

CHAPTER 1. School Days.

I came into this world on the ninth of October 1918 managing to be a war baby by a few weeks as the first world war ended almost one month later at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month 1918.

It is doubtful if my birth was planned as I was the seventh child of Margherita and Arthur Flack. I was born in the rented cottage where they lived with their six existing children, it had two rooms up and two down with an earth privy at the top of the rear garden which was shared by the numerous occupants of two other cottages.

The water supply was from a pump located on the side wall of a house in an alley-way about 30 yards from our house this was of course called "Pump Alley." Imagine living in the house with the pump on the wall. This pump also supplied about nine other cottages with all their water, day and night!

We lived in the High street, Lakenheath, Suffolk. This street consisted of a series of terraced houses and cottages either side of the main road. All the front doors opened out onto the pathway, and although it was the main road through the village when I was young it had no surface on it. Consequently in the winter it developed many pot holes, the surface water ran down the sides of the road and when frozen made ideal slides for the children. However the older inhabitants (spoil sports we called them) would put salt on the slides at night.

To return to my early childhood and my parents, my father was born in the village of Lakenheath, he had two brothers and one sister. When his mother died his father remarried a widow with four children of her own and they had four children between them making a total of twelve children in the family.

My mother was born in London and came from a much better class family than my father. She was sent to the village for a holiday, something rare in those days, met my father and married him. She being only 19 at the time while my father was 30 I understand her parents were not too happy about the match.

My maternal grandmother was a midwife in London and as a result of this some of my elder brothers and sisters were born there. I never knew this grandmother as she divorced, remarried, and with her new husband emigrated to Australia where she bought land and started a farm all before I was born. She died in Australia and as my mother was by this time also dead, her estate passed to her second husband.

My mother, an only child, was a very versatile person. She was an excellent pianist, played the mandolin and sang, my father played the flute. At one time there was a cinema in the village and my mother accompanied the silent films on the piano. Because of her singing she was nicknamed "Birdie" by the local inhabitants. To her dismay in the early 20's she had to sell her piano to feed her children.

In spite of being brought up in London my mother adapted very well to the country and was very fond of animals. If anyone had a piglet for which the sow had no teat (called a "pitman" by the locals) they would give it to her and she would bottle feed it. Eventually when it was fully grown it would be eaten or sent to market. Speaking of markets the nearest one to us was in Mildenhall 5 miles away, this was held each week on Friday and my mother always attended. As she had a donkey and cart she would do the shopping for our friends and neighbours. I understand that attending the market was the prime cause of her

(9)

death. She always stabled her donkey to the rear of one of the hotels in Mildenhall, this particular day was wet, she slipped on the cobbles and hit the back of her head. She was slightly concussed but quickly recovered and drove home but in the course of the next week was taken ill and died soon after of Meningitis. I was 5½ years old at the time and I think her death blanked out a lot of memories before this for me as I can only vaguely remember her, I do remember coming home from school one day and hiding under the seat in the donkey cart hoping that she would take me to market with her.

My Mothers death changed everything, my father was devastated. At the time my two eldest brothers were away in Yorkshire working on farms (there being no work in the village,) they came home and never went back. My eldest sister was in service in London, she had to come home to look after us.

Back to myself, I had started school at 3 years of age I don't remember this but I do remember that after my mothers death I rebelled against school and had to be taken to the school each day. If they didn't take me right into the classroom I just came straight home again!

Life in the village however was ideal for a boy, we could play football in the street, no cars to worry about then. I can remember the first cars coming to the village in about 1925, Dr Pickworth had one and also Lummis the butcher. We could go swimming in the river Lode, birds nesting, jumping dykes, playing marbles, rounders, cricket, football etc.

My brothers always bought me a pair of football boots for christmas. As they had to last until the next christmas they were always a size too big when I got them but I soon grew into them and hoped I wouldn't grow too fast out of them! I don't remember getting much else in the way of presents.

On the opposite side of the road to our house there was a sweet shop owned by Widow Bailey. Years later I found out that her name was really Rutterford. She sold lots of things as well as sweets and in addition she cut hair. It was quite an ordeal to have short back and sides, as she only had one oil lamp to light the shop. She would move this to the corner of the counter and proceed to cut your hair, sizzors only. Every now and then she would snip your ears, if it bled she would give you a sweet!

She lived on her own and had quite a long garden at the back of the house where she kept chickens and had a vegetable garden. When she went out to the garden it was normal for her to lock the shop door, the door incidentally had a bell on the back of it attached to a coil spring, this would ring loudly as soon as the door was opened. However occasionally she would forget to lock the door and she would be out in the garden and not hear the bell. If you were lucky enough to go in at this time I must confess it was a great temptation to steal a couple of sweets as they were all there in front of you on the counter, bullseyes, gobstoppers, the lot.

I remember on one occasion this happened to Herbie Sutton who was about 6 at the time and who lived next door to me. He was in there and had just got some Bullseyes in his hand when she appeared through the back door. He quickly put the Bullseyes into his pocket, completely forgetting that it had a hole in, and they fell though and bounced all over the stone floor, disaster Herbie's mother was told and he had a hiding.

Whilst talking about Herbie I must tell you the story of Herbie and the cockerel. As I said previously Herbie lived next door to me and his parents had a chicken pen in the back garden. In the pen were chickens and a very fierce

cockerel, Herbie was not able to unfasten his braces when he went to the toilet so his mother would undo his buttons and Herbie would go up the garden with his trousers at half mast. The path to the privy was by the side of the chicken pen and as he went past Herbie would always kick the wire and tease the cockerel. On this particular day whilst Herbie was in the toilet the cock got out and was waiting for him. As soon as Herbie appeared the cock pounced, Herbie fell down and there he lay on the ground screaming with the cock pecking his bottom.

Herbie is now dead but for years after we both laughed about it. During the war Herbie was a prisoner in the hands of the Japanese, he often stole food for his friends several of whom were from Lakenheath. He was punished on more than one occasion for this, he came home after the war but his health was badly affected.

Next to the sweet shop I mentioned was a pub called The Star kept by a man called Ezekiel Rolph and his wife. I used to visit them regularly, they always kept chickens and when the pullets first started to lay eggs they produced small eggs with no yolk! Ezekiel would give these to me and tell me that they were cockerels eggs.

