'democratic'. In the 'chair' was the lord's (here the prior's) steward who came over the water from Ely for the purpose. All the members, the villeins and a few freemen took part in the discussions, acting as a kind of jury, declaring the traditional laws of the manor. Here disputes between members, or between them and their lord were settled, and the month-by-month agricultural operations were decided. All the members, villeins and freemen held their land from their lord. There was not much difference between the two classes; the villeins of Lakenheath, like the freemen, could bequeath their land and sell it, but only with the lord's permission, and a villain could not go and live in another community, nor could his children. All the members of the manor-court, villeins and freemen were 'commoners' who held certain rights in common. In addition to these commoners there were a few cottagers who were called the 'poor', who did not share the commoners rights this manor remained in the hands of the priory until it was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536, when it was handed to the dean and chapter of Ely, who still are lords of the manor.

The de Clare family, the lords of the lesser manor, had their court- house on the north side of 'Deaths Lane'. (Someone or body in their ignorance, now refer to 'Deaths Lane' and have erected a sign which refers to it as 'Bridge Lane'. There is only one 'Bridge Lane' and this is not it). They never lived here, but that is where their steward stayed when he came to preside over their manor-court, which had only 12 villeins. This manor remained in the same hands until 1531, when it was handed to Ely Priory and became an integral part of their other manor.

Undly manor is a very small concern. It is believed that the manor-house lay some distance to the north of today's so-called hall. In 1536 Henry VIII seized this manor and sold it.

All the eastern part of the parish was a rabbit warren of 2,500 acres of heath. It belonged to Ely Priory. No villager was allowed to kill the rabbits which were bred here, but those with common rights could feed their livestock and cut fodder on the warren. It now belongs to the Elveden Estates. At present occupied by the United States Air Force.

There are about 900 acres of arable land in one great Open Field without hedges. It is between the Street and the Warren. It was divided into three sections the South Field between the Eriswell boundary and Broom Road; the Middle Field between that and a line running eastward from the great chalk pit; and the North Field between that and White Fen. All this land was divided into strips averaging less than an acre each. Each owner had a few strips in each section of the great field, but they were intermingled with the strips of other owners. This made farming very difficult because all the strips (whoever owned them) in one section had to be under winter corn, all those in another under spring corn, while the third section lay fallow. Farming could not be improved until the enclosure act of 1833 when each owner received one or more fairly large blocks in exchange for his scattered strips. Each commoner also received some land in compensation for the loss of his common rights (until then their cattle could roam all over other men's lands except when they were actually growing corn). Until 1833 all the houses (except Warren Lodge) were along the Street.

All the western part of the parish was swampy fen. Here some men had private fisheries, though most of it was open to fishing by commoners who also had the right to cut fodder for their cattle and dig Peat for their fires. It was drained in 1663 by the 'Adventurers' who received 2,500 acres, the rest, 3,700 acres, was divided between the commoners to compensate them for the loss of their common rights there. Undley Common, mostly fen, was not enclosed until 1820.

There was no through road until 1827 when the turnpike and a bridge over the Little Ouse were built. Tithes and most manor-rights were extinguished in the 1920's.

Back to my story. I eventually plucked up enough courage to pay Mr Rolph a visit. He seemed quite surprised that I knew he was thinking of selling up, anyhow the upshot was, after quizzing me as to what I had in mind for the property, told me that he wanted £2,000.00 and as he put it Not a penny more nor a penny less and it was mine unless I told him I was unable to raise the money. I went home and told Betty the good news, we were both very excited, after we settled down, realization dawned, where was the money going to come from? I had progressed in my job and was now Chief of Accountability (an American title) with 4 people working under me, my salary, £12.0.0 per week. I had savings of £150.0.0. I was a member of "The Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly Society", my Step Father having joined me when I started work at the age of 14; it was from them that I contemplated raising a mortgage. I was to discover that as a Friendly Society, they were only allowed to advance 80% of the agreed purchase price. This would leave me to find £400.0.0, I reckoned that by the time of completion, I could just about muster £200.0.0. We decided that I should approach my Aunt Sarah, who lived in Orwell Cambridgeshire an elder spinster sister of my Mother (she never married, her boy friend was killed during the first world war) for the other £200.0.0, Bless her heart she came up with £200.0.0 in the next post, with the notation "To be paid back when you are able".

4 years previous to this, at a committee meeting of the Royal British Legion which I had joined when on demob, I was asked if I would assist the secretary in his duties, I agreed, the secretary was unable to attend the next month's meeting, so I stood in for, him, he tendered his resignation the following month. His request was accepted, I was then voted on as the secretary, also treasurer, I held the position of Secretary/Treasurer of the Branch and that of the Service Committee for the next 18yrs at which time my cousin Bill Matthews took over the duties of secretary, I continued for the next 10 yrs as treasurer. The Secretary & Treasurer were automatically members of the Service Committee who administered the benevolent work of the RBL. As secretary of Lakenheath RBL I was automatically opted as delegate to represent the Lakenheath Branch at the "D Group" (Mildenhall) meetings. Chairman of D Group was a Major Nieve, who happened to be a trustee of the Foresters Friendly Society, to whom I was to apply for a mortgage.

Early in February 1954 a meeting was set up, for the Foresters trustee's to interview me, to inspect and appraise the property, at this meeting Major Nieve drew me to one side, and advised me to go ahead, saying you will buy when money is dear, mark my words, you will pay it back when money is cheap, have £1,000-0s-0d on an indefinite loan, and £600-0s-0d to be paid back over 10 years, all would be at an interest rate of 4%, the conclusion of the meeting was that we could go ahead and proceed on those terms.



Next day I engaged a solicitor and requested negotiations with the various parties be started. From then on things moved at an alarming rate, a completion date of 22nd March 1954 was agreed, I hadn't yet managed to scrape together my £200-0s-0d, in fact it took my complete wages of the week before the completion date, to come up with enough to meet my share of the deposit. We were both in a dream, hardly believing that this was really happening.

