

Childhood

Stanford-le-hope in Essex was my place of birth, but my early years were spent at Fobbing where the peasants revolt was planned at the Vicarage and the arch placed in order of the king still stands.

We lived on a smallholding overlooking the A13 and Bread and Cheese Hill. My Grandfather had three farms on the marshes of Fobbing, Coryton and Corringham.

We caught Sticklebacks, Newts, Lizards, Raft Spiders, Elvers, Water snails etc. and sold them to other school children and sometimes the teachers.

The marsh ditches were drained and the eels ~~were~~ ^{were speared} and scooped up and those large enough sent to market or jellied for our own consumption. On the sea walls we picked wild garlic. On the sea side of the wall were whelks and winkles, further out cockles and oysters, also clams. A net was laid across the creek at low tide so that the incoming tide pushed it down, but the outgoing tide lifted the top and trapped the fish. Special traps were set for ducks and geese, young swans were eaten, the old ones released, partridges and pheasants were also trapped. Everything caught was sold if possible, if not sold the meat would be removed and be

preserved in salt in barrels. The salt was from the six small salt pans at the back of the sea wall. At high tide the sluice gate would be opened and the sea water channelled to one of the pans, when full the gate was closed and the water allowed to soak away and evaporate, leaving the salt. Also in the same area were three shellfish beds where any shellfish could be stored until needed. Beach combing was a regular chore after high tide, a great variety of flotsam and jetsam was collected over time, some quite valuable.

Sea birds eggs were collected in season and sold to London Hotels as were the mushrooms from the marshes. Mushrooms were picked after midnight until they had to go on the rail to London. Grandfather had orders from over thirty hotels. All above their needs went to market. The method of picking was for two people with a two handled galvanised bath, us kids had small baths, adults very large ones, sometimes as many as sixty baths working. All the mushrooms had to be put into trays for transport. The marsh used to be white in season.

At sheep shearing time, us kids had the job of folding the fleece. We had leather aprons and sleeves to stop the lanolin from getting on us. Every now and again the aprons, etc. were

changed and washed in boiling water, the lanolin was taken off and stored to make a base for ointments or sold. Absolutely nothing went to waste.

Another way of catching eels was to place kitchen scraps into a sack and a few weights attached to the underside, a line was threaded round the mouth, wire was threaded to make a loop in the centre of the opening. The sack was placed weights down in the Fleet, the cord tied to a stake.

They were placed in the evening and collected about 5 a.m. by pulling the cord hard closing the mouth, the eels would have entered during the night. Usually about five large eels would be trapped with a number of lesser ones. To separate them they were tipped into a bucket standing in a bath, water was added to the bucket until the large eels could slither out. The smaller ones were tipped back into the Fleet.

During the winter there was shooting, rabbiting, ratting, snares and if someone or ourselves wanted something without shot in it, trapping.

A careful watch if walking on the sea wall or long grass was necessary as there were Adders everywhere, also black water snakes, which could be quite a size. One killed by my dog "Tip" was 6ft. 4ins. The skin was used to make a whip.

Every so often Grandfather would count his sheep. This was done by driving them from one field to another and counting as they passed through the gateway. With sheep running through I soon lost count, but not Granddad. He knew if any were missing and would send the dogs to find them.

At lambing time if a ewe lost her lamb and would not accept another, she would be milked and milk either fed to orphans or in house, or made into cream cheese.

On one occasion, a foal was fed a mixture of cow and sheep milk and flourished, unusual.

Fruit, nut and willow trees were planted on any area they had a good chance of surviving. Any produce was used in any of a number of ways. The pigs and chickens etc. were fed anything not suitable for human consumption.

My mother taught us from the time we could talk. By the time we went to school (4 years old) we

were ahead of our age group and put into older classes. My father taught us about the world around us. Both had the patience needed to ensure we understood.

At 4 years old, I started school. The teacher told us to put our sweets on a ledge in the cloakroom and hang our clothes there. Quite a no go for me, I had no intention of leaving sweets where others could help themselves to them. I was even more adamant about my cap of which I was inordinately proud, being red velvet with a silk lining. Ignoring the teacher I went into class wearing my jacket as somewhere to keep my sweets and my cap I put on my chair and sat on it. The teacher kept telling me I could not carry on like that, but I would not give in.

Next day, I told Mum, I didn't want to go to school any more, to no avail as she got me ready together with my packed lunch, no sweets, cap finally on my head and pushed me out of the door. After I had stood rebelliously for some minutes, Mum came out, walked to the hedge, broke a twiggy branch, came back stung my legs with it and said "school". For 3 ½ miles to school we travelled at adult pace and every time I slowed down I received a sharp sting with the twiggy stick. At

school Mum put my cap on the hook and told me to leave it there. With the memory of the twiggie stick, I decided that would be advisable. There was no harm to me, a lesson not forgotten and my first introduction to the fact that it is sometimes necessary to put up with things you don't like, self-discipline in a nutshell.

