

FOREWORD

Here I am in my 81st year putting some of my recollections to paper, not for any reward, just for my own satisfaction. This started last year when our 21 year old American born granddaughter, Lindsey, who, along with Emily her 19 year old sister, is studying at Appellation University in Boone North Carolina.

Lindsey sent an E-mail to us asking for information on living through World War 2, food rationing, bombing, evacuees, POW's, behaviour when war ended and the recovery of the country after the event.

As I was the one with the clearer recollection, Mary was born only days before the war was declared, I took on the task.

Once I started I really began to enjoy it and was pleased with what I eventually sent to Lindsey. She had wanted this for a project she was doing for the school she was training at. I decided to cover a few more years although I may find it hard to but into words.

As a simple son of a Suffolk farmer, my official schooling ended at the ripe old age of 14, with the sum total of zero degrees, diplomas or certificates, but with living my life, my love of books and a fair amount of travelling, I think I have accumulated a fair amount of information in my head, some of it useful, a lot not so. The trouble now it seems, sometimes, it does not want to come out when I need it.

About our love of travelling, Mary and I have been to four, of the five, home countries, not Northern Island, also eleven European countries, and Malta, Singapore and Canada and, as we have half of our family in USA, we have been there 14 times visiting 20 different states, so you never seem to stop gathering more information, useful or not.

CHAPTER ONE – WHERE I CAME FROM

My father, John William Turner, was one of five children born to John and Mary Turner, two boys and three girls. John and Mary had married in 1883, John died in 1905 as a result of an accident at work, leaving Granny Turner to bring up 5 young children, they were all born at Chamberlain's Buildings Farm, between Eriswell and Icklingham, later moving to Little Eriswell into a little cottage 100 yards from Lord's Walk roundabout, near the present sewerage works.

They were of good stock as Emily lived to be 103, Ada to 99, Ethel to 97, Hilton (known as Jim) to 93 and John, my father, to 90.

My mother Ethel Tuffs was 1 of 8 children born to Elijah and Hannah Tuffs at 11 Eriswell Road, Lakenheath in the centre cottage of a row of three. The children were William, Peter, and Jack, who as a married man with a wife and 2 children was killed in France in 1917. His widow, Ada, in later years married Jack's brother Ernest (Tom), who was twin to Ethel, my mother. There was another son Arthur and 2 daughters, Eliza and Hannah. No 11 is still there in the form of one private house and a Pre-school for children up to five years, instead of a row of three.

While the Turner family was still living at Chamberlains Farm, as father told me in his later years, one weekend he and a friend heard on the grapevine that some gentleman was going to drive a car along the Norwich turnpike (now the A11) from Barton Mills to Thetford, so they walked to this road which in those days was just a gravelled road used by horse transport, just to see this motor car go by.

Chamberlain's Farm was one of 7 or 8 that formed the large estate of Lord Iveagh of the Guinness family. The estate consisted of Little Eriswell, Eriswell, Wangford, Elveden, most of Icklingham and right up, to Lakenheath Village. After leaving Eriswell School in 1910 my Father worked on the estate and was based at Hall Hill Farm on the Lakenheath to Eriswell road near Eriswell Barns Auction Rooms. During this time he must have met my mother who was in service at Penson's Farm between Lakenheath and Hall Hill Farm.

In August 1914 the Great War started and my 18 year old father was one of thousands who quickly answered Lord Kitchener's call to volunteer to do their duty and serve the King.

CHAPTER TWO 1914 – 1919 FATHER'S WAR

So father went off to war like hundreds and thousands of others not realising what terrible events awaited them. He went to Brandon to sign up later going to Bury St Edmunds with hundreds of others. He was sent in a group of 400 Suffolk men to Kingston upon Thames in Surrey where they, with 600 others, were formed into the Eighth Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment, to go down in history as 8th East Surreys.

With all these thousands of men there was utter chaos with not enough accommodations, uniforms or equipment. Men found themselves up to a month after joining up still wearing their own civilian clothes and living in tents in muddy fields. Things gradually got sorted out and their training to become soldiers began. They trained in various places in Essex, Suffolk and on Salisbury Plain. The 8th East Surreys along with 7th Royal West Kents, 7th Buffs and 7th Queens became the 4000 strong 55th Brigade who with 53rd and 54th brigades formed the 18th (Eastern) Division of the British Army. By the end of 1917 the 18th were classed as one of the very best divisions the prize for which was to be given some of the dirtiest and hardest fighting. In Father's brigade each of the four battalions had between 1200 and 1000 killed along with thousands of others wounded, gassed and maimed during the war.

In July 1915 they were paraded and inspected by King George 5th on Salisbury Plain when he said `Well done lads, you are now smart enough to go to France and fight` or words to that effect.

They entrained to Folkestone and arrived in Boulogne on 15 July. They marched off North towards the war on the first of scores of marches through France and Belgium during the next three and a half years.

In August the 8th Surrey's were slowly introduced to the front line trenches sharing them with other battalions that had been in France longer. In a short time they were able to take over a section of the front themselves, they would have, perhaps, ten days in the line then a week in secondary trenches followed by a week's rest behind the lines. Rest meant cleaning equipment carrying up supplies, road making and anything else that needed doing. Things were reasonably quiet at the time but soon they began to have men killed and wounded, manly from shelling. Father told me that his best mate was killed the first time they went into the line. This lifestyle carried through the winter of 1915/16 with terrible mud everywhere.

In the spring they rehearsed an attack on some mystery trenches on some mystery front in some mystery attack planned for the future. This turned out to be what was later known as the `Battle of the Somme` on 1st July 1916. At 7.30am that day 100,000 British attacked across no-mans land, climbing out of the trenches, going over the top as it was known.

British guns had been pounding the German trenches non-stop for a week. The men had been told not to hurry but walk steadily forward because none of the Germans in front of them could have survived all this shelling. Unfortunately a great many had and our soldiers walked into a storm of machine gun fire. They were mown down in hundreds. For years after, when 1st July was commemorated father would say `This was the day that we lost 60,000 men before dinner. This was true almost 20,000 dead and the rest wounded and missing. I think father was one of the wounded, he never confirmed this but I know he was wounded at least four times by various bullets and shrapnel.

There was a letter at home for years from the War Office informing Granny Turner that her son John had been wounded and was in hospital. I have, for a long time, been annoyed with myself for not noting that date of this letter because I could have worked out where they were fighting when he was injured that particular time. Years later he decided to have a clear out and he destroyed all of his old army papers.

He was only slightly hurt, he was very lucky; you had to be to have survived over three years in the trenches in the Great War. The Battle of the Somme lasted from 1st July to the middle of November and only eased off then because of the terrible conditions. Trenches were knee deep in mud; the surrounding land was so cut up and muddy so nothing could be moved. The four month battle gained 4 to 6 miles on a front of about 20 miles at a cost of 400,000 British, 200,000 French and 600,000 German casualties. This land, and more besides, was lost in March 1918 in about three days.

After spending the winter of 16/17 in the mud of the Somme, the 8th Surrey's, with father, moved to Ypres in Belgium, taking part in June and July in the Battle of the Passchendale where the mud and death toll was as bad, if not worse, than the Somme. The winter of 17/18 was spent in terrible conditions in Belgium but in Feb 1918 they were moved back to France to an area that was quiet and virtually untouched as yet, by the war. The situation did not last long because the German army decided to make one last big attack to try to win the war. They attacked on the morning of 21 March with thousands of troops at a point left of where father's brigade was in the line. Father was again very lucky as the 8th East Surrey's were about two miles back in reserve. The 7th Buffs and 7th Queens suffered heavy losses. After a confused fighting retreat the 55th brigade found themselves back where they were in 1916 and had to start all over again. Father described this incident in six words, `The day the Jerries broke through`. I do know that father came home on leave at least once because he did tell me that he walked home to Little Eriswell from Lakenheath station wearing his mud caked uniform and that he undressed in the outhouse because he was `lousy as a cuckoo` as they used to describe their condition. He also at onetime had gone on a Lewis Machine Gun course and for the rest of the war he served as a corporal in charge of a four or five man Lewis gun crew. His Lewis gun proficiency certificate was one of the papers he destroyed.

After about a month back at their 1916 starting point they slowly started to advance again as the German army was exhausted and was described as having `shot their bolt although they may not have realised this. The allies, including the late coming Americans, were heading slowly to victory. There was still a great deal of hard fighting to be done and many men were to be killed and wounded. After each spell of one to two weeks in action, battalions would have a rest and then catch up with the action again as the fighting slowly moved north. In their rest period it was usual to announce the names of Officers and men who had been awarded medals in the previous fighting. In the `History of the East Surrey Regt`, a copy of which I acquired, it states that father, along with ten other soldiers had been awarded the Military Medal. That was about 20 Sept 1918 when the village of Ronssoy was captured. The medal inscribed with his name and `For Bravery in the Field`, along with his campaign medals, are among my most treasured possessions.

The armistice ended the war in November 1918; father had survived but still had to stay in France to help `Clear up the Battlefields` whatever that entailed. The men slowly returned home in batches and it was well into 1919 before father came back to Eriswell. I do know that only a few of the original 1000 that started out in Kingston in 1914 served right through the war and that father was one of them.

He used to say that only he and one other of 'his lot' returned at the end. I am not sure if 'his lot' meant the 400 Suffolk men or whether he meant the whole original 1000.

So after four and a half years it was back to work and start to earn a living again, that is if you had a job, and to try to forget the terrible things you had seen. There were no Counsellors in those days. P.S. I have in my possession a small booklet titled 'The Short History of the 55th Brigade 1917-1918' it was hurriedly printed after the Armistice and given to every man when he left the Battalion. In it, it refers to the first two or three days of July 1916, probably the most costly three days in the history of the British Army, where it says that 'Brilliant work was done by all units' even though all units had 60% casualties and after four or five days rest and receiving replacements they were again 'ready for a fight'.

Father brought home a few souvenirs; he had his old flat peaked army hat, a German helmet with a spike on top, called a picklehauber I think, a bayonet and for the rest of his life he wore a pocket watch in his waistcoat that was French. When asked about it he said that he had got it from a German prisoner, whether it was an exchange for a cigarette, a piece of bread or at the point of a bayonet I'm not sure, but knowing father it was more likely one of the former. Except for the pocket watch the other souvenirs vanished after I left home.

CHAPTER THREE – LITTLE ERISWELL.

Father was back in Little Eriswell after over four years in the army having to get on with his life, a much wiser man. His sisters, in later years, said he was much changed which was not surprising. As a young man he was a member of Eriswell Church choir but, when he returned home, the only time he would go to church was for weddings or funerals.