On the day we moved we were quickly brought back to reality, when our daughter of 20 months, who had never experienced stairs, tumbled from top to bottom, fortunately she was not badly injured, like the rest of us, she was more frightened than hurt.

One thing that has skipped my mind which was the, house has a Cellar; it is quite large about 10ft x 10ft x 6ft-6ins high, access was through a door under the stairs, it was well ventilated and very cold, ideal for keeping food items that nowadays are kept in a fridge.

Betty and I had many discussions about what we wanted to do, indeed what to do first, when 3 weeks later we had to change our immediate plans, we receiving the bill for conveyance from our solicitor, it may sound a bit naive now, but we had not given any consideration to such an obvious expense, (£60-9shillings and 10pence). All we had was a lot of hope and imagination but no money, there was nothing for it but to go and see the solicitor and be quite frank with him, the upshot of this meeting was, after listening to my story, was him putting me at ease by telling me not to worry for a few months.

We agreed that drastic measures were required, all luxuries must be avoided, I gave up smoking, restricted my visits to the British Legion to committee meeting nights only. Betty was adept at using needle and thread, sewing machine, crochet and knitting needles, which took care of most of the children's cloths. Our first quarterly electricity bill was £3-18shillings and 7pennce.

Here, I am going to do a bit of bragging, in that I give myself top marks for choosing such a marvellous mate, who was also an excellent cook. With a well stocked kitchen garden, and a Brother who worked for Lord Iveigh, on the Elveden estate farm in Eriswell, he did a bit of poaching, I used to pay him a visit on my way home from work at the Lakenheath Base, to his place in Eriswell, and collect a couple of rabbits, or whatever else was on offer, we managed reasonably well.

We bought a Nanny Goat, with plenty of grass, this seemed a good idea, as it happened it was one of our better moves, we were already in receipt of ½ pint of free milk per day for the 2<sup>nd</sup> child, with that, plus our Queenie the Goat, we had an

abundant supply of milk and goats cheese, once our taste buds had adjusted to the different taste, they were rather good.

We intended to share the chore of milking, Betty in the mornings, me at night, but things didn't work out that way, for some unknown reason, Queenie seemed to look forward to Bet's turn at milking. As Betty approached with milk churn in hand Queenie would hop up on her box, stand ready and waiting, not so with me, I had to catch and lift her onto the box, to make matters worse, or better, depends whose side you were on, Betty would get almost a pint of milk out of Queenie more than me, the result was, I became a redundant milkman. On reflection I came out of the situation very well.

We later had another Goat we named Sophie, the 2 kids she produced gave a lot of entertainment and amusement for the children, and us, with plenty of room to play in, trees to climb, outbuildings to play in, it was a wonderful environment for the children and their friends.

In February 1955 I had a bill for 13shillings from the Tythe Commissioners which I chose to ignore, much to my regret, because 1 month later I had notification via registered letter stating that, as I had chosen not to pay the annual Tythe, I was now obliged in law to redeem said Tythe forthwith, at a cost of £13-13s-0d, with no leave for appeal. Result, I paid. And belts were tightened a bit more. It don't sound very much by today's standard but my wage then, was £12 per week before stoppages. Average wage in our area at that time was about £8 per week.

In May 1955 we hired our first Television, a 14 inch Pye black and white, colour was not yet available. John Wilson the farmer, who we had rented rooms from, asked if he could come and watch In Town Tonight, a Saturday night radio show that had recently been adapted for T/V. When he came he sat on a hard kitchen type chair just inside the front door, he wouldn't come any further, and sat silently, bowler hat on knees waiting for it to come on, after the program had finished, apart from thank you, all he said was it wasn't like what I had imagined, he didn't want to see it again, I don't think it measured up to the images he had in his mind, I believe he thought the radio version was best.

At about that time we decided, in order to keep the grass in the paddock down, to have some Geese, we duly purchased 2 Geese and one Gander, they were delivered and deposited in the orchard, which for the time being was to be their new home, later that night armed with a torch, I went to see how they were getting on, flashing my torch, I located them, as I did so, with a flurry of wings they took off into the night going in a southerly direction, I quickly ran to the house, calling to Betty that I was going to try and get them back, I finally located them about ½ mile away, cowering next to a garaged lorry, with the man's help we caught, bagged them, so

that I was able to take them home, to eliminate the possibility of a further escape, I cut the wing feathers on one side, so that from then on they would be too lopsided to fly. Later that year we successfully reared 16 Goslings.

July 1956 I ventured into Mink farming, a brother-in-law who, was a farm manager in Hampshire, at a place called Fleet, he bred mink as a sideline, his father had recently died, so Jim, being the eldest was required to move to Ham Mill A village Nr Ashford in Kent, to run the family farm, rather than just sell the breeding mink off, he offered to go partners with me, I constructed a pen with mink proof fencing, I bought second hand, an Austin A40 from Diss which had been used as a milk delivery van, for the princely sum of £40-0s-0d, I had never driven before. It was the time of the Suez crisis and petrol rationing (I have still got some coupons) you were allowed to drive on a provisional licence, without being accompanied by a valid licence holder. A van was needed for the collection of fish waste which constituted an essential part of the mink's diet. The nearest available source of supply was a Mr Donaldson at Kings Lynn, and Mr Allflat at Downham-Market, collections were made on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons.

A bit about the Van, had M O T's been in at the time it would have failed big time. There was 20 minutes play on the steering, 1 headlight that didn't work, every time we went through a puddle, Betty had to lift her feet up to prevent them getting wet, tyres were way under what is now the legal limit, in those days we didn't consider changing them until the canvas was showing. Cost £45.0.0.