At 9 years old I went to college, but that was short lived as we moved to a farm when I was 10 years old.

At school, I was always getting into all kinds of trouble and received the cane many times. Fighting was probably the main cause as I had been taught that boys never hit or hurt girls and every time I saw a boy hitting a girl, I would protect her. I got the cane because I should have told a teacher and let them deal with it.

Also I was punished for work when I wrote out word for word after a reading, the teachers were convinced I was cheating.

After a while the teachers realised I was not cheating and I was given special tuition as were two of my sisters.

Childhood (2)

Peter Potter Written 1

I was born in the 1920's, which was a time when there was peace almost all over the world and an idyllic time for children in England. It was a time when the people believed in themselves and their country, a people truly proud of their heritage and their countrymen.

When living in a village, it was necessary to help one another whenever and wherever possible and if a call for help was made, it was never ignored. Trust was very strong. If someone went out for any reason, their house would be left unlocked and a neighbour would pop in to see that everything was OK and sometimes even prepare a meal for the occupiers return.

My parents were farmers and considered that it was their duty to look after the welfare of all the villagers, regardless of whether they were our employees or not. All those who were in need for any reason, would each receive a parcel of items that they might require, such as food, clothing, soap etc. which would be left on their doorstep at night.

As in all communities, there were some rogues, but they were invariably known and folk took protective measures against them, but we still helped them too if they were in need.

Children all had jobs to do and were proud of the responsibilities given to them, even though they may not have liked the job itself, the very fact that they had been given responsibility gave them pride. Accidents were rare and mostly minor, a bruise or a cut could occur because you were subjected to many dangers. From the time you were able to move around you learned very rapidly to be very careful, to look for danger and avoid it whenever possible. The greatest teacher was life and the sooner a person experienced it the better.

Neither boys or girls were favoured in the choice of their chores in most families, although the better off a family was, the more varied the tasks for the children appeared to be. I had four sisters and over the years we all did the same chores. My jobs were many and varied, looking after certain animals, chopping and gathering kindling for our house and also for the pensioners in the village. Grinding, cutting and mixing and cooking animal feed, mucking out the animals, milking cows, collecting the eggs, cooking dinner on market and shopping days, cleaning and sharpening tools. I would also collect cows for milking and round up the sheep and other livestock, counting and grooming them. I helped with the harvest, checked

fences, gates and carried out many other chores, in fact anything that came up whilst I was available, even doing the accounts, which I did for my father. By the time I was ten, I was capable of almost any job on the farm and could use and operate all of the equipment.

In my spare time, I went shooting with a four ten shotgun, hunting rabbits with ferrets, setting snares, traps for pheasants and partridges. I also made the nets and snares. After dinner I did the accounts and my homework from school.

Somehow I also found time to go courting, as my love life started at this time. My parents were like most of the adults of the time capable of all aspects of working and social life, they shared the problems of the community and like most workers were adaptable in that they were capable of several occupations. My father was able to put his hand to anything, engineering, building, tool making, mechanics, chemistry, doctoring plus of course general farming. He was in great demand to repair anything, or make a replacement if repair was not possible. Not only was he extremely clever, but also superbly fit and strong. All of his movements were perfectly coordinated and his speed of movement was the fastest I've ever witnessed. Two of his brothers were boxing champions in the Royal Navy at heavy and middle

weight respectively, but Dad could outbox both of them comfortably.

On one occasion when he was about forty years old, we were walking around the farm when we saw two young men in the middle of a corn field knocking the corn down. Dad shouted at them to stop, whereupon they shouted abuse at him. Dad took off like a rocket, they were about a hundred and fifty yards away and they started running as fast as they could, but they might as well have been standing still. Dad overhauled them and as he caught up with the nearest one he picked him up by the scruff of the neck and then continued running until he caught the other one in the same fashion. He then banged their heads together and told them he didn't want to see them ever again on our farm and we never did. The spectacle remains with me as clearly now as it was then. The power as he ran with two grown men suspended in the air was quite unforgettable. When I later related the tale to my uncles at a family get together, they told me that as a young man he was working on a jetty at Shell Haven in the Thames Estuary. Full oil drums were being loaded ten at a time on a cradle, into the hold of a ship. Suddenly the loader in charge slipped under the descending load. My father was on the ship and into the hold and under the load taking the weight on his

shoulders. Then the loader got up and signalled the crane driver to lift the load while Dad got out of the way. Ten barrels of fifty gallons is about four thousand five hundred pounds, plus the cradle and chains comes to about two tons. An amazing feat witnessed by about fifty people. Apparently he didn't have to buy a pint for a very long time. Later, when I worked at Shell Haven myself, the event was still spoken about with the weight having been increased over the years along with other embellishments. When I told Dad he was a legend, he laughed his head off.