In those days the beer was drawn from the barrel and Zeke kept little enamel bowls under the taps to catch the drips, I was allowed to drink this! Zeke's wife was pretty mean and gave nothing away, I remember on one occasion I went over to her and said to her "today is my birthday" and I showed her tuppence which I had been given, she asked me if I would like a clay pipe for my birthday, naturally I said yes, she gave me the clay pipe and then charged me a penny for it! half of my birthday money.

Just up the road from us was Hammonds Bakery, here again I used to visit them regularly and they were very kind to me. Although I was well looked after at home it is not the same if you don't have a Mother of your own. Houses in those days were very cold, the bakery however was always warm and they always had hot water which was heated by the same fire that heated the ovens. Jabez the bakers son, who was about 12 years older than me, took me under his wing and on Saturdays and school holidays would take me with him in his van on his bread delivery round. We would go all round the Fens and by the time I was 12 years old I was able to drive the van. As the village policeman was hardly ever in the Fens when we got out of the village I would take over the driving. I was able to repay him by babysitting for him after he was married, and indeed in later years when there was a flu epidemic in the village. All the Hammond family went down with flu for about three weeks, Stan Kent (who was a baker) and I completely ran the bakery making and delivering the bread.

Back to my school days, I suppose I was no different from other children getting into trouble every so often and staying out as late as possible. Very often I would be the last one out as the other children's older brothers or sisters would come and say "Mum says you have to come home" so off they would go. The fact that it was my sister that said come home didn't have much effect on me and occasionally I would get a clip round the ear from her. How I wished someone would say to me your Mum says you have to come in.

As soon as my two other sisters left school they were sent off to London to work. My sister Rita going to Wimpole street, where I think Medical Consultants lived. My sister Bertha to Windsor Castle to help to look after the children of

the Kings Librarian, as she lived in the grounds of Windsor Castle I had something to brag to my freinds about!

As I got into the big school things changed somewhat and I found that school wasn't too bad after all, for the rest of my school life I was near the top of the class. One day a message was left at my home, would I go and see a Miss Howard who lived in a large house called "The Firs." I duly went wondering what was afoot she said to me "I wonder, when you come home from school for lunch (we always called it dinner) would you call in and see if I need any errands run and I will pay you." I think it was about tuppence a week and I jumped at the chance as I think I only had a penny pocket money at that time. I used to call every day, there were never any errands to run but always there was a glass of milk and a piece of cake for me, something I didn't get at home. Dinner at home was mostly a piece of bread and jam, in later years ~~when~~ I realised that the old lady was just looking after my welfare I regret that it was too late to thank her as she had died.

To come back to my father, I now realise what a hard life he had losing his wife when she was fortyone and being left with seven children to bring up on his own. I'm afraid that daughters are never as good at managing the finances as wives are, and there was very little money coming in. My father was a general labourer which ment that he could turn his hand to most things, but he still only earned about £1 a week. In addition to working full time he rented about 2 acres of land on which he grew all his own vegetables, including enough potatoes to last the winter. I can remember that as soon as I was old enough I had to pick the potatoes when he dug them up and this was always on a saturday afternoon as it was the only free time my father had. His normal working day was from 7am untill about 6pm. and untill about 2pm. on saturdays. As saturday afternoon was also the time for the local football match I would be able to hear the spectators shouting and would keep looking longingly in this direction, my father would say X number of rows and you can go, my heart certainly wasn't with the potatoes!

In addition to the vegetables he grew a few flowers, kept a few chickens and the rest of the land would be for growing corn, wheat, oats or barley. When the corn was ripe it had to be harvested, my father always cut the corn by hand with a scythe, then my brothers would tie it into sheaves and I would help to stock it, some would call it stooking it. The corn would then have to be carted and stacked, for this it was taken to a small farmers yard, lots of men in the village had the same amount of corn as my father and their corn would be taken to the same yard. Sometimes there would be more than one persons corn in the same stack so they obviously had a means of telling what belonged to whom. In the winter the threshing tackle would come to the farmers yard and thresh all the corn at the same time, this was quite exciting for us boys as when they came to the bottom of the stack there would be lots of mice and rats which we would kill with sticks.

My father also kept a goat, a pig, pigeons, rabbits, guinea pigs an owl and a dove so naturally these had to be looked after and fed in the evenings. In the winter it would be dark when my father went to work in the mornings and also dark by the time he got home at night. The goat was kept on the land and housed in a shelter beneath a stack of bracken (in the village they were called brakes.) To get the bracken for building this stack my father had to take his scythe to the warren and cut it.

Villagers were only allowed to cut the bracken at a certain time of year so local men would stake out their patches some time before the day allocated to start cutting, sometimes tempers got a bit heated at this time! The bracken was also used as litter for the pigs.

To get back to the goat, my father would milk the goat on his way home from work and then stay on to see to the chickens and do a bit of weeding or sowing according to the season. It was my job to meet him with the empty milk can and then take it home again when he had filled it. It was about ½ a mile to where the goat was housed and on the way home if I met any of my pals I would show off to them by swinging the milk can in a full circle without spilling any milk. On this one occasion disaster, the can for some reason stopped at the top of the circle and out came the milk, all over me! Boy was I in trouble, it was the only milk we had for all the family!

After he had finished his evening meal my father's next job was to see to his pig, pigeons, owl, dove, rabbits etc which were kept in the back yard. In the winter it would be pitch dark by now so my father would get his old oil lantern out, light it and go out to do his chores. Unfortunately the glass on the lantern was not a good fit and if there was any wind the light would constantly blow out, after a time my father would get exasperated, put the lantern down and kick it up the garden path. One Christmas my two eldest brothers decided that they would club together and buy him a new lantern, this they did and duly presented him with it. After about a month they noticed that he was using the old lantern again so they asked him why? Oh, he said "the new lantern never blows out but with this old one when it blows out I can kick it up the path and relieve my tension." Today the doctor would recommend psychotherapy!

When I was 10 years old my eldest sister was married, this caused upheaval in the family as it meant that the next eldest sister "Rita" had to leave her employment in London and come home to look after us. Although she had been in domestic service in London it didn't mean that she was domesticated and I can remember that the household was not a particularly happy one as she had no idea how to budget. With only a small amount of money at her disposal it was a good thing that my father grew his own vegetables and reared rabbits otherwise we might have suffered from malnutrition.