On one particular journey to Kings Lynn, to fetch fish offal, the road between Whelney bridge and the Lamb public house in the village was flooded, the distance from bridge to pub was about 500 yards, some 150 yards of the road is regularly under water during the winter months. I had seen one or two vehicles drive safely through, so I decided to take a chance, it was the wrong decision, after about 50 yards or so the pulley wheel had picked up water and drenched the entire engine which spluttered then died completely. I took off my shoes and socks, rolled up my trousers, got out of the van and sitting on the front wing managed to raise the bonnet and dry the engine off, time to start up, I asked Betty to press the accelerator just a little bit then pull the starter. Things went well it started first time, but unfortunately her foot was too heavy, the pulley picked up water and not only sprayed the engine but covered me as well (I was not a happy boy) apart from everything else the water was icy cold and the engine died.

A gang of boys, about 14 or 16 yrs old stood near the water's edge watching us, all wore waders, they were obviously waiting for some silly nut like me, to ask for help, for as soon as I called out to them, they immediately waded towards us, it didn't take them long in pushing us to the water's edge, dry the engine and carburettor, after a couple of stutters the engine sprang to life, it sounded lovely, although by today's standard it was probably

quite ropery. I thanked them for their help gave them 10 shilling note and was soon on our way. From then on whenever Whelney was flooded we travelled to Kings Lynn via Hilgay thus avoiding anymore holdups.

By the way, after having to abandon Mink farming, the van, we had named it Bessie, eventually became redundant, it was banished to a place under the large Walnut tree in the yard, to become a dolls house for Susan and her friends, curtains up the windows carpets on the floor, spare crockery etc from the kitchen, it remained a play house for many years.

Driving test, I presented myself at the Ministry of transport office, Bury St Edmunds on the appointed day, duly taking mental note of car registrations parked nearby, in order to pre-empt the obligatory eye test, I was told to wait outside, the examiner would be with me shortly. When the examiner arrived he was with a large man about 6ft tall weighing all of 16stone, after introducing himself, the examiner asked, would I mind if his colleague accompany us, as he wanted to show him the route, reluctantly I agreed, the examiner tried to pull the passenger seat forward so that his colleague could get in the back, it didn't move, it wasn't designed to, this meant him climbing over the seat to get in. Off we went, things were going quite well until we came to the emergency stop, when indicated by the examiner, I applied the brake as quickly as possible, the result was, the passenger in the back took off and landed on the shoulders of the examiner, the seat he had been sitting on was an old ex bus seat I had fixed up for the children, it was attached to a piece of 4x2 timber hinged at the front to fold out of the way of dustbins full of fish offal. After they had sorted themselves out, we made our way back to the transport office, before wishing me Good day, he informed me that I had failed, I didn't ask him what I had failed on. I often wonder, I think he had a Gremlin on his back, anyhow my next attempt was successful, on 22-5-57 cost 10 Shillings (50pence).

In June 1955 I made a hen house, as per plans illustrated in the weekly magazine The Small Holder, to house 100 pullets, (young potential layers) that my step father offered as a loan. The pullets duly arrived and taken to their new quarters, everything appeared to be going smoothly, until it grew dusk, instead of jumping onto the perches provided, they decided that the darkest corner of the hen house was better, the result was, by the time Betty and I were able to sort them out and physically put them on the perches, 18 were smothered (Dead).

News, good or bad, spreads like wildfire in a tight knit community like ours, bad a bit faster than good, the next thing we knew was, the local vicar knocking at the door, having heard of our misfortune, insisted on taking the dead birds, saying he intended to try and sell them for us, he was obviously very persuasive, or he put the fear of God up them, because he sold the lot, and was back with the money in about 2 hours. From then on we had no more trouble with them and they turned into good laying hens.

In November 1955 a friend Geoffrey Coleman,(son of the man who took me to the Beck Row Australia Air race in 1934) came to see me and asked if I would hide 2 ex army lorry's which in partnership with his cousin Serge Rutterford had bought, having won the contract clearing trash for the Americans, from RAF Lakenheath, but were turned down by The Vehicle Licensing Authority, when they applied for a B Licence which was required for that type of work, apparently 2 hauliers in the village, a Mr Stanley Watts and a Mr Bert Flack, opposed their application. The idea was, hide the Lorry's in my orchard and spread word that the 2 Lorry's had been sold, and the enterprise abandoned, the following year, no objections were made when a licence was applied for, the contract was secured, and they were in business. Apparently the ruse worked.

May 1957. Calamity, General De Gaulle president of France, withdrew France from NATO, Super Sabres of an American fighter bomber squadron, were transferred from Chaumont (France) to R A F Lakenheath, (as the crow flies 4miles from our house) the very week that my Mink were kitting down, the high pitched roar of the jet engines caused panic among the animals, which triggered off wholesale abortions and cannibalism, resulting in total disaster. Attempts were made via The National Farmers Union to obtain compensation, to no avail, they were, the (N F U), advised that any claim would fail, due to the fact that the Air-Base was in existence before the farming of mink. This was a huge disappointment after a reasonable breeding season the year before, when we pelted out 36 minks, and successfully marketed them, through the Hudson Bay Company at their London auction rooms. Our only course of action was to kill and pelt out (skin) those remaining, cutting our losses.

Our next venture was Pigs, in partnership with my brother who was head pig man at Lord Iveigh's Eriswell estate. We set up initially with 4 gilts and 1 boar, they were housed in the paddock, restrained by an electric fence, one January morning we found that Charlie, that was the boar's name, was missing, we were able to trace his foot marks in the frosty ground, he had left the property by the front gate from his enclosure about 175yds away, crossed the main road, up an alley way between 2 houses, when we found him he was busy exploring the contents of a garden, a friend and I endeavoured to drive him home, we were not very successful, Betty came looking for us as we had taken so long, on seeing the problem she called out to Charlie (the Boars name), who looked up and immediately went to her, and followed her home like a dog After 2 years we gave up the pig enterprise the pressure of work being too great. We decided to concentrate on market gardening (cut flower growing) and chickens.