Mother was small and she was lovely and beautiful. Her family were farmers and landowners as were my father's. During the First World War, she was employed in the local powder and cordite munitions factory and then after the war she went off to learn the hotel trade with old family friends. There she met my father and they hit it off immediately. They never lost their love for one another and were loved by all who knew them. Their funerals were attended by mourners overflowing the church. At my father's funeral, the churchyard and the road for about a hundred yards were crowded with people from all over the world.

Just as many farmers of the time, money was short. It was laid out in livestock, grains, fodder and equipment etc. although there was usually enough money in the

bank and in hand to pay our employees and casual labour, such as pea pickers and potato pickers. Etc. Quite often, after paying everyone, there would be very little left for housekeeping for us and we would live on the farm produce. Such fare was much better than one may think. Homemade bread, home killed beef, pork, bacon, lamb, veal, chicken, turkey, guinea fowl, pheasant, partridge, duck, goose, etc., eggs, potatoes, many sorts of vegetables and fruit, home brewed beer, homemade wine and cordials, peppermint and ginger beer etc. We were never hungry, milk was plentiful to drink or make delicious desserts. Also pigeons, rabbits, hares, peacocks, all these things were also given to folk in the village who were out of work or suffering an illness.

At Christmas, all the needy were given whatever fare we had plenty of. Our workers were paid above the standard rate and also shared with all of the above produce when plentiful or in season. One rule, however, was whatever job they were doing had to be completed satisfactorily before going home. Anyone not doing their job properly would be given one chance and then if they failed they were sacked.

I enjoyed an idyllic childhood and I must say I thought it was a wonderful time for children.

Right opposite the gates of my first school, ~~Head~~ Lane Junior School, there was a sandpit in which the sand martins used to nest in the cliffs which had been formed. One day I went down into the sandpit to see if I could look into a sand martin's nest. I proceeded to climb up the cliff where the nests were and then suddenly the cliff face collapsed on me. My eldest sister who saw what had happened managed to pull me out. I had been completely buried, so that all she could see was one foot. I then complained, asking why she had pulled me out as I had been quite happy in there, I supposed I must have been suffering from oxygen starvation.

I was about six or seven then and at that time she was going to the same school as myself and there was also a particular twelve year old boy at the school who was a bully. He used to bully the girls as they were going home. On one occasion we were on our way home walking up what we called Green Hill, a footpath that was on my grandfather's land, when this boy started chasing us. When we got to a stile leading into the next field he caught us up. I took hold of the bar of the stile for support and then kicked him as hard as I could and then I pummelled him and thumped him about as much as possible as a result of which he then ran down the hill screaming his head off. Just after we arrived

home, the boy and his mother turned up. She asked my mother "Where is that boy of yours? He has given my boy Claude a hiding and has been bullying him". My mother said, "Peter, come out here". When I went outside, the boy's mother took one look at me and then looked at her son and said to him "You mean that little squirt is the one who did it?" He said "Yes Mum" at which point they left.

We had a small holding at that time in the village of Fobbing and it was three and a half miles from the school. We had to walk to school as there were no buses. From the time I was about seven, if the cattle were in the fields when I was walking back, it was my job to let them out of one field and on opening another gate get the cattle across the road into the field opposite. On one of the occasions that I was doing this, a policeman came along. He shouted "What do you think you're doing? I said "I am just letting the cows through". He said "You can't do that" and proceeded to clip me around the ears. He asked me where my father was, I told him he was at home. We then had to walk all the way round the road to get to our place, as the constable had his bike and it couldn't go the short way across the fields, which would have been one mile instead of the two by road.

We got home just as my father was arriving. The policeman said "Oh! It's you Lou", as he obviously knew him. He said "Your boy has just let the cows cross the road down at the bottom of Green Hill. Dad said, "Yes, he would, that's his job", to which the policeman said, "Oh, is it? Well I have just clipped him round the ears for it". My father said "Well, he must have done something wrong at some time, so he probably deserved it".