I remember that I had a treasured two shilling piece which my grandfather Flack had given me at my birth, this would have been solid silver, I came home one day to find that she had spent it! She did offer to replace it but of course this would have been no good as it wouldn't have been the one from my grandfather.

Shortly after one of my brothers married a girl who lived on a farm in the Fens. In those days there were no roads to the farms in the middle of the fens only droves, these were made of dirt and if it was wet they would be mud two or three feet deep, I have seen horses going through mud up to their stomachs. To come to my brother's wedding, it was on a Boxing day, this was the usual day to get married as it was the only time that everyone had a holiday from work. The reception was held in the bride's home at the farm, the one thing that sticks in my mind is the fact that there was a full moon and when we left the house about midnight it was like daylight. It's hard to realise today with electric street lights everywhere that in the days I am talking about the people in the fens only went out on moonlight nights, if they went out in the dark nights they were liable to fall into the dykes.

After the wedding my brother Fred and his wife Alice lived on the farm with Alice's parents. The farmhouse was quite large with several rooms and this was to make a difference to my school holidays as I was able to go and stay on the farm and have a carefree time with lots of good food.

I remember the first time that I stayed on the farm, I was given a room of my own, I had never slept on my own before in my whole life. I had had to share a room with my father and my three brothers up until now, even having to share a bed with my father!

Out in the fens at night everything was silent except for the animals, I had only been in bed for a short time when I heard an owl hooting, I was scared stiff and in the end my brother had to take me into his room before I could get to sleep. The problem was solved the next night. In those days all the work on the farm was done by horses and each farm had a horsekeeper who, if he was a bachelor lived in on the farm. The horsekeeper's name was Walter and he lived in, on the farm, so from then on I slept with the horsekeeper. Today if this happened the social workers would be sniffing around and causing all kinds of problems.

My holidays on the farm were wonderful, there was a big orchard with apples, plums and greengages, there were chickens running around free and I would search for the nests where they had laid their eggs. Sometimes I would find a nest with 20 eggs in it, the chickens would also lay their eggs on top of the hay and straw stacks so I would get a ladder and climb up and find them. There were also eels in the dykes and I would put eel hooks baited with worms into the dyke and leave them overnight then go back in the morning and collect any eels caught on them, one morning there on the end of the hook was a roach almost a foot long, which made a good meal.

Back to the village and home life, I previously mentioned a lady who was very kind to me and gave me milk at lunch time, well she wasn't the only one who was kind to me.

In the back street at the rear of our cottage was a fish and chip shop owned by a Mr Sitford, on the night of my mother's death I was taken to the Sitfords house and stayed with them until after the funeral. In those days fish would cost tuppence and chips a penny, so when people went into the shop they would ask for a tuppenny and a pennyworth. As children the most we could hope for was a pennyworth of chips, however from the time my mother died on each Saturday night I was given a fish and some chips free of charge. This went on until I was 14 years of age and had started work, I went in on the first Saturday that I received my wages and insisted on paying for my fish and chips. Mr Sitford was a bit upset but I think he realised that I needed to be independent, I will always remember the kindness shown to me by so many people.

Back to school where I was now quite happy. The headmaster's name was Jimmy Bolton, a wonderful man, it may have only been an elementary school but we all had a really good education. We had several teachers but one who was there all of my school life, and for some time after was a Miss Moore. She was a village person and her job was to teach the duds, these were the children who were backward and slow to learn. She had lots of patience with the children and always had their welfare at heart. In those days oranges came to the village in wooden crates and each orange was individually wrapped in tissue paper, Miss Moore asked the greengrocer to keep all these wrappings. She smoothed them all out and took them to school, then first thing in the morning every pupil would

(2)

be given a piece of this tissue paper and told to blow their noses. Its hard to realise that very few children had a hankerchief, most of the boys wore jerseys and it wasn't difficult to see where they wiped their noses when you looked at the sleeves of their jerseys. Miss Moore lived to a ripe old age but unfortunately after the war was run over in the High Street by an American and killed.

At school we had the school gardens, there were about 10 to 15 plots each with an asparagus bed at one end and the rest laid out with potatoes, peas, carrots etc. Each plot was allocated to two boys and each week we had two morning spells at gardening lessons given by Jimmy Bolton. When the crops were lifted they were all weighed and the boys who grew the most were congratulated. One year I was given the job of weighing the potatoes, naturally that year I grew the heaviest crop and I remember Jimmy saying to me " Harry you had the least tops to your potatoes but the most underground." He knew what I had done but he let me get away with it.

This didn't mean that he was generally lenient with me, I remember that when they built a new bowling green behind the Plough Inn, to make it private they had put a high pine fence around it. This fence was next to the pathway which we took to and from school, when the fence dried out all the knots in the wood were loose, and together with a few more boys I proceeded to push out all the knots at eye hight so that we could see into the bowling green. Obviously someone saw us doing this and told Jimmy. The next day in class Jimmy said that he wanted the boys who had done this to own up, honest joe, I owned up, the other boys didn't so I was the only one cained in front of the whole school.

As I said previously I was now settled at school and never missed one day for years. However I must say I did feel somewhat cheated for several years as a benifactor had left the school some money to buy new shoes for the regular attenders, each year came round and as the names of the recipients were called out mine was never amongst them and I knew for a fact that some of the boys had missed school on a number of occasions. Jimmy obviously noted how upset I was over this and one year lo and behold I received a pair of boots, I realised in later years that most of the children who received the shoes were far more in need of them than me.

As with most villages at this time everyone knew everyone else and certain names were predominant, in Lakenheath it was the:- Rolphs, Colemans, Gathercoles, Mackenders, Flacks, Rutterfords. There were so many families of the same name that they were dèvided into clans and given a nickname to differentiate between the families, our family were called the Drummers so if you were looking for me you would would have to ask for Harry "Drummer" not Flack. Other names for the Flack families were:- the Skinners, the Mudlers, the Soakeys, the Pinns, the Sikes, the Moodies, the Fattoes. By the same token most boys had a nickname and were always referred to by this and not their real name, a few come to mind:- Jack Gathercole (Gaddy) Wilf Gathercole (Rabbit) Jack Mathews (Whipper) Fred Flack (Loo) Reg Mackender (Lion) Wilfred Flack (Scrap) his brother (Wooper) Freddy Halls (Stonky) John Crane (Hubbard) Cecil Cooper (Hud) all the Sutton boys (Scud) Charlie Arbon (Jammy) Arthur Rutterford (Seed) his brother (Daddy) John Flack (Punch) Fred Coleman (Keddy) Jack Hensby (Frawn) Arthur Hensby (Squeaker) Alan Peachey (Pitman) George Sutton (Pont) Les

(5)

Mackender (Loggy) his brother (Fatty) Jim Rutterford (Shine) Ron Bacon (Boke) and many others that I can't recall.