Flowers in buckets ready to be boxed and sent to Covent Garden

In 1955, an area of the orchard was cleared and fenced off, stocked with perennial plants of the Esther Read family, which, at that time were widely used for cut flowers. Growing flowers enabled me to do the necessary work at week-ends before and after my regular work., Betty, helped by 2 or 3 women living in the vicinity, they were ex land army girls married to local boys, we employed them on a casual basis, paid by the hour, cutting, bunching and standing in buckets of water, ready for packing in boxes, later that evening. Betty was the chief flower packer, anything up to 20 boxes, were collected by a West Row haulage firm, and taken to Spitalfields or Covent Garden Markets early the next morning. The area used for flowers extended to about 1/2 an acre, by the time I became self employed, it had become quite an enterprise and a useful source of income.

1955 we also started rearing chickens from day old to slaughter weight, in the various sheds and the barn, in batches of 50 per time, rotated so that the rearing equipment, gas heaters, chick feeders and drinkers were fully utilized.

When we moved in 1954, we opened an account with Tommy Rolph, a local trader, who dealt in a variety of items such as ironmongery, paint, creosote and tar, he also used to generate electricity, supplying lights only, to houses close to his generating plant, this was before electricity came to the village, wiring in our house was connected to this, and was single rubber covered, no earth, positive and negative only and all the same colour. I did not receive a bill from Tommy, after several reminders asking for a bill, his only comment was, you are not running away are you, I eventually managed to get a bill from him in July 1956. The total was £19.00. What was amusing, after waiting for so long for a bill, written underneath was, 21/2% discount may be deducted if paid within 1 month otherwise strictly net. It took me 3 years to get the next bill.

In July 1957 we had our first holiday other than staying with members of Betty's family, a week at Heacham Norfolk, next to the beach, accommodation was a converted bus owned by a local builder, it was 16ft long 6ft wide, oil stove for cooking and hot water, lighting was by a Tilly lamp, the whole thing was pretty primitive never the less it provided a welcome break from the daily chores.

We planted up a Dutch light type greenhouse 30'x12' I had constructed, with Tomatoes, they were sold on a stall just inside the main gate, unattended, but with an honesty box, it proved very successful, along with other produce amounted to upwards of £40-0-0 per week, over about a ten week period. The next year I formed a window in the wall of the shed just inside the main gate, 6'x3', 2'6" from the ground with a wide wooden shelf so that we could feed produce onto the shelf from inside. The range of produce was increased to include Lettuce, Parsnip, Potatoes, Beetroot, Sweet corn, Pea, Beans and of course Tomatoes, the system worked well, in fact too well, apparently, a shop keeper complained to the Council that I had created a shop without planning permission. I was ordered to discontinue, but it would be perfectly alright for me to have a roadside stall, with an honesty box, providing I was offering only produce I had grown myself, it was against the law to offer bought in produce. I had no alternative but to comply, we continued with the stall for the next 3 years, when the rearing of chickens and growing cut flowers required more attention. We continued to sell oven ready chickens at the door (pre orders only). August 1959 we bought and had erected, a purpose designed broiler shed 30 x 60ft to hold 1,500 birds, complete with automatic water troughs and self feeders, we then gave up rearing birds in the various sheds, due to there not being enough hours in a day to accomplish all the necessary tasks.

July 1956 I bought a Put Put (That was the noise it made not it's real name, it sounded like a Doodle Bug) it was a motor that was fixed over the back wheel of my bicycle with a drive wheel resting on the tyre providing propulsion, I was at the time working at the Mildenhall R A F Base having been transferred there, when Mildenhall Base Exchange was combined with that of Lakenheath for administrative purposes, I was promoted to Office Manager my staff consisting of a Wages, Stock Control, Cashier, and Accountability sections, 18 persons in all and a Secretary to the Officer in charge, my salary was £18.0.0 a week

November 1958 I sold the 1 acre of land I had purchased for £125.0.0 from Sir Charlton Briscoe to a cousin of mine, Michael Leader, for the same price that I had paid, I actually made a loss (the price of the conveyance). Michael had recently married, living in a tourer caravan parked in our yard at the side of the house, the following year after moving into his new bungalow, his young sister Janet, Married Andy, an American, they lived in the caravan until moving to the United States 2years later.

One of the girls who worked in the wages dep't in my office, was leaving to go to the US with her future husband, brought to work a 10 month old Alsatian bitch, looking for someone to give it a new home, as no one else wanted it, I agreed to take her, I borrowed a van and took her home, after introducing her to Betty I went back to work leaving them to get to know each other. When I got home that night, I was met with a happy wife and children and a rather unfriendly looking dog, it appeared that all had made friends and I was obviously regarded as an intruder, after having a good sniff at me and obviously deciding that I smelt similar to the rest, I was accepted. We decided on the name of "Lady", next thing was, where to tie her up for the night, outside the summer house was a heavy wooden bench seat, secured to this it would enable her to sleep in the summer house, duly done we went back indoors for our evening meal, no sooner had we settled down than we heard a commotion at the back door, it was Lady, bench an all, trying to get to us, it seems she had already decided she was one of the family. Bet could hardly move for Lady being under her feet. It wasn't long before Lady knew the sound of my Put-Put, when I was 3 or 4 miles away, Betty always knew by her behaviour when it was time to set the table.



Betty John and Susan



Betty Lady and Cats

1959 we set in motion plans to renovate the house, it entailed demolishing the back part to ground level, but retaining the two flank walls which were flint faced, the original stairs had been removed, at night we accessed the remaining two bedrooms by way of a ladder, coming out into the open to get to it, this required every one



going to bed at the same time, this routine continued for about 6 weeks until the brickwork had been done and the new wrought iron open tread stairs had been installed. The renovation included a bathroom, 2 bedrooms, central heating, a modern kitchen, downstairs toilet and wash basin, hall way at the bottom of the stairs. Outside in the yard a cesspit, a main sewage system didn't come to Lakenheath until 1963.