The policeman was a chap called Thorogood and about twenty-five years later I met him again when he was an inspector of police at Braintree and we became good friends. There was another occasion when our paths crossed. When I was about 11 years old, one of my uncles was staying with us and he suggested that I take his car for a run and so I drove off in it and ended up going from Easthorpe to Earls Colne. While I was parked and sitting in the car at Earls Colne, this policeman came up and asked me what I was doing sitting in the driver's seat. I told him I had just been driving. He asked where the driver was, whereupon I said "I am the driver". The policeman said "Do you mean you have been driving this car?" I said "Yes". "You are not old enough to drive", he said. "Well, I've driven here from Easthorpe" I told him. He said "Well, you can't drive". He then turned to a

constable that was with him and told him to take me back home and then left. At this point the constable got into the passenger's seat. I said "Aren't you going to drive us back". He said "No, I can't drive". So I had to drive all the way back home and then my father drove the constable all the way back to Earls Colne. At the time I had just sold some rabbits that I had caught and the proceeds had to pay my uncle for the petrol that had been used, but fortunately I never got into any trouble with the police about the matter.

At the smallholding, we had many livestock including goats. All livestock was pedigree and dad showed them, winning nearly everything possible,



Mum with piglets, Jeff on bench
Chris Oliver and Sam.

which meant he received premium prices for anything he sold.

Farming was much more intensive, us children were each given chores to do according to our ages. We had many more livestock. At 10 years old, I had to milk the cows and feed them, tractor driving, at this time I learnt to fly and navigate. I learnt to plough with horses, had my first livestock, billy goat, which I took round as stud at two shillings and sixpence a time, also I dealt with the bull and the Pencheron Stallion for local journeys.

my Dog Tip

Sometimes I wanted to go shooting on my own, I would pick up my 12 bore shotgun and as silently as possible creep out the front of the house. Tip was chained at the back. Every time he would have worked his way loose and be waiting for me. At milking time, he would open the doors to the byre, then the gates to the cows, hooking them all back, the cows would be waiting. In the milking byre, he would make sure they were all in their right place and shut the doors. After milking he would open the doors and take the cows back to the correct field then close and latch the gates, never a mistake. He would not enter the house for any reason and I had to give him a bath outside,

when he pulled the bath which was under a shelter near his kennel. He changed the straw in his kennel on a regular basis and would stand by the shelter and bark lightly if I had not restocked the straw.

When ferreting or searching for wounded birds, etc. he never made a mistake. If a rabbit was in a 'seat' he would walk round it getting closer all the time until close enough to pick it up. If I was with him he liked me to flush the rabbit while he placed himself where the rabbit would run. He would cut it off until it just sat and he would pick it up. Everything he did was self-taught. Once he saw us do something, he never forgot and would do it himself if it was possible and always seemed to know when to.

We chained him at night, but he could wriggle out anytime he wanted. If a bitch was on heat he would be gone and we were left to sort things out, not always as well as him. On return it was always easy to see if he had been lucky as he had a dog grin of satisfaction, quite unmistakeable. He could turn taps on and off if he wanted a drink and lived to 21 years old. He had ways to tell what he wanted. He was a fantastic guard dog and tore the

throat out of an Alsatian that was chasing our sheep.

Our workers and anyone who were on hard times were allowed to chop down and train a hedge for winter fuel. Dad would show them how he wanted a hedge laid, which was designed to keep the laid stems to stay alive and keep the hedge strong. Then he would inspect the result and give them payment according to the quality. They had all the large wood and the small not needed for laying.

At the smallholding, I used to take bread and milk which I fed to an adder and young in a hedge. (Because I had seen it eating a mouse) my mother curious to see what I was feeding was terrified and told a gypsy who was our neighbour. He said "Don't worry, they won't bite him, no animal will ever hurt him". He wasn't entirely right as the Pencheron Stallion took great pleasure stepping on my foot at every opportunity, each time with a kind of snuffle – snort. (Don't ask me to give a demonstration). He removed his hoof immediately and I was never really harmed.

Whenever our family left the place for a while, the gypsies would look after it for us and were most

trustworthy. We children often played with theirs and also ate with them (hedgehog and other most unusual dishes all very tasty).

After eating too many apples, I suffered a very severe stomach ache. My eldest sister in charge for the day found a bottle of Syrup of Figs and gave me a dessert spoonful. The fluid, however, was Jeyes Fluid and only made me worse. The commotion I made brought a gypsy over and he ran back and brought a yellow liquid which made me vomit. When mum returned I was taken to the doctor who could find little burning, but prescribed goats milk for six months. I believe the gypsy saved me from more serious affects.

Another thing I was taught as soon as I could understand, was to be positive. This included facing and at times laughing at misfortune or injury, it doesn't take long to know which is the best medicine for a given occurrence. Used well it dispels shock. Nowadays people are told the trauma will bring on shock and they should take a break. What rubbish. The answer is to get fully occupied physically and mentally as soon as possible, get the blood flowing, feed the brain with oxygen, help it back to normality. Tell a person they are, or they look ill and they will be. Tell them they look great and they may not believe they are, but it will still give them a boost.