It was in 1919 that father resumed his courtship of the Lakenheath girl, Ethel Tuffs and at Christmas that year they were married. They started their married life living at 10 Eriswell Road with Ethel's father Elijah whose wife Hannah had died in 1916, one year before her son Jack was killed in the war. Father and Mother stayed there a short time before being given a tied cottage in Little Eriswell. The cottage is still standing but, having been unoccupied for many years is now dilapidated with bricked up windows and overgrown garden. It is the centre cottage in a row of three standing end on to the road next to the thatched house just to the north of Lord's Walk roundabout.

After leaving work on Lord Iveagh's estate in 1914 father was now in 1919 starting over again. He worked as a horseman, working heavy horses based at Hall Hill Farm, now Eriswell Barns Auctions, on the surrounding land but sometimes on some of the other estate farms.

At the cottage their first child, Jackie, was born in 1920. Sadly, he never enjoyed the best of health, I suppose in those days he would have been known as a sickly child. He died when he was about five years old, in 1925. In the meantime my brother Ernest was born in 1922. He says; in his eighty eighth year he can just remember playing with poor Jackie. I came along a few years later in October 1929. My sister Mary was born two years later in 1931. Sometimes now, I say that I was born on 7th October 1929 and Wall Street in New York crashed starting the world depression which lasted more or less until the Second World War began. It hugely affected world finances, industry and agriculture. When I say this my wife says 'whatever is the connection' I tell her the depression was the reason that we went to live at Undley Hall. I think that my mother was reasonably happy with her lot at Little Eriswell but, although losing her first born must have affected her. Granny Turner was just up the road and most of my parent's relatives lived Eriswell or Lakenheath within walking distance. Walking was the main way of getting around in those days.

Sister Mary was born in September 1931 when around the New Year father dropped what must have been a bombshell by announcing that he was going to rent a Council smallholding at Undley Hall.

CHAPTER FOUR - UNDLEY HALL

In January 1932 the Turner family, Father, Mother, Ernie 9, Ken 2 and Mary 4 months, moved to Undley Hall. There is the connection with the Wall Street Crash as, because of the depression, farming was in the doldrums and farmers were going bankrupt left right and centre. The smallholding at Undley was vacant because the previous tenant, a certain Mr Cook, had gone bankrupt and thrown in the towel. One of Mother's brothers, Arthur, told father that he could easily go the same way. Most of Undley had been one large farm when, in the mid twenties, it had been bought by West Suffolk County Council, dividing it into 12 smallholdings. The council built 5 or 6 new houses, split the old farmhouse, known as Undley Hall, into three homes to create a community consisting of 8 houses, the Lodge and the Hall. Some of the houses were semi detached so at the time we arrived there were sixteen families. On the top road, the Lakenheath to Beck Row road stood the Lodge and two houses. Down the Lane which was not a made up road, was one house on the left side and four more spaced out on the right side. At the bottom stood the Hall where we lived in the part set back from the lane which branched right and left with one house on each spur. The lane was almost half a mile long, the top third was not too bad, the second third not so good, the last section where it narrowed because of a cart shed that protruded out from the main farm buildings, in winter months, was absolutely awful. The last 80 yards and along the front of the Hall would very often be a sea of mud. There would be tracks cut by farm carts up to a foot deep and full of water.

Father's holding consisted of a set of buildings, a barn, stables, cart sheds, two pig sties, one small enclosed yard set in a large stack yard, or rick yard. Across the small yard outside the back door was the privy, also the dairy which, years before had been used as a dairy. It was complete with 3ft deep slate shelves along one wall. We never used it for that purpose but as a store for pig meal, bikes and all manner of things.

In the front adjoining the lane was a garden part of which was an orchard with very old fruit trees. At the back of the buildings was a small grass meadow which was handy for the house cows and cart horses. On one side of the meadow was a row of wild plum trees, marabellas, every tree a different type, some sweet, some sour, but they all made beautiful jam. With the holding was another grass meadow about a quarter of a mile away and about twenty five acres of arable land some of which was one and a half miles away. Later on he took another field up on the top road.

Although the Hall was only just over two miles from Lakenheath, I know that Mother felt very isolated there. She had a cycle with a basket type carrier on the back. I suppose this was mainly for transporting Mary on her rare trips to Lakenheath, muddy road permitting. No doubt I was the passenger sometimes.

Our part of the Hall was very old, up to 250 years. It comprised of two large rooms, a large entrance hall and a lean to kitchen/scullery with an attached larder and coal shed. It was extremely cold and sparsely furnished. In the kitchen which had a concrete floor with 3 or 4 rag pegged rugs, a large beam from wall to wall and large very old nails in the walls, handy for hats. There was a bricked in copper with a fire hole at the bottom and the very important cooking range. It had a covered top to the fire and an oven to the side. I say it was important because, apart from cooking, it was the only heating we had in that large house. There were fireplaces in both of the other rooms but one was never used and the other only occasionally. We mainly used the kitchen downstairs, we ate and relaxed there as it was the warmest place in the house, the room next to the kitchen we only walked through to the front door or to the stairs to the upper floor. Two bedrooms were directly off the landing and the other two were down three steps along a passage although only two were used as bedrooms as the others were used as storerooms for odds and ends. I can remember apples being laid out on the floor. One of my first recollections of the hall was coming down those large stairs, sitting on my bottom and hitching down one step at a time. Another incident, I recall, was the thrashing machine turned up on its yearly visit to thrash all the many corn stacks in the small holding rickyards.

It didn't matter which yard they went to first, we kids were there to watch. I was mixing with the men one rest break when I was asked if I had a cold as I was most likely showing the obvious signs about the nose area and I replied that I had two colds. I was asked how that was and said that Mother had said 'Have you got another cold'. I thought having recently had a cold; another one naturally added up to two. I was five or six at the time.

I vaguely remember father's brother, Uncle Jim and his wife Lillian and sons Don Jack and Brian stayed with us for a short time. Uncle Jim his wife and eldest son Don had gone to Canada to try life there. They were in Ontario where Uncle Jim found work on farms but, with the very cold long winters, farmers tended to lay off workers so they found it very hard to earn a decent living. They stuck it for a few years because two more sons were born out there but eventually they gave in and came back home with nowhere to live and no money. They stayed at Undley with us for a while also some time in Brandon with Lillian's relatives until they returned to Eriswell and the cottage we had left a few years before. Uncle Jim lived and worked on the Elveden estate for the rest of his life.

Another painful experience was at harvest time on year when father had started cutting wheat on the field just next to the meadow at the back of the house. Father had two horses pulling a binder and I with one or two of the other children were happily following about ten feet behind the binder when its drive wheel went over a large bees nest. Hundreds of bees swarmed out of this hole and took out their revenge on us kids. I was absolutely covered with stinging bees; father jumped down took off his waistcoat and tried to knock them off me. We ran home from halfway down the field, through the gate across the meadow, through another gate and round to the house. Bees chased us all the way, still stinging us as we ran. I don't know how many stings I received, it must have been many and only wearing a small shirt and short trousers no area was spared. Mother treated me by dabbing me all over with bluebag which was used on wash days to make the whites whiter. It was roughly a one inch cube of brilliant blue minerals of some sort. I must have looked like an ancient brit covered in woad. It was supposed to be a good remedy for stings.

I remember visiting various aunts and uncles down in Lakenheath village once with mother. We also went to Mr Henry Flatt's who mother was friendly with and, on walking past St Mary's Church for the first time I looked up to the top of the tower and thought I could see four men up there. 75 years later they are still there. I started school sometime in 1935 and, as school was over two miles away and I could not yet ride a bike, brother Ernie fell in for the job of getting me there. He had a carrier on the back of his bike and that was how I travelled, hard work for Ernie and a sore bottom for me. As Ernie was seven years older than me, when he was fourteen and finished school, I was only seven and for sometime after Ernie had to make two trips a day taking me in the morning and fetching me home in the afternoon. Later on Father bought me a bike so when I could ride it I made my own way there. The bike was a little big for me and father had to put blocks on the pedals so I could reach them I think from what I remember Ernie had a trying time teaching me to ride.

CHAPTER FIVE - OUR LOSS

Some time in the autumn or winter 1935/6 I have a vision of my mother in the kitchen sitting on one of our wooden high-backed armchairs being very sick with an enamel bucket in front of her. Later in life I was to realise the cause of this sickness. Then it must have been the beginning of April 1936 I remember a little old lady by the name of Mrs Lomax visiting my mother who was upstairs ill in bed. The next memory I have, I don't know if it was the same day, I was in the kitchen looking out of the front window watching two men carrying my mother on a stretcher down the garden to a waiting ambulance. I was six years old and didn't recognise the significance of this. I never saw Mother again.

There were only two other boys living close to us both about three years older than me. One was Len Morley who lived next door, in the centre section of the Hall. The other was Eric Tuffs, no relation to my mother, who lived half way down the Hall Lane. I spent a fair amount of free time with one or the other; not very often would there be a threesome. I am not sure if it was the day Mother went to hospital but Ernie and I, where was Mary? were at Eric's house being seen after by his parents, Maud and Gerald. It was in the evening when we heard a motorcycle go past. Aunt Maud said that it was George Lomax taking Father to Bury hospital to see mother. I think I might have slept there a couple of nights then I remember next staying at 11 Eriswell Road, Granddad Elijah's house though he had died by that time as had my other grandparents, all before I was born. No 10 was now the home of mother's youngest brother Arthur, his wife Beatrice and my two cousins. I don't know how long I stayed there but I remember going to the Baptist Sunday school on one, or two, Sundays. One day I and my cousins Gordon & Arthur were across the road playing with some school mates on the football pitch, now the playing field, when one of the boys came up to me and said ' your mother has died, hasn't she' That was how I found out that Ernie, Mary and myself were motherless. Mother and Father were both 39 years old.

Father was never described as a 'happy go lucky' person but that is not surprising considering he had survived those years in the trenches of France & Belgium then, a few years later took on a smallholding with all the animals to see after seven days a week, only to be left a widower, with three young children, at the age of forty. Ernie and I now found ourselves sleeping in the main bedroom alongside our father instead of in our former bedroom. Mary, meanwhile, had gone to Eriswell to be brought up by father's sister Ethel and her husband Percy Mendham. They had two daughters, Ivy and Jean. Mary has no recollection of travelling to Eriswell but years later Aunt Ethel told her that the Estate manager had taken Auntie to Undley, in his car, to collect Mary from Maud Tuffs. Cars were few and far between in those days. She also told her that mother hated Undley with all the mud and the isolation and Auntie wasn't the only person to say that.

I should mention that muddy Undley Lane was made up to a hard road surface with tar and gravel sometime between 1936 and 1939, which made a vast difference especially in winter time. I cannot pin down the actual date as there is no one left to ask. Mary at the time was four years old and stayed there for ten years going to school in Eriswell and later Mildenhall until she was fourteen

Life at Undley Hall gradually began to get into some sort of order after this life changing event. Mother's earlier sickness, I found out years later, was caused by pregnancy as she died from complications during childbirth, the baby also died and, to this day, we do not know whether it was male or female. We certainly never received any information from father. The subject was simply taboo; sometimes he would say something like 'your mother used to say this or that' or ' do this or that' and that was as far as it went.