Back of house taken down



Back built up

The boiler for the central heating unit was installed in the cellar, May 1960 which enabled us to have a boiler house type , bigger than was absolutely necessary but it proved its worth, it didn't need replacing until 2001 just 41 years after it was first commissioned, apart from regular cleaning all it had was 2 new control boxes.

Work had not been fully completed when James our third child was born, 9 July 1960, as with all the children, Betty took everything in her stride, looking back, only confirms how lucky and fortunate I was in meeting a land army girl, wearing an unruly blouse. Although works were not complete, we at least for the first time since coming here in 1954 had a modern kitchen, toilet facilities and central heating.

Fuel for the central heating was Red Diesel, which cost 11½ pence a gallon, old money, (not quite 5p new money). As the property was a registered agricultural holding, and I was actively engaged in food production, I obtained a Customs and Excise rebate of 6d (21/2p) per gallon, so actual cost was only 51/2pence.per gallon. Net cost for a 300 Gallon tank full was £6-17-6d. When the heating was first put on I thought it was never going to stop, but after 7 or 8 days it hardly fired up at all, after switching off, several radiators an acceptable level of temperature was achieved. I got in touch with Cory's of Thetford, it was their representative who had worked out how many radiators I would require, and told them that they must have

calculated wrongly, resulting in my being advised to install more radiators than was necessary. That afternoon the Rep came and checked his calculations, saying they were correct. I suddenly realised where we had gone wrong, neither of us had taken into account the thickness of the internal walls, constructed of Chalk 18" thick the outside walls were similarly made, in addition they were flint faced, what had happened was all the walls had absorbed heat when the boiler had been initially switched on, the walls having reached saturation point eventually started giving it back, they were in fact acting like large night storage heaters.

In September 1962 I resigned my employment with A F E X to become self-employed, chickens and flower growing had become more than a side-line, and far outstripped the £25 weekly salary from A F E X, I felt sure with a bit more effort the move would be worthwhile.

As stated earlier I borrowed £200-0-0 from my Aunt Sarah in 1954, I had been paying her back £20.0.0 a time, I sent her the last £20.0.0 on 6-11-62.

1961 the "Great Ouse Catchment Board", compulsory purchased just over an acre of our Paddock in advance of them constructing the drainage relief channel, which runs between the high ground and the Fen from Barton Mills to Denver sluice the outlet to the Wash, the idea being to channel highland water to the Sluice, before it entered the fen, thus eliminating the danger of flooding which devastated vast areas in 1947. The idea seems to be working as there has been no flooding since the channel has been in use.

1962/63 was the hardest winter we had experienced for many years, freezing conditions continued from November to March, ground was frozen to a depth of 24 to 30 inches, many people's water supply was cut off. I was unable to carry out any work on the nursery, not a very good start to working for myself. A plumber friend living opposite offered me casual work. He was inundated with orders for thawing out, mending and replacing frozen pipes.

That particular winter the Ministry of Agriculture launched a campaign to eradicate Coypu from the fen, the Coypu is an American continent water rodent, which was originally bred for its fur, some had escaped and had quickly established themselves in the fen waterways, causing considerable damage to dyke and river banks, they were about the size of a large domestic cat and bread like rabbits. The campaign was a success as it was not possible for them to burrow into the frozen ground, making it easy to trap them.

The main sewer was laid in the high street in 1963, later that year we were connected to the mains, up until then we had drained into a Cess Pit which had been

constructed in the yard, and required emptying twice a year. (1 empty a year was free, further empties had to be paid for).

In July 1963 my next-door neighbour contracted Foul Pest (Newcastle Disease), he only had a motley collection of hens about 2 dozen, because I was within the restricted area, I was served a slaughter notice by the Ministry of Agriculture, which meant that all my chickens had to be killed and disposed of, according to their instructions. They sent a digger to prepare a large pit and bags of quick lime to blanket on top of the carcasses before back filling. I was then faced with the daunting task of killing 1,500 7-week-old birds. The Ministry paid compensation based on the cost of the chickens, cleaning and disinfection. What they did not pay for was the loss of profits or for equipment being idle for over 6 months. By the time I was allowed to stock up again, a vaccination policy had been introduced, and the compensation slaughter policy abandoned, it meant that all poultry had to be vaccinated at about 10 to 14 days old. And the cost carried by the producer, Vaccine was bought in thick plastic bags of various quantities, in my case purchased in bags of 500 doses, a plastic tube was attached to a nipple on the bag, and to a vaccination gun at the other end of the tube, this was then hung around the neck, at a comfortable height, the hypodermic needle attached to the gun, was inserted under the skin of the chickens' breast, one press of the guns trigger measured out a 50ml dose.

At day old the chickens were confined in a corrugated cardboard surround in batches of 500 under each gas brooder, in the largest hut were three brooders suspended at a height of about 3 feet above the wood shavings, which was approximately 6 inches thick throughout the hut, the surround, 2ft high and about 25ft in diameter.

Operating inside the surround in a kneeling position, the chicks would be picked up vaccinated and placed outside the surround, as the density of the chickens decreased so the surround was made smaller, this operation was carried out when the birds were about 10 days old. Lighting in the shed was completely artificial, for this job Blue bulbs were used, this subdued the chicks into thinking it was dark.

In 1963 I purchased materials for making dutch lights, mainly in trebles with brackets fashioned from angle iron made by Les Woollard of Mildenhall, I started building greenhouses in which to grow flowers thus producing earlier, also to extend the growing season.

1964 We purchased our 2<sup>nd</sup> chicken shed, 30ftx60ft for £848-15-0 completely insulated, just twice the price of the hut bought in 1959, it was erected over the asparagus beds, strawberry and raspberry's, a pity, but with an extending family it was necessary to expand our income, with Paul born October 1964 and John 14

years old in June 1964, and likely to go to college within the next 2 years, we had to keep the momentum going.