The village of Lakenheath consisted of one long main street with one or two side roads leading with a series of 2 up 2down cottages built around small courtyards. Halfway through the village was a pond, there was no spring in the pond it was nearly topped up when it rained. Mill road, so named because it had a mill at the top of it opposite the school, led down to the pond and was the main source of the water. The pond literally separated the village into two halves, one side was called "up street" the other side "down street", I lived up street and if you lived up street you didn't go down street on your own unless you were looking for a fight. Every game was played up street against down street, football, cricket you name it, each side had its own champion and very often there would be a fight in the school playground between these two, if my memory serves me correctly there was one fight that lasted every school lunch time for a whole week!

We had a school football team and we used to play on a piece of land called the Scouts Pitch, this was situated on the edge of the warren this being a vast expanse of land covered by bracken, heather and speargrass and populated by millions of rabbits. It was owned by Lord Iveagh who also owned the villages of Elveden, Icklingham and Eriswell, the villagers had rights to the warren and some had specific rights consequently we were able to roam the warren but not allowed to catch the rabbits, not officially that is but more of that later. To come back to the school football, we could only practise and play after school hours and had no football kit, I decided on my own initiative to rectify this and went around the houses in the village asking for donations towards purchasing shorts and jerseys. I was quite successful and we were eventually kitted out. Back we come to Jimmy Bolton the headmaster, with all the work he had to do he still found time to coach us at football!

Back to the school itself, the only heating in the whole school was a couple of slow combustion stoves standing about 3ft high, totally enclosed, the only people who were warm were those next to the stoves. If it was very cold we would all have to put on our coats, (those of us who had coats) then go out into the playground and do physical exercises untill we had warmed up, then we had to go back into the school and carry on with our lessons.

We were only allowed into the school building during lessons at all other times we stayed outside, wet or fine, the only children allowed into the school at lunch time were those who had walked 3 or 4 miles to school and had bought sandwiches with them for their lunch. Two of these pupils were, Charlie Arbon from Wangford * (nicknamed jammy because he always had jam sandwiches every day) and ~~Graham~~ Cook who came from Undley, *Grahams father was a farmer and also had a milk round in the village. My brother Ambrose who always worked with horses worked for Mr Cook for a time and I understand that one day he said to *Graham " would you like to see if you are tall enough to be a ploughman " *Graham said yes, so my brother lifted the horses tail and told Graham to stand under it facing the horse, when he did so my brother pushed his face into the horses bottom. Graham and I were good friends and spent a lot of time together, his father eventually gave up the farm and moved his cows up to the village and became a dairyman, this was very good for me as it was another port of call for a glass of milk and a piece of cake. During the winter evenings I used to go to their house and his mother was very kind to me, like

X GRAEME

all houses in the village illumination was by oil lamps however their lamp was a luxury one which instead of a wick had a mantle, this gave a very superior white light, it was also a hanging lamp which meant that apart from meal times the table was bare and didn't have an oil lamp in the middle of it. This suited *Graham and I as we would lay books all around the edge of the table with the appropriate gaps to make it look like a billiard table, then with three golf balls and two walking sticks used as cues! we would play billiards. I remember that Graham's grandfather lived with them, I always thought him distinguished as he had a small white beard, Graham could play the piano and together with his sister, Gwenda, and his grandfather we would sing a round together, the one in particular that I remember was: A boat a boat haste to the ferry, I will go out and drink good sherry. Gwenda was always saying that she was going to marry me when she grew up, she didn't, she married someone else and unfortunately died quite young.

There was still very little work in the village and my brother Charles used to go to Wisbech for the fruit picking season, I remember him coming home with a brand new racing bike, it was multi coloured and everyone in the village admired it. He was only home for the weekend so off he went again to return a few weeks later this time with a motor bike, I remember it well, it was a "Sun" 2 stroke with a belt drive and a lovely copper exhaust, I used to polish this exhaust and as a reward my brother would take me for a ride. Soon after this several of the young men of the village had motor bikes and I would spend hours looking at them and thinking to myself that one day I would have one of those. My friend Jabez Hammond bought one, it was an O.K. Supreme and he often gave me a ride, some time later my brother changed his motor bike for a newer and better one this was a Raleigh, a proper girl catcher and after that he went even further and bought a Coventry Eagle capable of 70 miles an hour and complete with electric lighting!

At this time the village was lit at night by a series of oil lamps and my brother-in-law Jim Brown took over as lamplighter, prior to this the lamplighter was Mr Luke Coleman, his nickname was Luke Bubby, he was also the town orier, when he had anything to announce he would cycle through the village stopping at intervals, ringing a large hand bell and making his announcements. He was also a shoe repairer and speaking of cobblers the main one in the village was named "Copper Cash" he also made shoes and boots. The boots were made of heavy leather and finished off with hob nails all over the soles and metal cleats on the heels, when I look back I wonder how he ever survived as people only paid their shoe repair bill once a year, at Michaelmas, the time of the harvest when people had sold their corn and had a little extra money. I remember that I always liked to go to the cobblers shop in the winter as they had a fire and it was nice and warm, often we would outstay our welcome. Another friend of mine was Jack Briggs his father was the village policeman, Jack had a sister Leila of whom I was very fond but then most of the lads in the village (that is our end of the village) were fond of Leila as she was very good looking with a head of lovely curly hair, incidentally Jack had curly hair as well. I would cut a bunch of flowers from my fathers garden to take to Mrs Briggs who would always give me a cake and a drink, it could seem that I was obsessed with cake but you must remember that I can never recall any of my sisters ever making a cake for us.