Ernie would take me to school, when I came out in the afternoon; I would walk down to my Uncle John's. He had lose his wife Eliza, my mother's sister to cancer. They had two daughters and one son. Dot and Florrie had been perfectly healthy until their late teens when they both fell ill (possibly polio) and were left crippled. They could not stand or walk without help and I remember poor Uncle John and his little housekeeper, Annie Holden, struggling to get them down the narrow stairs to their armchairs. Arthur (Sonny), his son, worked in one of the butchers shops. Sadly, he was soon to go off to war and did not return home having died from his wounds received in the defence of Singapore in 1942. So sadly Uncle John was another who had a very difficult life and he was such a lovely man. He lived in a semidetached cottage that stood where the former Lakenheath Service Station now stands. In fact at least eight, possibly nine, cottages were demolished to make room for the garage, surgery and car park. Uncle John was a widower and next door, in the other half, lived Aunt Ada Tuffs, a widow, with three of her five children. She was our aunt because she had married mother's brother Jack, they had two children but he was killed in France in 1917. Later she married her brother in law Tom who was mother's twin. They had three children but Tom also died early, I think from TB. Wasn't life hard in those days?

I would come out of school call on Uncle John and pick up the Daily Mail newspaper as no newspapers were delivered to Undley. Over seventy years later I still read the Daily Mail. I would then very often sit on the brick steps outside waiting for Ernie to turn up with my transport home.

At this time, the late thirties, the international situation was heating up in Europe, not that I knew or understood any of it. Mussolini of Italy and General Franco of Spain were throwing their weight around and Adolf Hitler was about to start doing the same. One day I was sitting on these steps with one of Aunt Ada's sons, cousin Sammy, who taught me the currant ditty of the day. It went like this: - Come to Abyssinia, will you come; Bring your own ammunition and a gun; Mussolini will be there shooting peanuts in the air; Come to Abyssinia will you come. There was a second rude verse, mentioning a bayonet but I have forgotten that.

When I finally mastered my bike I made my own way to school, it was always head wind riding home along Undley road and early on I was not too sure of my way around Lakenheath so one day some friends took me along the Back Street to Wings Road. They knew my old bike had dodgy brakes so that when turned down towards the Post Office we gathered up speed. Not expecting to stop at the bottom, I didn't, straight across the High Street nearly skinning my knuckles on the Bank wall. A big laugh for them, just as well traffic was not like it is today or I would not be writing this.

One night Father took Ernie and I for an evening with the Lomax family just up the lane, I suppose he wanted to discuss something about farming because usually we didn't do social visits. I have fixed the date about November 1936, a month or two after Mother had died, and later in the evening I heard them discussing the burning down of Crystal Palace in London. I don't know if the Lomax's had a radio or whether they had read about it but, when we walked home it was very dark although in the north the sky was really lit up by these moving red lights. I asked Father if it was from the Crystal Palace fire but he said that it was not but it was the Northern Lights. That is the only time in my life that I have seen them.

CHAPTER SIX - GROWING UP

Some of the earliest little jobs I had to do on getting home from school was to make sure the coal scuttle was full and enough kindling was ready to light the fire the following morning, the paraffin lamp was full, our only lighting apart from candles, to lay the table for tea, which did not take long, put on the tablecloth, teapot, cups, plates, cutlery, bread and butter, cheese and home made jam and not much else. I used to like collecting the hens eggs that were found all around the stack yard and buildings as the hens were not enclosed and laid eggs everywhere, in the straw stack, in the cow and horse mangers, underneath the mangers, the cart sheds even in the dense patch of stinging nettles in the stockyard where it was hard to find them. If not found a hen would emerge some time later proudly leading ten or twelve baby chicks. I would sometimes be told to get the wheelbarrow and go to the usual reek of mangolds which were large roots grown and ground up into long chips to be fed to the horses and cattle. My job was to clean off all the soil and roots. Another seasonal job was to scare the rooks from the newly drilled wheat and barley also, another job, was charlock pulling. This was walking through these same wheat and barley fields when it was knee high. Charlock was a mustard type plant with a yellow flower, very prolific if left to seed which would survive in the soil for years. These plants had to be pulled up and carried off the field. Some farmers did not bother but father was very fussy about this. Strangely years later when weed killers began to be used, charlock was one of the easiest weeds to kill. One job I was not too keen on was going to the barn with father; this would be after tea by the light of a hurricane lamp, to hold the sacks for him to shovel the various feeds into individual lots for the horses and cows. This was to save time in the morning. The foods were mixed up on the barn floor, usually of chaff or chopped straw, meal and chopped mangolds. I was very often told to hold these sacks properly but I think I was more concerned about the rats that were scampering about in the roof timbers above my head.

Moving cattle and horses was another job; when I was more experienced I would have to take one, sometimes two, horses round the corner to the other meadow. They would be on just rope halters with my head reaching just about up to their noses but they were gentle giants and I loved them. I remember one particular time I was leading Kit, a lovely bay horse, and must have stopped for some reason for I suddenly found my little foot underneath one of Kit's. Reaching up I tried to push her away, her head went but her feet stayed still, she was quite unconcerned.

On the domestic side, Ernie was getting to be a half tidy cook, nothing fancy but he could make a decent Yorkshire pudding, which seems to be beyond the capabilities of some housewives, roast a joint of meat, vegetables, eggs and bacon, no problem. Father used to employ a lady by the name of Lizzie Palfrey to do seasonal work on the farm. She would come on Saturday morning to do some cleaning and cook the Saturday midday meal. She also did some washing for us. She was a hard working lady but everyone seemed to work hard in those days

On Sundays, with Mary still living in Eriswell with Aunt Ethel, almost every week we would cycle there to see her. Aunt would cook a lovely Sunday dinner; I would cycle up there first with our faithful collie dog, Bob, running beside me. Bob travelled to Eriswell so often that on one or two occasions when father had gone to Bury on the weekly bus, he went there on his own cross-country only to be told by Aunt Ethel we were not there. He would then make his own way home. Father and Ernie would cycle to Eriswell later then me as they had to feed all the animals first.

In those days, with so many animals around, every farm had green meadows. At Undley, they were all adjoining surrounded by belts of trees which were inhabited by scores of rabbits. I would often take Bob and spend a couple of hours stalking amongst these trees hoping Bob would catch a rabbit for dinner although I don't remember carrying many home.

CHAPTER SEVEN – WAR

In 1938 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tried his best to stop us from being drawn into war, he managed to delay this for about a year, but in the long run, he failed.

As war was almost certain, the government of the day was issuing all sorts of rules and regulations and information on digging air raid shelters, food rationing, black out precautions, plans to evacuate children from cities to countryside for their safety. Father decided to buy our first radio. Up until then our in-house entertainment consisted of a windup gramophone and about twenty records. One that I remember was 'Down on Misery Farm' stating that the hens didn't lay and you can't make hay, down on Misery Farm, which in our early days seemed quite appropriate. As we had no electricity it was laid on, along with mains water, only after I had married and left home in 1959, the radio was powered by a dry battery and an acid/lead accumulator. This accumulator had to be recharged weekly but with too much use it would run down in five days, result, no radio for two days. They were recharged in Lakenheath, a boy had a large tray on the front of his bike and he would exchange a full one for the run down one, cost about 5p.

During this worrying time with the threat of war hanging over us, a good thing did happen. Twenty five miles from Undley Hall in Stowmarket, on 29th August 1939, twin girls, Mary and Susan were born to Mr & Mrs Tom Sumner. Sadly Susan died shortly after but sixteen years later Mary and my paths would cross. More of this later.

There had been much talk about evacuees and on Saturday 2nd September 1939, four weeks before my 10th birthday, some arrived in Undley. There were mothers with children, some only toddlers. I don't know how many but only five or six of the houses ended up with evacuees. We did and a confirmed bachelor also had a mother and children. We, an all male household had a Jewish lady, Mrs Markovitch and her two daughters. We boys could not make out why we were particularly chosen but, when we thought about it, it must have been because Bertie Parnell and us had empty rooms. We were very uncomfortable about it and these people from the poor areas of Tottenham were like fish out of water. On the Sunday morning, 3rd Sept, we local kids and some of the London kids got together and went for a walk and we were showing them cows chickens and other things that they had never seen before. On the way back home one of our neighbours came out of her house and told us that war had been declared.

Our evacuees did not stay long as they were not happy either, it may seem cruel but we were not sorry to see them go. Some of the London families settled in well and stayed for the rest of the war.

We did not see drastic changes at first but then came ration books. We were issued with gas masks to be carried to school or wherever we went. The men folk set about conforming to blackout regulations. Father made shutters to fit on the outside of our windows, with frames of light wood covered in roofing felt. They fitted into blocks tacked to the window frames. They were easy and quick to fit and I got the job. Upstairs we had to use blinds. Outside the hall, in one of the neighbours' gardens, the men folk dug a large dugout roofed in tree trunks, corrugated iron and earth. It was big enough to shelter twenty people. As they were all First World War veterans they knew what they were doing. Thankfully it was not used much.

Food rationing soon came into force; tea, sugar, meat, butter and cheese and other essentials, even eggs. Living on a farm we were very lucky because we were always able to get eggs, a wild rabbit or pheasant or one of the few cockerels running around the farmyard. We had milk from the house cow and were sometimes able to get half a pound of homemade butter as a great deal of bartering went on as well as a bit of black marketing. We never went short of home grown vegetables and later during the war we were allowed to slaughter one or two pigs per year. So we had a fat pig to eat during the year so when it was slaughtered several neighbours would receive a joint of fresh pork and a portion of pigs fry i.e. liver, heart and other edible parts, which were delicious. These exchanges happened throughout the year as the neighbours killed one of theirs. So there was very often fresh pork around, no refrigeration in the kitchen in those days, after enough joints were cut, one for us, one for each participating neighbour, the rest would go into two very large earthenware pots, two feet high, to be salted, the sides, cheeks and hams went into a large lined tray where they were cured in a solution of vinegar, salt and brown sugar, or black treacle, if Mr Coe, our baker, could supply it. No doubt a small joint helped! Much work was involved, father seemed to be every night on his knees in the larder rubbing in with his hands the curing potion and turning it every day. When cured it went to Mr. Smith in Lakenheath to be smoked over oak chips/sawdust in his little smokehouse. Mr Smith was our local blacksmith, cum vet, pig killer, a Jack of All Trades. He possessed a large wooden tub and a large low table which would go on his rounds with him, from farm to farm, for pig slaughter. They would shoot the poor pig which was then hung up, its throat cut and blood drained. When this was going on at the farm, I was usually absent; I would turn up when it was in this large tub to have scolding water poured over it and the bristles scraped off. I did not mind joining in this. The carcass was then put on the wooden table to be dissected.