Also work and learning were portrayed as being good. We were encouraged to do everything to the best of our ability, to try to improve all the time, to try to perfect. If mistakes were made, we were told we would get it right if we kept trying. If we got it right we were told "well done". I still enjoy work. At no time in my life have I ever considered any task too menial for me, or out of my reach and I have concluded over the years that though one person may earn more, inherit money or rank, dress differently, speak differently, be better educated, be healthier etc. that person is in fact no more or less than any other human being. I treat all

equally. Over the years I have met Royalty, Dustmen, Prime Ministers, Lavatory Cleaners, etc. and found them all concerned generally about the same things.

My childhood followed the general pattern of the times, work, school, sport, country pursuits, such as bird nesting, which meant finding nests and watching them from being built through to the last young bird leaving and learning to fend for itself. Climbing trees, building tree houses, dens of many kinds, playing Mothers and Fathers, Doctors and Nurses, Cowboys and Indians, Cricket, Football, Rugby, Tennis, Athletics, Swimming, Boxing, Wrestling, etc.

Few people realise the freedom enjoyed by living with their family. This together with the added security and trust is unequalled by any other way of life and I was fortunate to find this out whilst I was still young.



FISHERS
FARM
FOBBING
(HOME FOR
MY EARLY YEARS)

-10-

When the Second World War started, I was still at school. I decided I would go in the RAF as soon as I could. However, when I left school I found that as a farmer's son, I was considered to be in a reserved occupation and I would not be allowed to join the RAF as I wanted. This meant that I had to change the career that I had for another. After giving it some thought, I realised the only thing I could do was to run away from home, which would absolve my father from blame. So I then had an argument with him and then packed my bags and left. My destination was a friend's parents with whom I lodged until I found a job. As soon as I started work at Shell Haven, I went to the RAF recruiting Centre at Grays and volunteered for aircrew. I gave my friend's date of birth as I could remember it easily. He was quite a bit older than me and he had to

sign on as he was eighteen. My idea was that if I signed on at the same time as a group the likelihood of a check on ages would be less than on a slack time. I then returned to Fingringhoe and worked where the wild life park is now.

My cousin Ron Polley, went into the army when he was called up. He joined the mechanised section and he was stationed somewhere in the Colchester area. His regiment had bren-gun carriers and light tanks. When they were sent out on training manoeuvres, they would often come to visit our farm. A number of their vehicles would arrive on the road outside. We had a large yard with a brick wall around it, which had double doors which were about eight foot high, this was where we normally kept the stock. They used to go on manoeuvres at the bottom of one of our fields. However, on some occasions they used to drive down to our yard, then drive any cattle or pigs in there into the back section of the yard and close the gates so the animals couldn't get out. Then they would drive all their vehicles into the front section of the yard and then come in and drink cups of tea with us until the manoeuvres were over. I don't know why they were never missed. I asked him once what he would tell his superiors and he said he would just tell them that they

had got lost if they asked, but he said they never did. Surprisingly he still managed to survive the war!

The bottom of one of our fields was used as a hand grenade practice area. They used to throw hand grenades from the tanks or bren gun carriers. They would come down with a sergeant and maybe a half dozen blokes. They would drive round and throw the grenades from the bren gun carrier, then duck down. On one occasion, one of the chaps pulled the pin out and dropped the hand grenade. The sergeant in charge shouted to the men to get out and then he fell on the grenade, because he knew that they wouldn't have time to get clear as the grenades only had four second fuses. All the chaps jumped clear and the sergeant had all of his intestines blown up. My sister, Chris, the one in the States now, gave him first aid, but of course he died. She did what she could for him while he was still alive. She was recommended for the George Cross Civilian Award.

In the same area, during the first weekend that we moved to Fingringhoe, the Germans dropped bombs across our farm. We had bombs from the top, right down to the marsh. The hand grenade range was where two parachute mines came down, one was just above the range and the other in the marsh. The parachutes came in very handy, the ropes which were

as thick as my thumb came in handy on the farm and the silk made all kinds of clothing. Everyone thought that they had been ordinary bombs because the parachutes had disappeared long before the authorities had come to have a look. The crater at the top of the field filled with water naturally and I used to teach the kids of Fingringhoe how to swim. I used to tie the reins (leash lines) that you used to have with plough horses, under the children's armpits, then I would stand on one side of the crater and then they would jump in from the other side and I would pull them over. I think nearly all of the kids in Fingringhoe learned to swim that way, at that time.

We had most of our windows smashed by the bomb blast and we had a dark house for a while because we used the black-out curtains to keep the weather out. The black-out would have been there at night anyway at that time to stop a light showing, but we had it during daylight too. One of our farm houses was taken over by the army to house a searchlight company and we think the plane was trying to hit the searchlight. Searchlights were quite visible from the air, you could always see the glass or the reflector in daylight when you flew over it. The bombs were dropped during daylight. It was a very cloudy day and the plane was

only at about five hundred feet. I believe he actually crashed into the sea near St. Osyth.