I was always reasonably well dressed thanks to my old Auntie Sarah who we always called Aunt Sally, where she got her money from I don't know, she lived in an small cottage with my Uncle Jack. *All I know is that when she was young she went off to Australia (and in those days you travelled by sailing ship and it took forever) she married someone in Australia who also came from the village. Most of her time in Australia was spent travelling around with families, I think as a housekeeper, she eventually came home leaving her husband in Australia. When I visited Aunt Sally as soon as I got through the door she would say "what do you want? I know you want something or you wouldn't come to see me" so naturally I wouldn't go for a week or two, then if she was at her doorway as I went past she would say "aren't you coming in to see me and have something to eat."

Almost at the same time as Aunt Sally went to Australia my Uncle Ambrose also went, later he went on to Newzealand where he spent the rest of his working life returning to to England about 1930. I remember him coming home, for weeks previous, all the talk in the village was of Ambrose Flack who was coming home from Newzealand, he duly arrived and stayed for a few months to see if he could settle, he decided that he could and went off back to Newzealand to settle his affairs. In the short time that he was at home he became friendly with a family in the village who had a son the same age as me, I remember he asked the family if he could take the son back to Newzealand with him and they would return in about 6 months, they said no, I offered to go but he said no, I was quite upset as I was his nephew and the other boy was no relation at all. However befor he went he hired a taxi and took me to Mildenhall and bought me a complete new outfit of clothes.

In addition to the aunts and uncles I have mentioned I also had two aunts and two uncles who were my father's half sisters and brothers, there was my uncle Adam who lived in London, he was a postman and always came to the village for his holidays. I would spend as much time with him as possible, he could mimic birds and animals and could always find birds nests, he was also a good story teller. He was in the Boar war as a young lad and fought in the Great War of 1914/18, We would spend hours walking on the warren and in the covet (a small batch of trees on the way to the warren.) On a fine clear day from the top of the warren in the distance you could just see Ely Cathedral, which was some 15 miles away, uncle Adam would say "we have run out of food and water so I will signal to Ely Cathedral for supplies and with two sticks which he pretended were flags he would spell out the letters to me as he signaled (he was a signaler in the army.) He would also make nests like larks nests on the ground and tell me that the birds would lay eggs in them, he taught me how to mark the nests so that we could find them again, after school next day I would run home from school and find the nest, in it would be a thrushes or blackbirds or some other kind of birds egg and occasionally there would be a halfpenny. I remember one day as we were walking through the braken which was about three feet high he suddenly grabbed my arm and said "don't move I can see a lion, I don't know if it is dead or alive, it is lying there with bees all around it's head" I was petrified, he left me alone and walked about 6 yards and picked up an empty Lyles Golden Syrup tin on which was a picture of a lion with bees around it's head, it said on the tin "out of the strong came forth sweetness" and if you look at a tin today it still says that, and it still has the lion and the bees on it!

Another day when I came home from school he said "what do you think I saw in the covet today?" "I don't know I said" so he said "you know that big chestnut tree we saw the other day, well I went there this morning and there was a man hanging on it, prehaps you should go and see if he is still there." Off I went to have a look but could see no man but when I looked closely he had carved a figure of a man hanging on the large tree trunk with his knife.

Uncle Adam never had any children of his own and I always felt that I was his favourite nephew but my Uncle Chum (real name Thurlow) was an entirely different person, he was a batchelor and lived in Peterborough. He also came to the village for his holidays, when I think back I realise that when he was born he must have had dislocated hips as he walked very badly and was crippled with arthritis. In spite of this he had a very strenuous job which involved a lot of lifting, he worked for a Milling company and used to drive a large Foden steam wagon collecting corn from the farmers and delivering foodstuffs, sacks of corn in those days weighed 18 stone which is 2½ cwt. I think prehaps he did a little dealing himself as he was able to buy a house for his landlady in Peterborough and also built two new houses in the village. When he came on holiday he kept himself much to himself and gave very little away, however on one occasion when he came he showed me a pocket watch which I thnwk he had bought for 5/- I admired the watch and he gave it to me, everyone was amazed!

Whilst talking of my Aunts and Uncles I must mention that they were all strict Baptists and I was made to go to Sunday school each sunday afternoon, I regret to say that I was expeled from the Baptist Sunday school for misbehavior, after this I went to the independant chapel and was much happier there. Although I hated it at the Baptist Sunday school I was always eager to go on the outing which was held one day in the summer on this day we would assemble at about 7.30am outside the Co-op opposite the village pond from here we were transported to the railway station about 3 miles away and then we would go by train to Hunstanton or to Great Yarmouth.

I remember on one occasion we went by charabang to Hunstanton, it was the type of vehicle that you entered by steps at the rear and the seating was a bench seat along either side. Now in Suffolk and Norfolk there are practically no hills whatsoever but I remember as soon as we came to a slight incline we all had to get out and walk to the top. I don't remember that we actually had to push the Chara!

The Charabang was owned by George Pincham and the business was carried on by his son Ernie until the Eastern counties bus company stationed a bus in the village to go to Bury St Edmonds and Newmarket, Earnie then became a driver for them.

Around this time vehicles were becoming quite common in the village and we had taxis owned by Harry Platt, Ernie Pincham, Easy Raven (yes this really was his name!) prior to this the only way of getting to the station was by horse and trap this was owned by Bert King who had been disabled in the 1914/18 war and always had what was left of his left hand covered by a wollen glove, I always wished that I could see what it looked like without the glove on.

I remember having more than one ride to the station to meet relatives who were coming on holiday, I did say that the only means of getting to the station was by horse and trap this is not quite true, in the village lived a small farmer named Prewer whose daughter lived in London and when she came on holiday he would meet her with his bicycle, she would stand on one pedal and leaned

against the bike, he would put her case on the handlebars and he would push her like this all the way back to the village.

Prior to Baker Hammond having a motor van to deliver his bread he would do his rounds in a horse and cart, it was Mr Hammond senior's brother who drove this and on his way round would call and have a drink in every pub, the first pub was opposite the house where I lived and was only 100 yards from the bakery. By the time he had finished his round he was always asleep and the horse would make his own way home!