We lived fairly well in the country, during the wartime rationing which actually went on after the war until the early fifties. We never went hungry although it was totally different on the towns and cities as people there could not get hardly any extras and had to make do with their meagre rations.

In the late thirties, before the war, a fair number of young men, none from Undley, had joined the local Territorial Army units, Norfolk's, Suffolk's and Cambridgeshire's, cousin Sonny Hensby among them. At the outbreak of the war they were the first to be mobilized. They along with other battalions were formed into the 18th Eastern Division of the British Army. They trained in various places in the country until October 1941 when they were given embarkation leave before going somewhere overseas and Sonny cycled up to say Cheerio; we were not to see him again. They sailed from Liverpool at the end of October to they knew not where. Over the Atlantic to Canada, changed ships and proceeded down the East Coast of America, although America was not in the war at that time, they were American ships and crews. Back over the Atlantic again to Africa and around South Africa where they had a few days in Cape Town, during which time on 7th December the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and America entered the war. The Japanese also landed in British Malaya so instead of heading North towards the war in the Middle East, their original destination, they were diverted East to India. Sonny's Cambridgeshire battalion, with two others formed the 55th Brigade who, along with the 53rd and 54th formed the 18th Division which happened to be the same brigade and division my father had been in during the First World War. Around Christmas 42 brigades were either in or heading for India and one, due to the fighting now going on, headed straight for Singapore while of the other two one was called upon to go also at the start on the New Year 1942. The Japanese were pushing our troops slowly back and down to Singapore Island. After a short time in India, Sonny's battalion was also called and they arrived in Singapore harbour amidst falling bombs on the 29th January. When they disembarked only Singapore Island was free of Japanese but during the next few days they went straight into defensive positions. On the night of 7th January the Japanese crossed from the mainland to the island itself. Ever since the 55th landed they had been shelled and bombed and during heavy fighting they were slowly pushed back. Conditions were chaotic because of thousands of civilians and troops were squeezed into a very small area at the mercy of Japanese bombs and shells. On 14th January, the day Singapore surrendered poor Sonny died from wounds he had received, he had been in Singapore for sixteen days, and all of the survivors of the 18th Division were now prisoners of war. Of roughly 800 in Sonny's 1st Cambs, 47 men were killed, 17 died from wounds and 80 wounded. Tragically that was not the end of it as 247 men died as a result of the terrible treatment they received from the Japanese in the prison camps and working on the Death railway in Thailand. Some of the men survived the railway only to die on prison ships which were heading for Japan and were sunk by submarines. Among them was one, if not two, men from Lakenheath.

The sacrifice of the 18th Division in a lost cause was one of the biggest blunders of the war. Sonny was one of those listed as missing and his poor father did not know anything until three and a half years later when, at the end of the war, his son was officially classed as killed. I don't think Uncle John ever heard any firm information about what happened to Sonny. I have made a point of trying to find out the circumstances by reading many books and a bit of research about this episode of World War 2. For years I was very anti-Japanese and vowed to boycott Japanese goods. I am not quite so anti now and it is almost impossible not to buy Japanese products.

It's strange but all through school, history was one of the subjects I liked least. I was not interested in things that happened hundreds of years ago and all those dates I could not remember. If they had been about the Boer War or the Great War that would have been interesting to me. It seemed that 20th Century history was too modern.

CHAPTER 8 - CIVILIAN VOLUNTEERS

Civilian volunteers were called for from the start for men to be Air Raid Wardens, auxiliary fireman, Royal Observer Corps to track and report all enemy aircraft and later, after the fall of France, men to form a Local Defence Volunteers(LDV) which later became the Home Guard, as in Dad's Army. Hundreds came forward, mainly WW1 veterans and sixteen to eighteen year olds. Father joined and all he, and the rest, had was only an LDV armband to wear. Later they were issued with uniform, rifle and about ten rounds of ammunition. I remember playing with the rifle. They did a very good job during the time there was a threat of England being invaded. When the threat faded in about 1942 when Hitler had given up the idea of invading us and had gone east to invade Russia instead, men were given the chance to leave or stay on. Father was quite willing to train during the evenings but when it came to be all day exercises on Sundays he left so he could see after his animals. The Home Guard was disbanded in 1944.

Early on in the war, a great deal of our food was imported and had to be shipped in from all over the world, beef and mutton from Australia and New Zealand, wheat and maize from USA and Canada, tea from India and Ceylon(now Sri Lanka). Tea was a very important commodity because if no tea was available the country would come to a standstill and because of the shortage of ships and the threat from U boats, the government wanted the maximum home grown food from British farms.

In every county they formed committees of so called experts and farmers, they were known as the War Agricultural Executive Committee, always referred to as the War Ag. They provided caterpillar tractors, bulldozers, draglines and all other implements to farm on a large scale. They drained the fenland, reclaimed derelict land and farms even took farms from incompetent farmers. For a labour force they employed local men, Women's Land Army girls, girls who like men had to register at age eighteen with the choice of going into women's military forces, war work or the Land Army, and later on thousands of Italian prisoners of war were [put to work on the land. A prisoner of war camp was built at Eriswell. The Women's Land Army had a hostel at Lakenheath on the land that is now Mutford Green and Quayside sheltered housing complex opposite in High Street. In wartime no one was allowed to be idle, persistent dodgers were sent to work for the War Ag or risked the penalty of perhaps a month in Norwich Prison.

When France fell, England came under air attack and it came to a head when the RAF won the Battle of Britain. We did not see too much of the air battle because it was fought more down south. I do recall on one occasion, when we boys were at our favourite meeting place, sitting on the milk stand out on Undley Lane, this was like a large table on the side of the road where large churns full of milk were placed for collection daily by the milk lorry, when we saw a plane above the roof tops opposite. Suddenly puffs of smoke appeared around it. It was being fired at by guns at Beck Row aerodrome, which had been built about seven years before. We ran up the hill outside the Hall to get a clear view to see the action and getting to the top we saw two fighters following the bomber and started to shout encouragement hoping to see this plane shot down, it did not happen because they were also German planes.

My earliest recollection of Beck Row Aerodrome was about ten days after my fifth birthday, in early October to be precise, because I must have been taken there on my friend Eric's crossbar or on his father's, Juddy Tuffs who with his wife Maud were very kind to us for many years. We had gone there to watch the entrants to the London to Melbourne Air Race; Beck Row was the starting point, testing their planes for the start of the race on 19th October 1934. I remember standing amongst many people on the road when one of these planes came flying over our heads and landing on the grass airfield and one gentleman saying that it was Campbell and Black who would go on to win the race in under three days, some great feat in those days. From 1936 to 1939 Beck Row was open to the public on Empire Day for an air show. On one occasion Eric & I were taken to the show. All biplanes in those days and the bombers stationed there were H.P. Heyfords that seemed to fly much faster than we could cycle, with the crews poking their heads out of the top. Mr Tuffs was working

there as a bricklayer's mate and for a better view he decided to take us up onto the scaffolding of the building he was working on only to be told to come down by a policeman, despite our protests.

Hitler found out he could not beat us by destroying the RAF in daylight so he turned to night bombing. We then had bombers droning overhead at night and we got to know the sound of German planes because of the strange up and down noise they made. People said they made their engines noisy on purpose. On many nights we would be either in the kitchen or in our bedroom and we would hear a rumble and windows would rattle and we would know they were unloading somewhere. We were lucky not to have any drop close to us although some incendiary bombs dropped on and around Lakenheath council houses in Eriswell Road, also bombs dropped near the Railway station and on what was the Chicory Factory next door, killing one poor chap. They were really after the many airfields in the district, as we did not have a local newspaper we never really knew where most of these fell. One evening in mid November 1940 we heard planes flying fairly low overhead, obviously enemy, flying North West they kept on coming in a continuous stream. It was a beautiful starlight night and we thought we could actually see them, we heard no bombs so we knew they were going some distance further on. They were heading for Coventry where, we heard on the radio later, they destroyed the city and the beautiful centuries old Cathedral. There were 450 bombers and 550 people were killed and the Germans lost the grand total of one plane.

In the autumn of 1940, we school children were in the playground one day when someone stated that an airfield was being built up on Lakenheath warren. On getting out of school we rode our bikes to there to see what was going on. Large bulldozers and huge earth graders were levelling all the heath land that had previously been populated only by rabbits for a great many years. In 1941 the airfield came into use; it overlapped two roads that were used by civilian traffic all through the war. It was not fenced in until about 1950 after the Americans had arrived in 1948. I had been interested in aircraft ever since they began to use Beck Row in 1935 and this interest continues to this day. At weekends we would get on our bikes and ride these roads to see what was going on; also if there were any new aircraft types; we would watch the ground crews 'bombing up' for the night raids. On one particular Sunday we saw this lonely Wellington twin engine bomber; we cycled up to it, waited a few minutes to make sure nobody was inside working then the bravest one lay down his bike and climbed in, the rest following. I would have been well to the rear. We had a marvellous time; I think we were on the way back from Germany when there was a loud shout from outside of 'Out! What the H are you doing in there? Clear Off' sheepishly we cleared off but for an hour and a half we had been in another world. Around about the same time, on a Sunday morning with collie Bob running along beside me on one of many trips to Aunt Ethel's, I was amazed to see this huge four engine plane circling over Lakenheath airfield, a 'Short Stirling' the first one I had ever seen. I still have to look up every time I hear a plane although my eyes are not like they used to be.

As I was now in my early teens and getting a little bigger; muscles have always been missing from my frame; I was able to do jobs for Father and the neighbours from whom I was rewarded with money; it was more profitable from the neighbours than from Father; and these few shillings and pounds were very welcome as pocket money had not been invented then. This money was mainly used for buying my sweet ration, if there were sweets available as they were rationed like other commodities and in short supply and 'kept under the counter' for special customers. I used this money to buy my ticket to the Comet Cinema in Mildenhall, 6 miles away, which was very busy in those days. Sometimes I would cycle there and join the queue outside; which as the war progressed seemed to consist of men and women in uniform from all over the world. Being close to Lakenheath and Mildenhall airfields these airmen were British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand or others from our Empire, Poland Czechoslovakia Free France and later on America, all in their different uniforms. As well as the airmen there were W.A.A.F's and soldiers of all types from numerous camps in the area, a few sailors too who were probably local men on leave.