When I worked at Shell Haven, I was checking the number of empty oil drums being built in a stack on a piece-work system and I suspected there was a discrepancy in the figures and found I was right. I told the chap stacking I would have to report it. He knew it would mean he would be sacked and attacked me.

A week before I had stopped a runaway barrel of boiling pitch from striking him by turning it, in so doing I had my thumb crushed and had my nail removed in hospital. That night he bought me a pint at the "Sun" pub and had told me his father had been killed in France and he was the family earner for his mother and three young sisters.

After the fight which was in front of the offices, I felt sorry for him, so went straight to the office and gave in my notice.

Later that day, I went to the reclamation site at Mucking where my cousin was the Manager and got a job as a plant operator, driving cranes and loco's, also repairing machinery and equipment.

I still came back ^{HOME} on some weekends and I used to cycle 30 miles each way. If half a dozen barges or a ship

came in then I would have to work on a weekend and couldn't get away. When I was at the rubbish tip, on one particular day I was crane driving, I think it must have been a Bank Holiday, because everybody wanted to get away. We were all going on a charabanc trip. My cousin Bert Hipsey, the manager said I have to get six barges emptied over the weekend. Although we would have got paid time and half, nobody wanted to work because we all wanted to get away on our trip. When the barges were really full, the water level was within 6 inches of the top. So all I did was drop the grab on the edge of the furthest barge out from the jetty and the water rushed in and sank it. That then pulled the others down because they were all tied together. So there was no way anyone could work on them until the tide had gone down, so everybody cleared off home. Bert said I had done it on purpose, but I said I wasn't used to the crane yet. We all went on our trip, which was to Walton-on-the-Naze.

When we were at work, sometimes bombers would come over and you didn't know whether you would be hit or not. They did drop one quite close, but we never actually got hit, not even the tip, which was about one mile by half a mile in area.

We used to have to flood the rats out of the tip every now and then because they would dig holes in the sea wall. So we would fill all of the holes except one and then put the hose down it and pump water in, usually when the tide was up. You would then see all of the rats come out and come to the surface of the water and all the blokes would be at the bottom of the bank with sticks to hit them with.

You used to get toys and ornaments and these you would sell locally or give away. We used to have the London sewage boats come down the river. They were supposed to go out into the North Sea and release the sewage through the false bottoms in the boats. They would drop the sewage when they got just past our tip and if the tide was coming in, we used to pack up until the stuff had washed away. We would make a cup of tea.

Brown, C/M of the firm, asked me if I would move to the branch at Fingrinhoe and I accepted (my cousin probably wanted to get rid of me).

I was a plant operator there until I was called up. One incident whilst I was there was in a lunch hour.

The Manager had a boat moored against the jetty and we decided to take a trip in it. The Manager (another relative) caught us and knocked ten shillings off my pay and five shillings off the ^{other} ~~other~~ chap. We didn't do it again. He took the cash as payment for the hire of the boat.

Fingringhoe was run by Brown's brother and I went to work there so I could be near home and it was from there that I got called up to the Methodist Church in Long Wyre Street to attend the medical centre for a medical check to join the RAF. I passed the medical and then I had to go to RAF Cardington in Bedfordshire for the air crew educational test. I was there for three days for the tests. I had to have another medical as well as passing what was then the University Entrance Exam.

One of the things that got to me while I was there, was a hearing test that was conducted in one of the airship hangers. A chap would stand close to one end of the hanger and he would talk in a normal fashion and I had to write down what he was saying. The eye test was very severe too, you had to have what they considered to be perfect eyesight. There was no such thing as aircrew with glasses, as the aircraft were not heated, if

you had worn glasses you would have suffered frostbite in no time. I passed everything there and then I had to wait to be called up. When I was called up I went to St. John's Wood, to a place called Grove Court on the Marylebone Road, which were luxury flats, very posh. There were still civilians living in the flats. I was billeted with another chap in the rooms that we were in. There were two rooms, a kitchenette which we never used because we didn't have any rations or anything. The other room was a bedroom. Just opposite us were living two posh young ladies. When we were off duty, they used to take us to either the Panama Club or somewhere like that. As we were trainee airmen wearing our white flashes, we were allowed to go to the Chevrons Club in London, so sometimes they would take us there and it never cost us a cent, it was very nice.