Also in the village at this time there was a carrion shop, this was the place where all the dead animals, horses cows, sheep etc. were taken and skinned for their hides and the carcass rendered down for tallow etc. it wasn't a very pleasant smell that came from the building. Our next door neighbour worked at the carrion shop and although the animals were not really for human consumption I'm sure that if an animal was killed just because it had broken it's leg or something similar some of the flesh would be eaten. The dead animals were collected from the farms etc. on a special cart with the dead animal lying on it for everyone to see, the owner of this business was Johnie Baker who lived at Beck Row, he was quite a character if he was coming through the village with a dead animal on the cart in the evening he would stop outside the Star pub, which was in the High Street immediately opposite our house. The horse and cart complete with dead animal would be left standing outside until the pub closed at 10 o'clock, then out would come Johnie worse for drink, there would be several children hanging around the cart because we knew that when he came out he would throw a handful of coppers into the road and we would scramble for them.

On the subject of animals, there was no official slaughter house at this time so all the butchers would kill their own animals, just up the road from us was Bill Reeves the pork butcher, his shop was in the High Street but the back of the premises was on the Back Street and this is where he used to kill the pigs every week.

When we came out of school we always came down the Back Street so what was more natural than for us to want to see them kill the pigs, it was a sorry sight but not one that frightened us boys. They had a long wooden bench with two handles at either end, the pig would be held down on this and they would cut it's throat, the blood would go everywhere and the pig would squeal it's head off, then from a boiler they would ladle boiling water over the pig's body and proceed to scrape off the bristles with a sharp tool. After the pig had been disembowelled it would be hung on a beam by two hooks through it's back ~~hooks~~, ^{leas} officially we were not allowed to watch all this but the slaughterers turned a blind eye and occasionally gave us a pig's bladder which we blew up and used to play football, I suppose we should have played rugby really because a pig's bladder is oval shaped.

The blood from the pig and the water from the scalding drained into a big open pit and the top of this liquid was covered by hay or straw, I remember one evening in the winter when we were all playing together we chased one of the girls and she ran into this yard and straight into the pit, she was not a pretty sight when we pulled her out!

Bill Reeve the butcher used to render down the fat and make lard, he would also make scratchings from the rind. The pork sausages that he made had no additives and when you fried them there would be lots of fat left in the

(5)

fryingpan in which you made delicious fried bread. All the sausages were made in a hand grinder and the skins were the pigs intestines, the sausages were always made in the evening and my brother Ambrose together with a friend would go and turn the mincer, Bill Reeve would feed the mincer and link the sausages. As I mentioned the houses on the one side of the High Street had an entrance from the Back Street, about four doors along from the butchers shop lived a man named Bass Brown, he had a large greyhound dog. This dog was always loose in the back yard which was open to the Back Street and if you walked past the back yard the dog would take no notice, but, if you ran past the back yard the dog would come out barking it's head off. When we came out of school each one of us would endeavour to be the first one so that we could run past and the dog would catch the ones behind. Bass had a son named Freddie who was much younger than us, Freddie had a brush on a stick which he imagined was a horse he would ride this up and down the street all day and every day, he was called Freddie on a broomstick.

Also on the Back Street was the village Blacksmith, by coincidence his name was Smith (Fred Smith) and his partner was Walter Smith, although I don't think that they were related. The smithy being on the way home from school was a regular port of call. We were not particularly welcome by Fred but Walter was much more pleasant. We would watch them making the shoes and fitting them to the horses hooves, I can still remember the smell of the red hot shoes being married up with the hooves. Fred had an aversion to oranges, so if we were lucky enough to have one we would call in and stand near to him while we ate it, he would chase us away! In addition to shoeing horses they also made and repaired farm impliments and it was a real education to watch them putting an iron tyre on the wooden wheel of a cart, (no welding in those days) The wheel would be measured exactly, the iron cut to size, heated, bent, and hammered into a circle. This would then be heated in a large fire, it would take about 3 men to lift it over to the wooden wheel, as it was put on to the wooden wheel, red hot, they would quickly throw buckets of cold water to cool the iron down and shrink it onto the wheel, also to stop the wood of the wheel from catching alight.

In the winter the smithy was also a rendezvous for the unemployed men as it was always warm from the fire in the forge and they would help to work the bellows for the privilege of being there.

In the village there were three bakers but in spite of this lots of people still made their own bread, as they had no facilities for baking the bread it had to be taken to the bakehouse and the baker would put it in his oven when he had finished baking his own bread. The tins that the homemade bread was baked in were about twice the size of the bakers own so we would take the bread in the tins to the bakehouse in a wheelbarrow. When we collected the bread after it had been baked there would be little crusty pieces hanging over the edge of the tins, we were allowed to eat these.

We always took our bread to baker Hammonds but our next door neighbours the Suttons used to take their bread further down the village to Ezra Rolphs and I remember that one day we had gone back to school after lunch and had all settled down to the first lesson when in walked Herbie Sutton, very late, the headmaster said "where have you been and why are you late?" Herbie said "I had to take the bread to Ezzies" the headmaster said "who?" and Herbie said again

"Ezzies" the headmaster said "it is Mr Rolph to you" and promptly gave Herbie 4 strokes of the cane in front of the whole class.

As I said in those days all the carrying was done by horse and cart, at harvest time two extentions called ladders were put on to the front and rear of a tumbril, this allowed the cart to be loaded high with corn etc. Sticking out of the back of the tumbril were two extensions about a foot long and just low enough for a boy or girl to sit on under the loaded cart (we called them tibs.) I remember on one particular day a cart was coming down the Back Street loaded with corn so I thought I would have a ride home, I had only been on the tib a short time when I felt something go into my ear. I thought that it was a grain of wheat, however after a short time there was an awful noise in my head. I rushed home crying with pain and was promptly taken to the doctor. Now Dr Pickworth was not a pretty sight for a young boy to start with, he had a wiry beard and one eye was all bloodshot at sometime he had been hit in the eye by a firework so I was frightened for a start. He proceeded to prod and look in my ear and the noise was getting worse, at last he said "theres nothing wrong with the boy take him home" at this precise moment out of my ear crawled a black harvest beetle about 1/2" long, naturally I had instant relief and a little sympathy from Doctor Pickworth.