I remember in 1943 going with Ernie's future wife, Sylvia, on a local bus to visit him in Bury Hospital. He had suffered for years from what turned out to be appendicitis which became serious. He celebrated his 21st Birthday during the weeks he was in there. On these trips I was amazed at the number of woods we passed that contained huddled army camps full of soldiers, lorries as well as tanks. Bury was about 17 miles away and I think it was the longest journey I took during the whole war. This was the first time I saw black American soldiers. People just did not travel; the few people that had cars could get a small petrol ration but this had to be used for important business only; woe betide anyone using it otherwise. The majority of people hadn't a clue what was going on more than 20 miles from home.

Growing up as a schoolchild during the war was really an exciting time; I was 15 when it ended; we never really understood the black side of events, we heard the news on the radio, statements like the Admiralty reports that a Royal Navy ship had been lost, one hundred and eighty men are missing and the Air Ministry announcements that aircraft of Bomber Command last night raided Berlin, eighty-five of our aircraft failed to return, with seven to a crew, we never realised all the sorrow this caused to hundreds of families.

One particular raid on Nuremburg one hundred and eight were lost, eighty shot down before they had even reached their target, a further eighteen on the return trip and ten more in crashed in this country.

An incident I was personally involved in, although few knew at the time, was on one very hot Sunday afternoon. When Beck Row aerodrome first came into operation a Lakenheath man with a lorry obtained a contract to remove all the refuse as he had a few acres of waste land halfway between Lakenheath and Undley where he dumped this. The refuse was an attraction to us boys as we could soon walk the mile or so there more or less unobserved. We would cross a couple of fields, walk along a grass drove and we were there. We would go there fairly often usually at the weekend when no one was about; we would look through this rubbish for anything we took a fancy to. Highly prized items were aircraft magazines and Lilleput magazines, which were about the size of Readers Digest, and Men Only which contained saucy cartoons and photos of the latest pinup girls which helped our education somewhat. There would also be discarded maps, exposed films by the yard even leaflets printed in German that had been intended to float down over Germany. On this particular Sunday afternoon, my mate Len from next door and I walked down to this dump. I was busy hunting around when Len told me to watch; I turned around and he was holding about three yards of discarded film in one hand and a match in the other. He put the match to the film quickly burning his fingers so that he dropped the remainder onto all this bone dry rubbish. Within a few seconds we realised we were not going to be able to put this fire out so we took to our heels up the drove towards home, every now and then we would look over our shoulder to see this pall of smoke billowing up into this lovely blue sky. We heard later that the Fire Brigade had been called to deal with the fire that had mysteriously consumed a fair amount of rubbish. To this day very few people know the culprits, anyway, poor Len is long since dead and I don't suppose anyone would take his accomplice to court now!

CHAPTER NINE - PLANE CRASHES.

By 1942 more and more Allied aircraft began to appear in our skies especially United States Army Air force began to arrive. Even from day one bombers from Beck Row and from other pre-war airfields had been going on bombing raids; at first in daylight but, due to heavy losses, they soon switched to night bombing, They would take off around dusk and return in the early hours of the morning. As air activity built up so sadly did the number of crashes. I think the first one I went to happened late in the school day; some of us were in the playground having a games lesson when we heard and saw a Ventura from Feltwell which seemed to be flying normally when suddenly it rolled onto it's back, roared loudly and disappeared from view behind the

school roofs. We all thought he was just playing silly beggars and had recovered and flew back home. About five or ten minutes later we were dismissed but, on going out of the school gates, we were confronted with the sight of two or three crash tenders from Lakenheath airfield driving very fast past us with their hooters blaring out. We realised that he had not flown away but had crashed hence the black smoke going up, so it was onto our bikes and through the village, down to the fen where all this smoke was coming from. When we could get no further on our bikes we then had to walk about half way down a field to the crash site where the plane had simply dived straight into a ditch. As it was soft fenland only about a third of the wreckage was above ground where it was still throwing out flames and smoke though not enough to hide the pitiful sight of what remained of some of the crew. No one could do a thing to help; there were about four men in the crew and they didn't stand a chance.

Several years after the war I was working as a tractor driver in this very field and the ditch had recently been cleared and deepened by a dragline and the soil dumped on this field. There were a large number of pieces of aircraft, ammunition and also a parachute from which I salvaged the cords that, having been buried for six years were still as good as ever.

Another Ventura crashed on the outskirts of Lakenheath village; it went through three hedges and two ditches and was totally wrecked and once again no survivors. Stirlings were operating from Beck Row and Lakenheath and I went to three crash scenes involving these aircraft. These bombers were always loaded to the limit and, if on a short trip that needed less fuel, the equivalent weight would be added to the bomb load so in the event of engine problems during takeoff they were often in trouble. Two of these crashes were similar and with the same result; one took off for Germany, from Lakenheath, and crashed at Eriswell, the other from Beck Row and crashed at Holywell Row. Heavily loaded they had failed to gain height, clipped trees and crashed in fields where they caught fire and their bombs exploded blowing everything into very small pieces; again no survivors! The third was on a training flight, with no bombs, from Lakenheath; it got into trouble and flying towards Lakenheath village it just cleared the high ground of the warren, went between two houses in Eriswell Road taking down the street light cables, pulling down their chimneys, hit the ground where the kiddies play area is now, skidded two hundred yards parallel to Undley Road where it caught fire trapping two of the crew one of whom died. The other was rescued by a local man who used an axe to chop a hole in the metal to release him.

On the way home from Lakenheath I stopped for a break on the old Black Bridge, long since gone, on Undley Road when I heard and saw a twin engine Douglas Boston flying fast and very low in the direction of Brandon; it vanished from sight behind some trees, I turned away to resume my way home when I heard a loud bang, looking back I could see the cloud of black smoke rising from behind the trees and I knew it had crashed. I turned back and rode through the village and along the Station Road to the crash site, with several other boys. We cycled as far as we could then down this grass field towards the crash, walking alongside a ditch someone pointed to the other bank a few feet away. I saw this poor chap lying on his back as if he was resting looking quite normal although sadly he was dead as were the other three airmen still in the burning wreckage. We never heard if the crash was due to mechanical failure or a mistake by the pilot.

Another less serious crash was an American B17 bomber that was returning from a raid when it had some kind of problem and crash-landed along the Lakenheath to Wangford Road. The plane was wrecked but I think all of the crew were OK; and as it was less than a mile from school, this attracted quite a number of children who helped themselves to all sorts of souvenirs. All I got was one nice black soft leather glove. Next day at school the police turned up to give us a bit of a lecture and ask for all these souvenirs to be handed back; I don't think they meant my one glove although it wasn't much use to me.

One Sunday on one of our many rides along Wangford Road, this ran through the airfield, we three or four boys spotted a strange visitor; in the corner of the field where damaged aircraft were very often parked, we saw a four engine American B24. We turned off the road onto the airfield track to get a closer look. Four young American airmen were standing near their jeep close to this large aircraft. They were pleased to show us their jeep as we had never been close to one before. They then asked us where the village was and what was there. We told them that over the hill were seven or eight pubs which didn't interest them too much; we then told them that there was a land army hostel; that was very different, they said something amongst themselves and in about two minutes flat they had climbed into their jeep and were heading for the village, leaving us to our own devices. This meant we were soon inside the aircraft which was in a rather damaged condition, having several large holes in the sides and roof. On the floor in the long body lay hundreds of spent cartridge cases; these were .50 calibres which were about twice the size of RAF machine gun ammunition. Many of the cases were covered in bloodstains so it was obvious the at least one of the crew had been unlucky. This did not put us off and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves for about two hours; the GI's had not yet returned when we left.

All the visits to these very often tragic sights was, in a way, very exciting to us youngsters; we were always on the lookout for souvenirs, anything from clear Perspex from windscreens which could be fashioned into things like rings and various trinkets, Italian POW's tried to get this and aluminium as they were very good at making things like cigarette lighters or jewellery. We also were on the lookout for machine gun ammunition which would be quickly slipped into our pockets; these could be single rounds or perhaps ten or a dozen all linked together. Inside the plane there would be belts of 400 or 500 but these got broken up in a crash. RAF personnel would try to collect them but they always missed some. What did we want them for? Personally I would take them apart, extract bullets from the cartridge case with pliers; the charge inside the case itself consisted of about forty very thin sticks of cordite about two inches long. They looked like miniature sticks of spaghetti, these were extracted and put end to end and made lovely fuses when touched at one end with a match. If you opened up three or four cartridges you could make a fuse two or three yards long; it would fizzle from one end to the other in no time.

The bullets themselves were colour coded on their tips, the majority were just lead filled; there were also armour piercing ones that had a sharp pointed interior of hardened steel, also tracer bullets that held incendiary powder inside that could be shaken out after nipping off the point, This powder made a nice little flare at the end of a cordite fuse. Thankfully at this time, Father never had a vice or I might have taken a nail and hammer to the percussion cap. We were kids and did silly things without getting hurt although one lad, who lived nearby, did pick up a flare, or something similar, in a field that had not gone off. I don't know if a match was involved but he finished up with a badly burned hand.

CHAPTER 10

At school, a very staid lady by the name of Miss Moore was my teacher when I was about 10 or 11; she like two other teachers taught two classes at the same time. We were still having practise sessions when we had to do our lessons while wearing our gas masks. They were not very pleasant to wear as after a short time they would steam up; if you breathed normally they were OK but if you blew into them the air would burst out of the side of your cheeks. There were a few boys who took a delight in doing this as when the air escaped it made a rather rude sounding noise. This particular afternoon, Miss Moore had for a time ignored these interruptions but finally her patience had run out and she said that the next one to make this rude noise would have to stay behind after school. A boy sitting by my side made me laugh somehow and out came a snorter;

of course I was told to stay after school and when all the others had left I was alone with Miss Moore who, for about five minutes, carried on doing some last jobs; then out she went and after staying there a little while I too slipped out and went home. Next day nothing was said as I think I was one of her favourites.

A male teacher, who was my teacher at that time, left to go into the RAF. He probably volunteered and I don't think he expected to be away for over four years; he had some very nice text books of his own and he asked some of the boys to look after them. By the time he returned the boys had left the school and the books were rather well worn. Our Headmaster, Mr Dent, was at Lakenheath all the while I was there and stayed for many years until he retired. He ran the school all by himself; he taught the two top classes, he did all the paperwork, he handled all the monies, all the National Savings from 6d stamps to 15shilling certificates, and, when the scheme was started to serve soup and later full dinners to pupils who required them, he collected all this too; he was a busy man. He also handed out a few strokes of the cane, or the stick as we called it, there were always four or five boys who earned this treatment and most of them seemed to think that to be caned was something to boast about.