We used to have to eat at Hamilton Court, which was named after Lady Hamilton, the friend of Lord Nelson, which was across the road and about a hundred yards away. We went to Lords Cricket Ground to have our photographs taken, to the Beaumont Street Baths for swimming to make sure we could all swim, because aircrew had to be able to swim, even if you were towed. It was alright if you were towed, but you had to do three lengths of the baths to say that you could

swim. The chap who was eventually to become my mid-upper gunner, Johnny Moore, was there and we had to tow him backwards and forwards, otherwise he just sank. We also used to go to Regents Park Zoo to do square bashing and that sort of thing. When we had a break there, they had a NAAFI van in the monkey cages and when we were in there the women who used to serve us would shout "Come on monkeys". They had moved the animals from there up to Whipsnade and some went to Bristol. They then had to move them on from Bristol when the bombing started to get bad there. This was my initiation into the RAF. We had to take turns guarding the place and also being fire pickets and you had to wear all of your back pack. I was on fire picket one night with one of the other chaps and we were standing out in the Marylebone Road, when a couple of young ladies came along, so we started chatting them up. I walked down the road with one and the other chap walked the other way with the other young lady. We came to a seat and we sat down and I thought I was getting on very well and then an RAF sergeant turned up. "What are you doing" he said. "Are you supposed to be on guard duty or fire picket?" I said "I'm on fire picket". He said "What are you doing here?" "Well, this girl was rather distressed so I brought her along here". "You had better get back", he said. He didn't put me on a

charge, but it's a wonder that he didn't. The last I saw was him chatting the young lady up.

I used to take part whenever I could in all of the sports at the Lathol Club and Grays Athletic Club. I also used to box at the Grays Club too. Before the war, Freddie Mills used to be among the people who went there. He was also a friend of my father. Both my father and my uncles used to spar with him. He joined the RAF, he was a Pilot Officer. When I moved from Brignorth to Pembrey, he was the P.T. Sports Officer there. We put on three or four exhibition bouts in the gym for the chaps because Freddie Mills was famous at that time. He was the Middle Heavyweight Champion of the World. He was a lovely chap and he knew all of our family, in fact he knew more of them than I did, I think. He knew all of the Grays ones, but I only knew some of them. We had a sewer that ran right through the Pembrey camp, which was like a small brook and it was called the Swan Pool Drain. It was nothing like a swan pool, if you had anything like a bit of a wind coming the wrong way, you knew all about it. Pembrey was where I started flying. We used to fly to Kidwelly Flats, where we used to practise air to air firing, air to sea firing. We were flying Avro Ansons and Airspeed Oxfords. None of us were allowed to even sit in the

pilot's seat in those days, we were all trainees. All of these aircraft were converted, they all had turrets in for air firing. The aircraft were stripped really, they had bench seats along the side and there would be about half a dozen of you and you would have to take turns at air to air or air to sea firing. On Kidwelly Flats, they used to have targets to fire at and the Magisters used to tow drogues for you to fire at. I did very well at that as I had been shooting all of my life and as I had been shooting birds I knew what to do and that made a big difference. We used to have competitions with a twelve bore and clay pigeons. Everybody put in threepence and the competition was a knockout. I won it every time. I even beat the instructor every time too and he got really savage because he had been used to taking the money. It wasn't until we got to Hixon that the chap who was to be my mid upper gunner said "How do you manage to hit them things each time?" He said, "I can't hit anything". I said "Just follow it through and as soon as you get past it, pull your triggers and you will hit it". So he did, and he beat me the very next time. That was about a hundred and twenty cartridges, going from being hopeless, getting one in every twenty, to beating me. I didn't mind, as we had already agreed to get together as aircrew as we got on together really.

well. We used to call him 'Jumbo' because he had a massive nose. He had been a fireman on the railway shovelling coal and his body was solid. He was the one that we used to tow in the swimming pool and he never did learn to swim. We used to have regular swimming tests and even with a Mae West, Johnny managed to sink. I never saw anybody like it. When we had dinghy drills, during which we went to the coast and had a fuselage in the water and you had to climb out of the escape hatches and as the dinghy was upside down, you had to turn it up the right way. One of us would have to hold Johnny up, while someone else turned the dinghy over so he could get in it. Everyone wanted to help him, they would almost fight to do it. Everybody wanted to help everyone else really.