Whilst on the subject of medical care, at our school it was very basic, it was left mainly to poor old Jimmy Bolton the headmaster. I never once saw a dentist and our hearing was tested by Jimmy standing some distance away and whispering, our eyes were tested by holding our hand over one eye while reading a chart with the other eye. I remember that one summer there was a drought and an epidemic of some illness of which a symptom was your hands skinning between your fingers, I was the only pupil with the symptoms and was told that I must stay away from school for two weeks as I might infect the other pupils. Nothing was said however about playing together out of school hours! so for me it was an unexpected holiday, I had a wonderful two weeks, albeit on my own. I spent my time down by the river Lode catching fish it was quite easy as it was almost dry and the fish couldn't escape. The dykes were dry of water but there was a mass of wet mud in the bottom, there were always eels in the mud so I used to go along the dykes with a long stick, poke it down into the mud and make an airhole, the eels would come to the surface through the holes and I would pick them up and put them in a bucket, I had a wonderful time. Now to come to the opposite of a drought, in the winter we often had floods, these were the result of the majority of the fens being reclaimed land, this land was drained by a series of drains and dykes with pumping stations at various points to lower and raise the level of the water, in these drains and dykes all being linked to the river Ouse. A bank had been made on the fen side of these drains and dykes to stop the flooding of the fens, this meant that the fields to the village side of the bank would be compleatly flooded and the road linking Undley to Lakenheath flooded to the depth of about 2 feet, once it became deeper than this a dangerous situation would arise and all available manpower would be mobilised to patrol and repair the bank. This work was called "scradging" (I think this was a local name) this emergency was a mixed blessing as it was usually at the time of year when there was no work about and the men were glad to earn some money. I can remember going down to the bank at night to watch the men at work and the only lights they had were oil lanterns so as you can imagine as well as being hard work it was also dangerous.

(15)

I didn't own a pair of wellingtons until after I left school, can you imagine what it was like having to walk through 2 feet of muddy water in ordinary boots, it was freezing I can tell you!

Sometimes all this water froze and it's amazing how many people had ice skates. not the all metal skates of today, but a strip of metal set into a piece of wood with a screw sticking up from the back which was screwed into the heel of an ordinary boot and leather straps which held the front of the skate to the boot. We had two pairs of these skates in the family but I don't remember being allowed to use them, anyway they would probably have been too big for me. It was great fun to run around and slide on the ice and if you steered clear of the dykes the water was only about 2 feet deep so it was relatively safe even if the ice did give way, which it often did.

Today there is no flooding in this area as a new river was cut through the land in the late 50's or early 60's. Land which in my youth was unfarmable is now rich agricultural land which can be worked all year round.

We had our share of characters in and around the village, I remember a Mr Rolph whose nickname was "Spanker" he was always a bit strange when there was a full moon and as boys we would tease him which made him much worse. He was one of the better educated villagers and when he was normal he was employed to measure the fields to see how many acres of land there were.

Another person who was strange at full moon was Jessie Rodgers who lived in Undley. She would wander through the village late at night in the moonlight shouting and complaining and beating her chest. It was quite frightening for a young boy but everyone else took it as a matter of course.

Another character was Charlie Maggs who lived at Hockwold. He would come through the village in his horse and cart and always had his accordion with him. He would stop at the pubs and sing, accompanied by his accordion, invariably he would finish up the worse for drink and they would just put him on his cart, give the horse a smack with the whip and it would take him home to Hockwold some 4 to 5 miles away. I don't remember them ever causing an accident, however I do remember an accident with a horse and cart and a motor bike. Johnie Baker who I have mentioned previously was driving home from Lakenheath to Beck Row, it was a foggy winters evening, I don't know whether the horse and cart had any lights on, but Oscar Flack (no relation of mine) was coming home up the Undley road on his motor bike and ran head on into the cart and was killed instantly.

Like everyone else of my age I seem to remember that we had far better summers years ago than we do now. The evenings seemed to be far warmer and families would bring out chairs and sit on the pathway talking until late at night. Indeed it would be so hot in the houses that we would often sleep in the barn of a nearby farm at which my brother Ambrose worked, he would arrange that there was hay in the barn for us to sleep on. As it got dark the bats and swifts (we called them shriek owls) would be flying above the street, the boys would throw up our hats in the air and sing "Bat, bat fly my hat" and the bats would dive towards the hats.

We played a lot of marbles in the Main Road and would play in teams of four. Sometimes someone would do something that the others didn't agree with and one would shout "stuff donks" this meant that it was everyone for themselves and you had to grab as many marbles as you could, usually someone ended up with none and there was a fight.

We also used to spin our tops along the Main Road and we would see who could make their top jump the farthest. To do this you had to put a small knot in the end of your whip, sometimes this resulted in a top going through someones window pane, we would all quickly dissappear if this happened.

Every year a travelling fair would come to the village and the field next to the pond was called the fair ground. It was quite an occasion and stayed in the village for about a week, it was a temptation to play truant from school on the days that the fair was arriving as there were big steam engines towing three or four trailers and it was a work of art trying to get them through the gate into the field without knocking the gate post down.

Lots of the stalls at the fair were illuminated by oil lamp flares, this was an open flame and the smell always reminded me of my mother lying in her coffin. I didn't realise untill I was much older that the smell was of methylated spirit. They possibly used this in the lighting of the lamps and I suppose that when my mother died methylated spirits were used on her body. Even today the smell of methylated spirits has some effect on me.

The caravans of the fair people were always spotlessly clean and the brasswork highly polished. Their large water cans were either brass or copper and were always shinny bright. I remember the sweet stall which was owned by Carrie Rolfe, I think she came from Kings Lynne and she always made all of the sweets. There were all flavors of rock, fudge, coconut ice, nouget, you name it, she made it and it was delicious. I remember my father would always bring some home. Saturday night was the main night and people came from miles around. The village streets were so full that no vehicles could drive along them, there would be hundreds of bicycles parked everywhere, on-one would think of touching them. Today if you leave your bike for 5 mins someone steals it, it is really sad.

I can remember that on the edge of the warren there was a place which was called Good Friday Hill, every Good Friday some of the village shop keepers would erect stalls and sell sweets, ice cream, oranges and apples. Games would be arranged for the children with prizes for the winners, this was organised by the Church or Chapel Sunday Schools.

Although times were very hard and most families had a job to make ends meet there seemed to be very little illness amongst the children. There was however one boy who had rheumatic fever and had to spend several years confined to his bedroom, his name was Barry Hensby. He had many friends and we all used to meet on the pathway below his bedroom window, we would swap comics etc. which he would raise and lower from the window on a piece of string. Although Barry spent these years restricted he made a complete recovery, (I think due to his mothers patience and attention) and we are good friends to this day after almost 70 years, more about Barry later.