The soup they started supplying was made by two volunteer ladies, different ones each day, so we kids had five different types of vegetable soup, I doubt there was much meat in it, it ranged from rather thin to beautiful thick soup. I enjoyed it all. Two pupils took turns to wash and dry the bowls after. Later they started full dinners. National Savings was a very big thing during the war; children were encouraged to bring and save their odd shillings and there was always some special scheme going on to raise money to help buy aeroplanes, warships, and things; we had `Wings for Victory` week, `Warship` week and all sorts of weeks. Towns and village schools were set targets to raise thousands of pounds; dances, whist drives and all sorts of event were held to raise money for the war effort. One of our neighbours, in the Hall, arranged Whist drives in her large lounge which would hold about 14 tables and seemed to be always full if rather crowded. After the Whist there would be a raffle for a home made cake, a pound of butter or, perhaps, a chicken or some other things. I may be wrong about the raffle perhaps these things were auctioned off but a great deal of money was raised. People would cycle all the way from Lakenheath to attend the Whist Drive. I think National Savings at school was a good thing as it taught children to save, it did me, and today it seems totally different.

CHAPTER 11 - P.O.W'S

It must have been late 1942 when we first began to see Italian prisoners of war in Lakenheath. A P>O>W camp had been built alongside the Brandon to Barton Mills road, just outside Eriswell. The camp held 300 to 400 Italians who were at first put to work for the `War Ag`. We began to see them being bussed to work in double-decker busses with one British soldier as guard. Later on it was realised that the prisoners were reasonably content with their lot,; they hadn't wanted to fight in the war anyway; they were not going to make things hard for themselves and in time they were allowed to live out while working on some of the local farms. Early on, I remember one occasion I was with a group of boys cycling along a fen road; we were I think on our way to work ourselves, for the `War Ag`, because of a shortage of labour we schoolboys would volunteer to help out in busy times on the land; we passed this group of about thirty Italians, complete with guard, hoeing sugar beet. Making sure that we were safely past we gave them the `V` sign or shouted something rude about Mussolini. They lifted their hoes into the air and made as if to chase us; we had a laugh and pushed a bit harder on the pedals. I think they had a bit of a laugh themselves.

A few months later farms that were short of labour were able to hire one or two prisoners to live and work on their farms. Mr. G., a neighbour of ours who lived about 150 yards from us, had two. They lived in a nice wooden hut very close to the house; I think they must have had some cooking facilities too. They were named Alberto and Angelo; Alberto was a fairly serious individual and Angelo, who was only about 5ft.5ins tall, was a happy debonair type of chap. Slowly, I got to know them and became friendly with them. Mr & Mrs G. were very nice to me and before long I was a regular visitor to the wooden hut. I helped them with their English and they taught me to count up to ten in Italian plus a few Italian swear words. Angelo could sing well and sometimes he gave us a song or two from Italian opera. After working hours they were fairly free to do as they wished, within reason, and on one occasion I cycled with Angelo up to the camp through Eriswell; one of the facilities they had in camp was a shop where they could buy all manner of things; toiletries and extra food. After this visit Angelo came home with a 12ins square slab of fruit cake complete with cherries, the like of which I could only dream of.

They were reasonable workers and must have been there about two years. In February 1944, I think on a Saturday morning, I had cycled to Lakenheath and, on collecting the newspaper from Uncle John's, I saw on the front page a photo of American planes bombing Monte Casino monastery which was centuries old and famous building on top of Monte Casino mountain in Italy. When cycling down the hall lane I saw Alberto and Angelo and stopped to show them the photo. There were many cries of Mama Mia and up throwing of hands, but that was war and many things worse than that happened.

Some time after this, Florrie, Mrs G. gave birth to their third son; I don't think I was very well informed at the time, but people began to notice Florrie was a bit reluctant to show off her new baby. Sadly it became known that the new baby had black hair and a very Mediterranean complexion; Alberto and Angelo vanished from the scene and a short time later so did Florrie and the baby.

In October of 1944, Mr.G. offered me a job and I stayed with him for fifteen years.

CHAPTER 12 - 1943/44

During 1943, my last year at school, around the time of my fourteenth birthday we did another spell of helping on the land for the 'War Ag'; a number of boys and girls were put in a gang picking up potatoes. It was a bit heavy going for us kids; I know it was hard on your back, I don't remember if we were ever paid. There were two or three men to collect the sacks of potatoes we had picked up and there were two Land Army girls, one of who drove the tractor pulling the potato spinner. At that time, during the evening and weekends I would help Mr.G. on various projects. He was younger than most of the smallholders up Undley and always seemed to have something going on and I got pleasure from helping him. I left school aged 14 at Christmas 1943; I was not like some of the boys who could not wait to leave, I quite liked school as I think I coped fairly well with most subjects.

My first month or two after finishing must have been a rather lazy time for me; the start of the new farming year saw more jobs where I could help Father and Ernie. The Father told me that I would have to go further a field to find fame and fortune; so I went and got a job on a fruit farm in Sedge Fen. To get there the quickest way was to cycle down the concrete road, down to Undley Fen and along side one of Mr.G's fields, across a plank over the boundary drain, down the side of two more fields and onto the track leading to Hartley' fruit farm. This cycle track was well used but rather bumpy.

Sadly this journey to fame and fortune soon spluttered to a stop as when I arrived one Monday morning the manager led me to a large orchard of Bramley apple trees that had just been pruned and underneath these were hundreds and thousands of twigs that had been pruned from the trees. He told me he wanted me to collect all these twigs, put them in heaps to be collected later. It was not a hard job at all but I was on my own

in this large orchard; I could see no further than forty yards because the trees were so thick; I had no watch, I could hear a little activity in the distance. I might as well have been at the North Pole. Every day seemed like a week and, on the fourth day, I looked at the area I still had to cover and decided rather than go mad I would throw in the towel and go home. Father was not best pleased!

One day, while helping father, I was leading the horse as he was horse hoeing sugar beet up on the top road and, on going home for dinner, our friend and neighbour Maud Tuffs came out of her house and told us that the invasion had started; 6th June 1944. We had not noticed anything unusual as the sky at that time always seemed to be full of aircraft, day and night. On any clear morning it was not unusual to see 200 or 300 American bombers, in bunches of about 25, all over the sky; they circled around gaining height and forming up into larger groups before heading east for the continent. We would see them return five or six hours later, low down now flying in very ragged formations with odd ones trailing behind; on looking closer you would see many with one, sometimes two, engines stopped. A great many never made it back. In the evening the RAF would start taking off from Mildenhall, Lakenheath, Feltwell and Tuddenham, all within about six miles, and scores of other airfields further a field. They did not group up like the Americans but flew alone to their target, if you could call it alone by being surrounded by hundreds of others doing the same thing. You would see them speckling the sky, far too many to count; they would be climbing seemingly with their engines flat out, all heading in same direction. We did not think about the lethal bomb load everyone was carrying above our heads. We would be asleep in our beds when they returned in the early hours, again far fewer than had set out earlier.

I kept reasonable busy during the early summer of 44 helping father and other neighbours with various seasonable jobs, earning a few welcome shillings. About July time, my friend Eric told me of a vacancy where he worked. This was at Pearson Bros at Burnt Fen, on the road to Littleport. They had four farms there, two on either side of this road. Eric drove a John Deere tractor, his father did all sorts of farm work; there was also another John Deere tractor that they needed a driver for. The tractor was a mid thirties type with three iron wheels; I was to drive this tractor; no self started in those days and it hadn't got a starting handle, it was started by pulling round a flywheel. I was 14 years old with no muscles and had great difficulty in swinging over this flywheel. It was hard to pull over because, unlike Eric's larger more modern tractor, it had no taps to release the compression when the engine was turned over. So, after about five weeks, I was taken off and given another job. I enjoyed my time there; I worked on all four farms, when working on the nearer farms I would cycle the short trip, Undley Fen to Sedge Fen, on the further farms I would sometimes ride with Eric in his father's ancient Singer car. I worked in the corn harvest, in the potato harvest, also carrots. Sometimes I would be carting various crops with a horse and cart.

On a Sunday morning in September, myself Ernie and a couple of other boys were playing some ball game in our grass paddock, behind the Hall, when we heard the sound of aircraft approaching from the direction of Ely and we stood and watched as hundreds of C.47 Dakotas, many towing gliders, flew over our heads. We found out the next day that they were carrying paratroopers and glider borne troops to Arnhem in Holland, many of the men that went over that day never returned; Arnhem turned out to be like the fiasco of Singapore; a great sacrifice of brave men, for no gain. On one of the days following this we saw large numbers of transport planes taking more troops and supplies to Arnhem but to no avail; that battle was lost.

There were many female workers on Pearson's; during the potato harvest there would be two gangs, one on either half of the farms. I was mostly with the gang on the Sedge Fen side. About six ladies were from Lakenheath, the rest lived in the fens; these ladies amazed me, they cycled from home, put in six or seven hours hard work picking potatoes and when they were finished they would hop on their cycles and pedal off home to do their cooking and housework. They always seemed happy and ready with a joke; I am sure that they helped the shy little lad from Undley out of his shell.

I must mention the fact that in the thirteen or fourteen months that I worked at Pearson's, my wages, for a five and a half day week only exceeded £1.10 shillings about three times and that was when Eric and I did overtime. My pay was 4shillings and 4 pence per day; in today's money that would equal 22p. To cycle there for a Saturday morning would earn me 11p. How times change!

The war was still dragging on; there were till planes crashing in the locality. I know there were three collisions, all RAF or American.

There were three Undley lads in the in the forces, Vic A. in the navy in minesweepers, Will P. in infantry in Europe and George B. who was in either the Paras., or gliderbourns; he was in the last big battle in Germany in 1945 when thousands of troops were dropped over the Rhine amongst all the German army. It was confused for a time and George was posted as missing, but he survived.

CHAPTER 13 - 1945

During 1945, I continued working down Burnt Fen; it looked as if the war would finally end and things would change for the better and that all those serving in the military and those unlucky enough to have been P.O.W's could come home and get on with their civilian life.

As a bit of an enthusiast where aircraft are concerned I remember during the corn harvest seeing for the first time a jet plane, a bit of a milestone for me. This must have been just after Germany finally surrendered in May. 8th May was declared V.E. Day; Victory in Europe was going to be a day of celebration. I listened to the radio and heard that it was to be a public holiday and street parties were going to be held everywhere; also beacons would be lit up and down the country. I was at home with no one to celebrate with and a bit out on a limb so I thought that I would have my own beacon, even in broad daylight. Among the trees in Father's farmyard was a large elm tree which I had climbed many times. I found an old Hessian sack, doused it with paraffin and climbed right to the top of this tree, about 35 ft high, tied this to a branch and set a match to it. It flared up and smoked lovely; on climbing down I saw Mr.Smith, our neighbour, cycling home from the fen. He looked up, cycled on but turned into our yard to find Father. I was admiring my beacon when Father came round the corner and told me, in no uncertain words, to get back up there and put that thing out. It proved useless to tell him it would burn itself out in a few minutes; that wasn't quick enough for him; so up I had to climb, dodging bits of hot debris, and knock out the remaining flames. V.E, Day celebrations for me were over.