There was a policeman from Bristol in our squad at Pembrey. Every morning we had to go on a ten mile run and he would tread on my heels and call me a country bumpkin or an old farmer's boy. I didn't mind the name calling, it was the treading on the heels that annoyed me. I told him that the next time he trod on my heel and pulled my slipper off, I would hit him. So he said, why didn't I try it. No sooner had I warned him than he did it again. So I just swung around and hit him in the solar plexus as hard as I could. He went

down like a stone. The Corporal P.T. Instructor who was with us, said "Right, in the gym tonight". So we went to the gym that night, but we weren't allowed to fight because he was much bigger than me. He was in the heavyweight and I wasn't. I argued and eventually they called in Freddie Mills. He said "Do you really want to fight him?" I said, "Yes. You know my Dad, you have sparred with him". He said "Who are you then?" I said "My name is Potter". "Oh! From Grays?" He asked. I said "Well, from Stanford-le-Hope". He asked if I was anything like my Dad, I told him I was OK. He then told me I could fight him, so I did and gave him a good thrashing. He never trod on my heels again. That was the only trouble I ever had in the RAF like that. I was good at all sports. I used to play rugby, football, cricket, whatever came up. I was also a very good sprinter, but I wasn't so good at long distance running. The rest of my RAF Service is already recorded.

Farmers helped one another out of necessity, sharing equipment and labour.

When I was on leave the next door farmer, Jim McNair asked me to break in a mare for riding, at three years old she was fully grown, cross between a Cleveland and a Clydesdale, standing at 18 hands. There was no

halter to fit her, so I made one up, but it had no bit, no saddle either so I rode bareback. McNair gave me a hoist and all was quiet. The gate was opened and Queenie walked across the road to the field opposite.

A few days earlier, manure had been placed in heaps at a distance apart for them to be spread by hand. In those days there were no mechanical muck spreaders. Just as we entered the field, a car came past and tooted his horn, hand operated and extremely strident. Queenie took off like a whirlwind and then feeling me moving to keep my balance on her back, started to buck round and round, rearing and doing her best to unseat me. After two or three minutes, she gave up and started running up the field straight for a row of muck heaps. She jumped the first one and immediately had to hunch to jump the next as they were about 1 ½ strides apart and so we continued heap after heap for 300 yards to the top of the field, where she turned and ran down the next row.

On the way up the first row, I was able to balance OK, but when she turned and jumped I was slightly unbalanced and as we proceeded down, at every heap I slid a little bit forward and by the end of the row, I was sitting on her neck with my legs crossed behind her head and holding onto her ears. She ran straight

across the road and cleared the five barred gate into the cow yard with ease and stopped just short of McNair, who had collapsed with laughter and was sitting in cow manure quite helpless. My wife Janet's mother was also helpless with laughter, but did not sit down. How I managed to stay on I do not know and how Queenie jumped the gate with me at the back of her head was incredible.

Childhood

At one farm we moved to in the 1930's, the lavatory was outside and had seven seats, all different sizes to accommodate all ages. On her first visit my mother bolted the door and sat down, then suddenly a door opened at the other side of the building and a workman, lowering his trousers, sat down, saying "Morning Missus" and proceeded to talk about the weather and farm trivia. Mum sat petrified until he left. She always made sure both doors were bolted afterwards.

Childhood

Many of the tasks were gradually lost to machinery, pea picking, potato and bean picking all by hand, the Binder was replaced by the Combine, which also saw the demise of the Thrashing Tackle and Stacks.

All the above were social occasions, almost on a par with the local fete, but much more intimate. To a great extent fruit picking has gone the same way.

The farm to-day is not the social meeting place it was. Farm Shops are mainly impersonal.

The conviviality, gossiping, laughter and jokes, with the occasional sharp tongue are rarely to be found today.

Sadly, even at meetings today, people are becoming afraid to voice their true opinions due to foolish laws which prevent free speech.

One of the bright spots of the advance of machines is the cutting of kale for cattle in winter. On a frosty day the tall plant would have multiple pockets of ice, which at every stroke of the knife, would fly up and make a beeline for the neck and nothing could stop the ice and water running down the neck and body, ugh!

A source of income for us kids was our tree house on the edge of one of the woods built in the rooftops of a circle of Holly trees, it overlooked a lovely secluded glade, much used by courting couples. We would take careful note where they settled and once they were gone we would search the grass and were often rewarded with coins etc. that had fallen out of pockets. One further benefit was our education increased in leaps and bounds, or should it be "Ups and Downs".

Gleaning by the villagers has also disappeared. After harvesting they would collect any corn left in the fields, which they fed to chickens etc. Afterwards they would all gather for a harvest supper which we provided for them.

Cleaning ditches and digging furrows to allow water to drain from a field seem to be a thing of the past. Roadside ditches and grips dug through verges to allow water standing on the road to drain to the ditch have been allowed to fill in and the water standing on the road soaks through cracks and softens the underlay, causing further cracking of the surface. The village roadman who kept all in good order has been replaced by systems and machinery accompanied by large numbers of men costing vastly more by comparison and doing an unbelievable inferior job. The ideas that abound today are devoid of common sense. Theory cannot be of use unless it is used in conjunction with proven experience. The balance of more non-productive staff than productive is a sure way to bankruptcy of both ideas and finances.