Very little time was spent in the house during the summer but the winters were a different matter. It was often too cold or wet to play out of doors after tea or at the weekends.

The cinema in which my mother had played the piano had unfortunately gone out of business but traveling cinema came to the village hall one night every week. The films were now accompanied by their own music, there used to be lots of breaks in the films. When this happened or when they changed the reels there would just be a white light on the screen. We couldn't resist this and would get off of our chairs and with our hands make shadows of animals on the screen. I

was not always able to go as it cost 3d. I found one way of getting the 3d needed for the cinema I would go to my Aunt and say "I have 2d to go to the cinema so I only need another penny" and usually she would give me a penny, then I would do the same thing with my uncle or one of my elder brothers untill I had 3d. Eventually they cottoned on to what I was doing and would ask to see the 2d that I said I had before giving me the other penny.

Some of the boys did go every week, and they would bring us up to date with that weeks episode of the serial, one of which I remember was called "The Masked Riders." I was one of the few young boys that would be out in the street after dark and the older boys would re-enact that weeks episode of the Masked Riders. The only way that they would allow me to participate was if I would let them tie me up, I remember on one occasion they had tied me to a five bar gate on the property of Miss Howard. (the lady who gave me milk each lunch time.) Along came the good lady and there was I tied to her gate, although I was a willing victim I told her that the other boys had tied me up against my will. She was very sympathetic, untied me and took me to her house and gave me a hot drink, I was the lucky one, I would have volunteered to be tied to the gate every night.

We also had a travelling theatre company who put on their plays in the village hall. The only two plays that I can remember were; Maria Marten and the murder in the red barn, (this was a play about a murder which had been committed in Suffolk) and Charles's Aunt.

On the nights that we had to stay indoors there would be quite a room full and there wasn't enough space for us all to sit around the fire, so sometimes there would be a bit of wrestling for a good seat. My father had a leather strap which hung beside the fireplace, we would always be threatened with this but I don't ever remember him having to use it, the threat was enough.

There was a routine about the evenings, my father would eat his dinner and then the table would be cleared and the girls would wash up. My father would then place his chair by the side of the table and move the oil lamp from the center to the corner where he was sitting and proceed to read his newspaper. This he read all through, every page, every article, I think the paper was called the "News Chronicle." As it took him sometime to do this we children would get restless and start pushing one another, this would sometimes rock the table and the lamp would almost fall over. If the lamp was moved from side to side the flame would make the glass black and it would have to be cleaned.

As we only had one fireplace in the house, the living room was the only place that wasn't ice cold. The bedrooms were especially cold and to warm the beds we would put house bricks into the oven and when they were hot we would wrap them in brown paper and put them into the beds. The bedrooms were so cold that if there was a frost in the night you would wake in the morning and there would be ice on the inside of the window. I remember going to stay with my brother a few years ago, he had a bungalow in the village. It was a cold night and I said to him "do you remember when we were boys and there was a frost, we would wake up in the morning and see pretty patterns of ice on the inside of the windows." He said "don't worry you will see some on the window of your room in the morning," fortunately he has since had storage heaters fitted so no more jack frost.

Not much was organised for the children in the village, there was however a scout troop run by Fred Drew. I was never able to join this as I could not

perhaps afford the uniform, however a Mr Skillham came to the village to retire and he started to invite a few boys round to his house on Friday nights to watch his magic lantern. He would give them a hot drink and something to eat, I think I managed to go once or twice but was not very keen. The boys used to tell me about certain games that were played and only in later years did I realise that there was an ulterior motive for having the boys there!

At school except for lessons the two sexes were separated, we had our own playgrounds separated by a four foot wall down the middle. The play grounds were not tarmacked consequently if you fell over and cut yourself the wound would be full of earth. However we seemed to be able to play football and cricket on this surface without sustaining too many injuries. I remember once bowling to the Headmaster, the ball hit his ankle and put him out of action for a few days, for some reason I was a bit of a hero with the boys, but on reflection I shouldn't have been as he was a great Headmaster.

The toilets on the boys side consisted of about six loos, each with a bucket, and a long wall about six feet high with a gulley at the bottom. The back of this wall faced the playground and we used to see who could pee over the top of it, on the day that I managed it a teacher was walking by and got a bit wet, he never did find which one of us did it!

During our last year at school neither Graham Cook nor I did much work in class. We had been at the top of the class for a couple of years and had reached the extent of our education at this school. For the last year I would run errands for the Headmaster and each week I would have to go to the bank for him. This was a travelling bank which only came to the village once a week. As I said the people in the village had to get their water from a well or pump, however the Headmaster's house was different, he actually had running water. This was supplied by a tank in the roof which in turn was supplied by a pipe connected to the spout of a large pump, of course the water still had to be pumped up to the tank in the roof. Graham and I were detailed to keep this tank full of water, the pump handle had been fitted with a large piece of lead at the end of it and although this was heavy to lift up when you pulled the handle down it helped to force the water up. We both had to work the handle together as it was quite an effort, we knew the tank was full when the water came out of the overflow.

In the Headmaster's garden there were fruit trees and when the fruit was in season, Graham, being much taller and stronger than me, would lift the handle up and down, not actually pumping any water but sounding as though he was. While he did this I would nip down the garden and scrump some fruit for us both, we were never caught out!

In this last year at school I was walking through the classroom one day and on the floor I spotted a small ivory figure. At first I didn't know what it was but seeing a small piece of glass at either end I decided to look through it and lo and behold I could see a nude lady! I used to show it to my favoured friends, somehow or other it disappeared, to where I don't know, the original owner must have been one of the teachers.

Other jobs Graham and I did in this last year were; cutting out cardboard models for other pupils to assemble in modelling class, and putting the maps of different countries in their geography books. We did this with a series of rubber rollers on which were engraved the maps of the different countries, we would put the appropriate roller onto the handle, push the roller over a large

ink pad and then run the roller over the page in the book. The only country that fired my imagination when I printed it was South America, I vowed that oneday I should go there but although I have travelled quite a lot I still haven't managed to get there, who knows one day I might!