About this time all the Italians POW's vanished from the area to be replaced later by German POW's. They were a very different kettle of fish, not at all like the happy go lucky Italians; these were a very surly lot. I suppose they had something to be surly about after having lost the war. They were soon working on local farms; I seem to remember Father having one for a short time to help with the sugar beet harvest. Mr.G. employed two and I think there were few others who worked up Undley. By early August the Americans dropped two atomic bombs on Japan and brought WW2 to an end.

Sometime during September 1945, Mr.G. came around to see me and offered me a job and I jumped at the chance. His tractor driver had acquired the tenancy of one of the Undley smallholdings and was leaving so I was given the chance to replace him. Mr.G. had a Fordson tractor, a much more conventional type that Pearson's John Deere. I soon got the hang of that and the place of work was very handy, about 150 yards from home; I could walk there in 2 minutes or trot if I was late. I know Mr. G. was going through a rough time just after his marriage had broken apart, but he was very patient with my early efforts as tractor driver. He was a very good boss to me and treated me very well all through the fifteen years that I stayed with him.

I got used to working with Chris and Ouze, the two German POW's. We never talked about the rights or wrongs of Adolf Hitler. I don't think he was ever mentioned; it wasn't all that easy to communicate anyway; but they were very good hard workers. I can't remember for sure but I don't think they lived on the farm. Ouze was a short tubby quiet fatherly type but, one dinner time, I remember Mr.G. talked him into getting onto a little Shetland pony that he had bought for his two young sons. This pony was staked on the large grass verge alongside the lane, on a long rope. Ouze got on and even his little short legs almost touched the ground. Mr.G. cruelly flapped his coat and away went the pony; Ouze hung on well until the pony ran out of rope and came to a sudden stop. Ouze kept on going and landed on his nose. I reckon he sustained more injuries then than during the war. He had a skinned nose and face; he took it well but I don't know how he explained this on going back to camp. Chris was slightly younger and well built and not afraid to work hard. I know they stayed until 1948 as I recall working with them during the very cold winter of 1947.

Since starting to write about the groups into which German POW's were placed according to their political beliefs, I have learned that there were three groups. 10% were classed as anti Nazi, 80% as in between and 10% were convinced Nazi's. I would have thought there were more than 10% hardliners; I could never understand how during the war 95% of the German people worshipped the ground Hitler walked on but a few years after the war all the Nazi's had gone and everyone was now a German!

All the time during the war travel was very restricted; trips to Lakenheath other than to school and weekends were rare because of the blackout and also there was nowhere for a young teenager to go. There were pubs but I was too young for that. All this changed when a certain lady, Mrs.Bailey, whose husband farmed in the fen growing mainly Brussels sprouts, decided to start up a youth club. I joined and began to get out and about more. Later a large ex-army hut was purchased and erected close to today's Palmer Drive in the High Street.

Mrs Bailey did a great deal for the young people; she ran the youth club, arranged pantomimes, arranged holidays all over England in other youth hostels. I went on two or three myself. The Youth Club was very handy for the Half Moon and many evenings consisted of two hours playing darts, table tennis or billiards and then two hours sampling Greene King beer. Talking of pubs and beer reminds me of the Christmas some of us walked to Little Eriswell, to the long gone Roebuck, the first pub I ever went in, slightly underage.

Around autumn 1945 Father purchased a beast of a car, a 7hp 1936 Austin Ruby saloon. Father never learnt to drive, he belonged to the horse era, so Ernie and later I acted as his chauffeur. This car had no self starter, only a crank handle to start it, and had a rather short wheelbase. If you went over a bump rather fast it seemed to carry on bouncing for the next two hundred yards. I was only sixteen at the time and could not even apply for a licence. Ernie was lucky in the fact that, because of the war, he was able to get a full licence straight away without having a driving test. Father purchased it from Mr.Rush who turned up one day with this car, showed Ernie and I over it, we climbed in, Ernie behind the wheel, me in the back. There was a concrete road leading from the Hall about one mile down to Undley Fen. Ernie drove down to the fen and then changed places with me so I could drive back. That was the sum total of our driving tuition. Ernie drove for about 55years without an accident and I have driven for 64 years with no accident; touch wood! That must have been a good lesson.

Christmas 1945 also saw the return of sister Mary to Undley Hall having left as a 4year old, she returned at age 14, to the task of being housekeeper, cook, errand girl and general dogsbody to Father, Ernie and me. She could have stayed at school longer, as the school wanted her to do but Father wanted her home and that was that!

Ernie left home and married Sylvia in 1949 and, as at that time it was not easy to find a home and they wanted a place close to Undley, Father had purchased six acres of land about 200 yards along Undley Common Lane and it was agreed that they could have a home there.

A newly built place was out of the question due to the cost and the shortage of materials; from somewhere came the idea of a second-hand railway carriage. Father and Ernie went up to Stratford in London to view the carriage, picked one and purchased it from LNER or BR who delivered it to Mildenhall railway station where railway people separated it from the wagon wheels and lifted it on to the goods yard. Someone was hired to cut it in half and a mobile crane to lift the two halves onto two flatbed lorries which then transported them to Undley Common followed by the crane which offloaded them onto ready prepared concrete foundations, side by side. A local building contractor put a roof over them, filled in the two open ends and pebble dashed all round. It was fitted out inside, water and sewerage installed; no electricity was available so a small generator was used. They finished up with a cosy little bungalow in which they lived for several years. Their son Geoffrey was born there and then, when things were a little easier, they had a nice new three bed roomed bungalow built on an adjoining plot. When Father retired in 1960, Ernie was out of a job so for a short while he worked for Sylvia's brother until he found a job on Mildenhall airbase amongst the Americans and their aircraft as a driver; a job he was very happy with and where he stayed until he retired. Sadly after fifty five years of marriage his wife Sylvia passed away.

After Ernie married, Mary just had Father and me to see after but Father always kept her busy inside and outside. I stayed on at Undley Hall for fifteen more years until I married; Father lived there for another forty years and I know we appreciated all sister Mary did for us, even if we never told her.

Ernie, Sylvia, Mary and I would pile into the Austin Ruby, usually twice a week, to go to the Comet Cinema in Mildenhall and, during that time Mary met her future husband, Francis Tuffs, who lived about two miles along the road to Mildenhall. Father was not all that enthusiastic about this because he thought this particular branch of the Tuffs family were a bit of a rowdy lot but he changed his mind later on and was known to say that he could not have had a better son-in-law. They were married in 1954 and, as Father still needed a housekeeper and we had lots of space, Franie came to live at the Hall.

I moved out in 1959 and, by that time, they had a little daughter, Marion, running around. When the time came for Father to retire, there was a possibility of them having to leave the Hall, but as the smallholding would become vacant, Franie, and several others, put in for the tenancy and he beat them all. So everyone stayed on at the Hall and Franie took over, Father stayed there happily until he died in his 91st year.

Mary and Franie moved to Lakenheath to live in their bungalow when Franie retired, so, one way or another the Turner's had well over sixty years at Undley Hall.

After leaving school I still went around with the same friends that I had made at school. We cycled all around the local area, thirty or forty miles on a Sunday afternoon was not uncommon. We played football together; when I was involved it was usually just a kick about because I was never good enough to play for any established football team although I turned out for the Youth Club four or five times. Getting together at the Youth Club and especially the Half Moon, seven or eight of us had formed a gang, although we never referred to it as a gang. We went on holidays together; sometimes the number would be up to 10 or 11, we celebrated birthdays together. Through the years we began to arrange a good meal and a bit of booze up at a pub or restaurant on our 21st Birthdays; never any females invited. When we had celebrated the youngest members 21st we decided on a date in February, over fifty years ago, to have an annual get-together; we began to lose a few to marriages, in fact all eventually married except two confirmed bachelors. I missed several `Anneries` when I first got married but started going again several years later. At least one has been present every year for 52 or 53 years. During that time, one lost his wife and has himself died, another has died leaving a widow, all of the rest are OK but getting a bit decrepit, no marriage has broken up, six couples celebrated golden weddings and there are still six of us diehards attending the annual get-togethers with not so much food far less drinking but plenty of talking! Still no females invited; aren't we a lot of chauvinists.

The holidays we lads went on were mostly to the south coast; Seaford in Sussex, twice to Brighton, Avon Tyrell which is close to Bournemouth and twice to Torquay. The first two we went on we had to take our ration books as some things were still rationed. In 1952 we were very adventurous and went on one of the earliest continental package holidays; seven of us went to Lake Como in the Italian Alps. We left Lakenheath station about 7.00am, travelled to London, London to Folkestone, to Lugarno in Switzerland, then coach to Lake Como, travelling through the night on wooden slatted seats on French Railways. We did not see too much of France as it was getting late in the day when we left Boulogne; it was certainly an eye-opening sight come the dawn, travelling through that beautiful Swiss scenery. The journey took about 33 hours and we arrived at our hotel about 4.00pm, rather travel weary. England's finances being in a bad way, only seven years after the end of the war, we were only allowed to change £25 into foreign currency and take £4 in sterling. Italy was in a worse state, 1700liras to £1 so it would take 170 of their 10lire notes to buy £1 although they had larger 1000 lire notes. We went on a day trip to Venice, had a look at all the sights around St.Mark's Square; went to a Venetian glass works and had a trip around the canals by gondola. We tried the local wine, very cheap, 2p per glass, and tried the local food. We went to St.Moritz in Switzerland and some of us, as I think it must have been the last day there, used all the currency we had left, including most of the £4 sterling to buy a Swiss watch each. Our meals were covered back as far as London but I had the princely sum of two shillings (10p) left and on getting back to London I had to borrow another shilling to get egg and chips and a cup of tea in Lyons Corner House. One of our group lost his watch plus a £5 fine to His Majesty's Customs at Folkestone. I made sure mine was well up my arm out of sight. With time to kill in London before our train left, we viewed the desolate bombed area around St.Paul's, acres and acres of ruined houses.

Sometimes, on a Saturday morning, four or five of us would travel up to London by train, then in the evening we would go to the theatre; that was when you could cycle down to the station, put your cycle in a shelter there and walk into the ticket office and buy a ticket to almost anywhere in the country. We would hop on the train to Liverpool St. Station; go to Arsenal, Tottenham or Chelsea to watch a football match in the afternoon; in the evening we would go to a theatre and watch a show, have a night afterwards in the Great Eastern Hotel. On Sunday morning we would walk around the market at Petticoat Lane and then home on the train. One particular show was the American musical `Oklahoma` when it first came over here; it was playing to packed houses at the Drury Lane Theatre. We arrived to be told that all the seats were sold out but we could stand at the back of the circle which we gladly did. That was before they had invented `Health and Safety`!