We decided to have another dog, Lady was now about 6 years old, the idea was that the young pup would learn from the older dog, this seems to have worked pretty well and is a system we have continued ever since, we had a litter of pups from Lady, she had 6, we found homes for 5 of them and kept the other one, a male which we named Rebel, he turned out to be a really big dog, very protective of all the family and their playmates, in *fact* too protective, he bit the postman, and we had to have him put to sleep. We next decided on an Old English Sheepdog a type of dog I had always wanted, my parents had one when I was in my teens. After many enquiries we eventually traced one down in Redruth Cornwall, it was a bitch, after Rebel we have always had bitches, we found them more predictable and compatible with children than male dogs. We named the Old English Sheepdog Sheba. Apart from Lady, Sheba was the only other dog we had a litter of pups from, all of which we managed to sell, last to go was to a United States Captain a Pilot, he had flown into Lakenheath Base from the USA in a Hercules transport plane, and had arranged to collect the pup the day before returning to the States. He turned up, not to pick the pup up, but to apologise, saying that he would not be able to take the pup for the time being as his plane had been hijacked by a ground crew S/Sgt, who, having wife trouble decided to go to the States to sort his problems out. He was one of the ground crew who was servicing the plane readying it for its return to the States, he knew it was fuelled up ready to go. We learned afterwards that while he was quite capable of taking off on his own, there was no way that he was going to be able to land, always supposing he arrived at the right place. In order to eliminate the likelihood of a possible disaster, he was shot down over the Atlantic Ocean.



Sheba



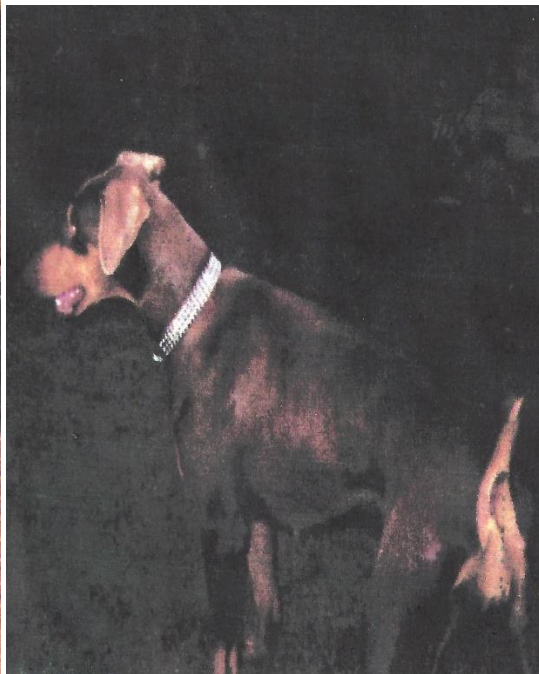
Sophy the Rockweiler

When Lady died we replaced her with another Alsatian we named Betsy, our next dog to replace Sheba was Sophy a Rockweiler, contrary to their reputation she was wonderful with children, especially our grandchildren Laura and Sarah, along with Betsy they had a great time together.

On Betsy's death we had another Alsatian we named Annie, she was quick to learn from the other Dog, and soon became one of the family she turned out to be very good. When Sophy, I think the children's favourite, passed away, 29-1-89 we purchased a Doberman 8-2-89, 16 weeks old from kennels at Methwold who we named Sadie, unfortunately she died quite young 23-4-92. Our next dog was another Doberman also named Sadie 10-5-92.



First Sadie



Second Sadie

Our middle son and family came to live with us in 2004 he brought his dog with him, a Rhodesian Ridgeback. After Sadie died, 2005, we didn't have any more dogs. Sometime after the central heating had been installed, 1964, we decided to take out the open fire place and the mantle shelf in the sitting room, in doing so I discovered a thick beam at mantle shelf height and a large cavity behind where the open fire was, after a good clean up and removing more plaster a complete Ingle Nook fire place was revealed. The back of the beam was scorched, obviously from past use and a metal bar running from behind the beam to the chimney breast was notched



and had no doubt been used from which to hang cooking pots etc, after a good clean up it looked quite good. See below.



Sophy



BETSY & SADIE  
ME CUTTING BACK LAWN.





LADY



1967 Betty and I joined the Brandon middle school badminton club, where we enjoyed several competitive years, among the regular players were 2 male teachers, who, looking to earn extra money, did so by regularly helping me clean out and disinfect my chicken sheds, in between batches, when not helping me out, they worked weekends on the forecourt at a local filling station.

I was invited to join the board of Governors at the Brandon middle school in the late sixties, and played an active part in raising funds for the swimming pool, which was constructed in the early seventies. In the meantime, Betty was invited to be a parent representative on the governing board of the Lakenheath Primary school, also that of Sedge Fen. She was already a Vice President of the Womens section of the Lakenheath branch of the British Legion, a regular Poppy Day collector, for which she was awarded the Royal British Legion poppy day collectors' badge in 1968, during this period Betty was one of the founder members of the Lakenheath playing fields association, taking part in the many fund-raising events, leading up to its



opening 3 years later, and was an active committee member for many years thereafter.

In 1968 I was invited to join the Mildenhall Rotary Club. It was an enjoyable experience being in Rotary, we both enjoyed meeting and socializing with new friends.

The Chairman of the Lakenheath British Legion approached me in 1973 with the idea of forming a Lions International Club in the village, after contacting several local men in the village, enough were persuaded that it was a good idea, this enabled us to press ahead and apply to Lions International for authorisation to form a new club, to be called "Lakenheath and District Lions International". The aims and objects of the Lions appealed to me more than those of Rotary, while in its way Rotary was ok, its approach to benevolent work, so far as I was concerned didn't match up to those of Lions International. At its inauguration I was appointed treasurer, a position I held for 12 years. The social activities, many of them formal dress occasions involving wives or girlfriends, also mixing with Lions and Wives of other clubs in the area was an enlightening experience. One such social occasion was a visit to Kings College University Cambridge, when about 300 Lions from clubs in the area, indulged in an "Elizabethan Banquette", members were encouraged to dress the part, ladies in Period Dress, the men at least to wear Doffing Head Dress, unfortunately no photo of me in my Doffing Cap, Betty made her costume (dress) photo below,



The menu was elaborate 7 courses in all, in between courses we were entertained by the Kings College choir. The waitresses were local wench's, it was a most memorable night.

We as an international organization visited R A F Station Honnington, which was the control centre responsible for all aircraft military and civilian, entering the air space for which they were responsible, for instance all aircraft from USAF bases at Mildenhall and Lakenheath, indeed, all aircraft Military or Civilian wishing to take to the air were required to log their flight details prior to take off and obtain clearance. This control Centre was housed in an underground bomb proof bunker. On a visit to the control centre at USAF base Lakenheath, I was surprised to learn that 2 aircraft fully armed were always in the air, with 2 possible targets pre-set on their navigational computers, these targets were loaded onto their equipment direct from the Pentagon, we were given to understand that there were up to 20 of these aircraft in the air in various parts of the world at any one time,( up to 30 of these bombers were stationed at Lakenheath) they were kept airborne by refuelling tankers flying from the USAF base at Mildenhall, and other airfields throughout the world.

I was honoured on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1994 with a lifetime Honorary Membership of Lions International in recognition of high esteem and services rendered. The certificate is framed along with that of the certificate citing my being awarded the Royal British Legion Gold Badge, presented to me on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1972, both have pride of place on my sitting room wall.

1967 we purchased our third and last chicken shed, this time it was a bit bigger 60ftx40ft, large enough to house up to 2,000 a time, to dispense with the chore of continually having to monitor, order, and change Gas cylinders, I had a 1ton tank installed, which served all 3huts, also it was much cheaper purchasing Gas in bulk. Cost of shed £1,320.00. My annual chicken feed bill jumped to over £7,000.00. For the time being with John at Wisbech Horticultural college and Susan due to go there the following year to study Floristry, it was a case of consolidating what we already had before embarking on any other enterprise.

Also, in 1967 we had a litter of pups from Sheba the Old English sheep dog, photo is of third son Paul, aged 3, and Sheba's 8 pups.



1973 was quite eventful, February, Betty's first flight, a weekend in Majorca, it was arranged by a friend in the village at a cost of £38.00 each, all in. The contents of a hip flask helped Bet's nerves no end. On the return flight we failed to make sure the flask was full, result, the sides caved in and from then on it would hold only about a tablespoonful.

Plans had been drawn up and submitted to the local council, to turn the old agricultural barn situated in the yard next to the house into a garden centre shop. Shortly after this, the local florist shop came up for sale. It was well established, and a member of Interflora, covering the American air bases at Lakenheath, Mildenhall and Feltwell, as well as all the local villages. The big problem was, it included the house at a total price of £15,500.00 plus £820.00 for stock. All my available cash was tied up in purchasing a Westdock greenhouse covering an area of 560 sq yards (1/8<sup>th</sup> of an acre) my eldest son John having finished his horticultural studies and a 2year stint at East Malling Research station, was now working for me full time. My only alternative was to see my bank manager, and solicit his help, result, an

overdraft was arranged that enabled me to go ahead and purchase the business and property, plus working capital. We bought a new Ford Escort van for deliveries.

Thank goodness for a sympathetic and understanding bank manager, he was in charge of the bank when I first opened an account in 1952. Nowadays they seem to be changed every 2 years and can't make a decision until some robot at their main office gives them permission.

Susan my daughter had, 2 years previously, completed a 1 year junior horticultural and a 1 year floristry course at Wisbech Horticultural College, and had since been working for a London florist. She agreed to come home to do the floristry and help run the shop, taking over coincided with the introduction of VAT, 1973. We continued to trade from there until April the following year (1974). We eventually sold the house minus the floristry business later for £11,500.00. We moved the shop and contents to 18 High Street where we continued to trade for the next 37 years into what used to be an old agricultural barn which we had renovated and fitted out at a cost of about £12,000.00. In order to keep costs down we undertook to do the work ourselves, only employing tradesmen for essential Brick, Carpentry and Electrical work, all materials we purchased ourselves. All the flints from the old Barn were saved and used in facing the renovated building all the flint work I did myself.

### **Barn before Renovation**

Front

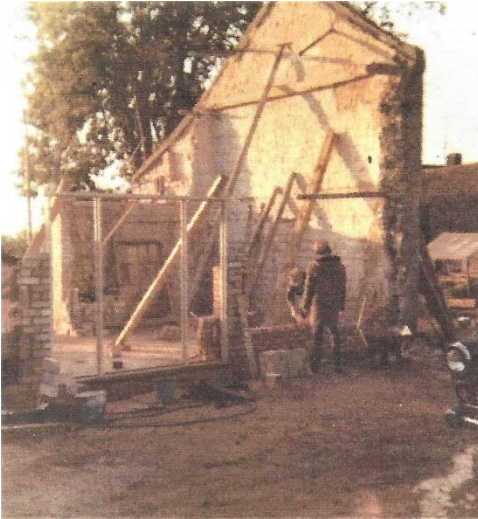


Back





Flank walls



Flank Wall







In addition to this we had approximately half acre of Glasshouses purchased second hand from Butters of Spalding. In March of that year, we took delivery of a “Westdock” aluminium greenhouse, 6 bays covering an area of 1/8 of an acre, my eldest son, John, had by then finished his horticultural studies plus 2 years at East Malling Research Station and was now working for me full time, hence the greenhouse. It was delivered and appeared to be a giant gig saw puzzle, we gleaned advice from various people, the plans that came with the greenhouse parts we managed to get it assembled, glazed and ready for use.



A Venlo glass house



Twin Plastic Tunnel

With alterations and additions to the agricultural barn completed, we finally opened in 1973.

After my daughter married and left to start a new life her place was very adequately filled by Claire my eldest son's wife who also studied floristry at Wisbech College at the same time as my daughter. She remained our florist until the property was sold in 2012.

Retailing was not entirely new to me having worked for AFEX (American retail store that sold a very wide variety of goods, except food). For 12 years mainly on accountability. I was conversant with Profit and Loss. Apart from services and presentations, probably the most important was the buyer to get it right. The right merchandise at the right price and the customers will come. Anyone who buys solely from a catalogue and make friends of the salesmen whose purpose is to sell you something you didn't know you wanted and probably didn't need are doomed to failure especially in an area such as ours where most work is outside of the village. Additionally, many people shop in the nearby towns.

Soon after Betty's illness which turned out to be Rheumatoid Arthritis other problems cropped up that fully occupied my time.



Some 10 years before the property was sold was the start of a steady decline of the business which was probably my own fault. I had left the day-to-day running of the business in other hands not realising how unexperienced they were. I was buying at various markets, including Covent Garden, small wholesalers' merchandise, plants and flowers and making full use of the Greenhouses. The new manager was more interested in presentation than in buying and using the greenhouses relying instead on local nurseries and mobile salesmen and catalogues.

Betty's health continued to deteriorate after many hospital visits and tests over a long period. In the Spring of 2008, we were invited to attend at Newmarket Hospital where we were told that her illness was Pancreatic Cancer with no possible cure or treatment. It was in fact terminal which turned out to be months rather than years.

To watch someone you love and been the major part of your life for over 60 years slowly fade away is indescribable. When Betty finally passed away, I felt a sense of relief in that she was no longer suffering.

I know it sounds silly but I talk to her every day keeping her up to date with my garden and family growing up. Possibly it's pathetic but it helps.

I found it very difficult the next few years to adjust my life without her. Only about 6 days out of 59 years 4 months of our marriage had we been apart. Not once had we gone to sleep at logger heads with one another, we resolved early on in our relationship to respect one another's opinions which quite obviously would differ at times. Many people who probably mean well fight shy of talking to me about Betty as though she didn't exist or didn't touch their lives. I don't need reminding as she is always in my thoughts. I like talking about her. I am very proud of her.

### **Holidays**

Apart from visiting various members of Betty's family our first real holiday was in 1956. Our local builder, Mr Diver, rented us his converted bus sited at Heacham (Hunstanton) beach looking back it was very primitive but to us it was quite luxurious over the years we had family holidays in places like Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Felixstowe, Wells and Cromer. Holidays, as a family, became difficult due to their ages. My eldest son was 14 years older than Paul our youngest. Our first break as a couple was a weekend in Majorca (Spain). It was the first time Betty had flown and the first time that I had been in a jet. Our next was a Mediterranean cruise in 1976. It was an educational cruise apart from school children and teachers there were 200 first class passengers. This particular one was organized by the N.C.O. (The passengers not the educational party) we were however invited to take part in various excursions and lectures relating to various ports of call. First, we flew to Venice (Italy). After touring Venice, we embarked the "Uganda" and set sail that evening our first port of call was Albania then Navarino Bay from there to Alexandria (Egypt) and on to the

Sphinx and Pyramids then Cairo Museum and Tutankhamun treasures. Lunch at the Ritz Hotel. From there to Kos (Greece) and then Athens followed by Naples (Italy) where we visited Pompei. We then flew to Rome. It was not only an educational cruise for school children it was also very educational to us. As first-class passengers we were expected to dress for dinner which was in two sittings. We were allocated tables and a member of the crew (Rotated) was present at each table. It was my first penguin suit and believe it or not it still fits today. Then I was 49 now 94 years of age.

Our next holiday was also a cruise, 1978, on the same boat again through the NFU. It was much the same as before except of course the ports of call were different. Again, starting from Venice then Yugoslavia, Haifa (Palestine) where we visited Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem our guide was an Army Chaplain and very good he was too. Then on to Greece a different tour this time taking in among other things the Corinth canal from Greece to Malta tour of Malta then flying home.

Our next was a river cruise taking in the River Rhine and Mosel.

In 1979 we bought our first static caravan sited at Pakefield (Lowestoft). The same year we teamed up with Charlie and Margie Palmer. Margie was in the Land Army with Betty. We had various holidays together. The first a weekend in Cyprus followed by two per year, 14 days each, usually in February and October. Neither of us were sunbathers. We tended to explore and experience where we were.

The first was Benidorm (Spain) twice, Majorca, Ibiza twice, Cyprus (twice), Crete, Malta, Portugal (twice), Madera, Las Americas (3 times) a cruise of the Caribbean, tour of Scotland, West Country and various other parts of the UK.

Charlie and Marj had a chalet at Hemsby (Yarmouth). We enjoyed our van at Pakefield until 1988 when we went to Hopton (Yarmouth). It was a lovely get away from the business which was right on top of us. Sadly, Betty died in 2008 of Pancreatic Cancer. It was a harrowing time. We were informed at the hospital several months before that there was a possible cure.

I eventually sold the caravan in 2019. I am still in touch with several couples that we befriended at Hopton. All of them talk of Betty and times at Hopton. Unlike most people, some family included, react as though Betty never existed. I don't visit the cemetery after over 60 years she is never really out of my head. I certainly don't want to visit a block of stone to remind me. Bet is in my head every day.

## Holidays Part 2

We were fortunate to team up with a couple who like ourselves interested in the places that we were visiting. Sitting round a pool sunbathing didn't list high on our list. In Cyprus and Crete being a member where the Lions Club International was quite active. We were advised by them to hire a taxi rather than go on the organized coach tours. The cost between the 4 would be little more than the tour price. The advantage was we were in advance of the coach thus avoiding a rush to the toilets etc. Plus, there were some places where some nationalities were not welcome. Also, the usual delays associated with crowds and dawdlers was avoided.