CHAPTER 15 - THE 50'S

Even after the war had ended, all males, on reaching the age of 18, had to go to register for National Service, and, when I went, I already knew that I would not have to serve my 18 months in the forces. As farm work was still an important reserved occupation, my boss said he would sign all the necessary papers to keep me exempt. Father was certainly in agreement so I never did National Service. Sometimes later on I wished that I had and a few years later when the `Cold War` started to hot up, the Air Ministry wanted volunteers to bolster up the Royal Observer Corps that had done vital work tracking and reporting all aircraft movements during the war. If we had gone back to a normal peace they would have been disbanded. Because Stalin was throwing his weight about they kept the R.O.C going. The `Cold War@ was the reason the USAF came to Lakenheath in 1948 and they have been here ever since. As the R.O.C. involved aircraft and aircraft recognition I was very interested and joined. Every six months we received a gratuity of a few shillings but more important almost every year we got as flight in various types of RAF aircraft, even one year a Comet.

A group of us lads and a few older members of the Lakenheath community reformed the Tennis Club that had faded away pre-war. It was on ground that went with the old 'Bell Hotel'; we levelled and reseeded, erected a high wire fence around the area large enough for two courts. We spent many an evening burning off our surplus energy and then recuperated over a glass of beer in the Bell, sadly it also faded away a few years later. Several of these same people, including myself, joined a badminton club at Hockwold which met once a week. That was my favourite sport and I really enjoyed the game.

CHAPTER 16 - WORKING FOR MR G.

As I have already said. I worked for Mr.G. from just before my sixteenth birthday until I was thirty one. He was a real forward looking farmer; he was the first in the area to purchase a combine harvester with which I worked for many harvests; he was the first, or possibly second to buy a 'grey Fergie' as they came to be known. It was a lovely little tractor to drive and it was amazing what it could do for its size. It had one drawback, it was very cold in the wintertime as you were sat straddled on it like sitting on a horse, so when a cold wind was blowing you could not keep your legs warm. Mr. G farmed a smallholding at Undley also several fields around Lakenheath that his parents owned and also rented others in the various fens around. In the mid fifties he purchased a very nice farm at Risby and I spent a fair time working there. Later he gave up the Undley farm and moved to Risby to live in a new farmhouse he had built. He took on a certain amount of contract work for other people and I would go spraying corn, hay baling and combining corn in the area. Every time I was doing this contract work he made sure I was well rewarded; he treated me well.

For several years a Mr.Legge and his son Derek worked with me. Derek was several years younger than me but we got on well together and, to cut a long story short, I began to question him about a young, pretty, always smiling girl who had caught my eye. Derek was well acquainted with this girl; she was about the same age as him and lived almost next door to him.

I don't remember exactly how it came about; I don't think I went as far as twisting his arm back but he agreed to ask this young girl, by the name of Mary, to meet up with me one evening. Luckily for me, Mary agreed to and we duly met. We went for a long walk down Station Road, lent on the old bridge, long gone, down there and talked and talked. I very likely told her my life story; she must have felt sorry for me as she answered in the affirmative when I asked her for another date. I think I went home that night feeling as happy as a dog with two tails! We went to cinemas around the local area, Cambridge Fair and various places of interest. I got to meet her parents, her brother and sister and they made me feel very welcome, but after about three months, I arrived for a cinema date but Mary did not. I was rather upset by this but I never did hold it against her as she was only sixteen and, perhaps, I was too serious about our friendship.

So it was back to the wilderness for me, pub, cinema, pub, cinema with some of my old friends who were still single.

By this time the Austin Ruby was long gone, also, Ernie and I had persuaded Father to buy one of the new Ford Prefects that were on the market. It was a nice little car and I managed to pass my driving test after failing twice in the Austin 7. In those days you took your test in your own car and, with no MOT test, the cars were not always in the best condition. I don't think I would ever have passed in that car; it's easier to blame the car. Ernie and I were still acting as Father's chauffeur when he wanted to go anywhere and we had it on alternate weekends for our own use. Ernie had married Sylvia a few years before this and did not go out much so I had use of it most weekends. I then decided I would be independent and bought a lovely car of my own; it was a Morris Minor one of the best cars I have ever had.

Sometime about 1955 I decided to start up a flock of laying hens to make a few bob on the side. I purchased a corrugated asbestos poultry shed; it was Nissan hut shaped and about 30ft by 15ft. Father let me erect in on a corner of the farmyard, landlords were not so strict in those days, and I also made what was called a brooder with timber and wire netting which was used to hold day old chicks, in a warm environment, from day old to five or six weeks old. Two thirds of the length was a wire netting run with water and food; the other third was a warm covered area with a low hanging cloth bag filled with feathers, the mother hen, and under the floor of this was a paraffin heater. I would have 150 day old chicks delivered and reared them in this brooder until they were large enough to go into the straw floored shed hoping that I would not lose too many of them; I always lost a few, maybe four or five.

You then had to wait for them to start to lay; I would put in three Tilley lamps to give the hens a longer day so they would produce more eggs. This made me some money for four or five years until we all had an epidemic of Fowl Pest which meant that thousands of hens, turkeys and ducks were slaughtered for miles around. I seem to remember I rang the necks of all of mine and also many of Mr.G's including lovely turkeys that were being fattened up for Christmas, they all were buried! We did get compensation for all of these birds but it had been quite profitable while it lasted.

CHAPTER 17 - A TURNING POINT

In March 1958 one of my cousins, a member of the gang, asked if I would polish up the Morris Minor and collect and transport his bride to the church and afterwards to the reception. After the reception up turned a gentleman to act as MC for the evening entertainment and with him he brought his eighteen year old daughter Mary. We were under the same roof again after two years. During the evening a few shy smiles were exchanged and then a mutual friend decided to act as matchmaker; I think he persuaded Mary and I outside and things began to move. I still feel indebted to him as from then on we began to go out together again. During the early Summer Mary went off, alone, on a package holiday to Spain that she had booked and I drove her to Ely station. I went off to Torquay in the Minor taking the three remaining single members of the gang. After this was behind us we both realised that we had missed each other's company.

In December 1958 we decided to get engaged; on asking my future father in law if it was OK he told me I had better ask his wife; everything turned out fine.

We began to look around for somewhere to live. At this time Sir Charlton Briscoe lived in 'The Retreat'; he was the biggest landowner in Lakenheath and for a few years had been selling off plots of land for building; only for one building not ten on one acre as today. At that time he had two plots available, one of about two thirds of an acre up Maids Cross Hill for £100 and the last one up the top of Drift Road, an acre for £75. We decided on Maids Cross Hill as that was on a proper road where as Drift road was not made up, it still is not. We had plans passed for a two bed roomed bungalow; we wanted a nice brick and bay windows so as not to be too plain. We asked three builders to quote us a price; we then had to decide on one and eventually chose the highest price because the builder could complete it soonest. There was no desperate rush but by this time we had decided on an October wedding. The quote was for £1464 the electrics were £80 and the land was £100; a bit different from today's prices but we very often remind each other how Mary had £4 for the weekly housekeeping and that included buying coal for the fire. At first we only had one fireplace for heating but this was later boosted by installing night storage heaters. For the first three months we had no electricity because there were no cables up there until the following January.

Before our wedding a local furniture supplier from Beck Row had taken us to London to one of his suppliers to choose furniture for our new home; kitchen suite, bedroom suite; dining room suite; three piece suite and kitchen table & chairs, in fact almost the whole caboodle; weren't we lucky!

The last few weeks were a bit hectic because, although Bennett's built our home in fourteen weeks, less one week for summer holiday, the decorating was not completed until the week of our wedding.

Mary and I received many wedding presents from relatives and friends that helped us very much. I remember that almost every household in Undley gave us a present.

The day of the wedding I think I could have been classed as almost a nervous wreck. Having always been one to avoid the limelight, I was never one to be in the front row, row four was more in my line. Mary had much more confidence than I; she was a member of the local drama group and as she had a good singing voice, she was used to singing in public accompanied by her father Tom. She had appeared in plays and pantomimes and she didn't suffer too much from stage fright.

On the big day I remember driving to the Fox pub, on the Back Street, where my best man Jim lived. My nervousness must have shown as Mrs. Crane gave me a small tot of whisky to calm me down. Jim and I walked to St. Mary's Church. Mary was delivered there by a friend of her parents in his nice car.

Everything went well and we had a reception in the Village Hall with almost 100 guests; Mary, her mother and some friends did all the catering with three or four lady helpers serving the meal. The dreaded speech was stumbled through; all of about twenty words. I should add that Mary had four bridesmaids, her sister Angela, her friend Margaret and two little ones, one of whom was my niece Marion, my sister Mary's daughter. Father Tom saw after the evening's entertainment as he was very good at that. The evening was short for Mary and I as we were going, that evening in the Morris Minor to the Big City for our five day honeymoon. I collected the car from the Fox, took Mary down to Boxhall to change, a short call back to the hall for goodbyes then off to London. We got off to a bit of a slow start thanks to the fact that when I let out the clutch nothing happened because the rear wheels were off the ground, thanks to my strong friends! At Barton Mills we stopped to remove the numerous pennies rattling around inside the hub caps then we were away.

We drove to up to London through towns and villages, no motorways in the fifties although, about a year later when Mary & I went with Mary's parents on holiday to Lancashire we actually drove along the first short stretch of motorway in England, the Lancaster bypass.

We made our way around the North Circular road down Edgware Road to Marble Arch and found our little hotel which was just off Oxford Street. We abandoned the Morris Minor in some nearby Mews; it was well sprinkled with confetti; during the next few days we would walk past it to just make sure it was OK; no parking charges, no wheel clamping; things were very different in those days.

We viewed the sights; a trip to Petticoat Lane Market, a visit to the Cinema and many, many hours in Selfridges store in Oxford Street, then home to Lakenheath to get down to the serious business of married life.

I went back to work up Undley, Mary continued to cycle up to Lakenheath Base where she worked for American Express; she did that for almost a year but by that time our first offspring was on the way and she had to give up going to work for three or four years.

We had purchased our building plot from Sir Charlton Briscoe but under certain rules that he had applied to all the plots that he sold, we had to have approval for any other buildings we wanted to erect. I made a sectional timber shed that we needed for use as an outhouse for bikes, firewood, even coal and he came up to Undley to view it and give his OK. He also insisted that no house or bungalow was less than 100feet from the centre of the front road which meant a very long front garden.

Our plot was one of three, a two acre of old chicken pens had been divided into three with a frontage about twice the width of the bottom. This finished as a long tapering two thirds of an acre; ours was slightly larger than the other two because the outside boundary of these pens on our plot did not go straight back but bulged out.

These chicken pens had not been used for years and were all covered in long grass and under the grass was buried all of the old wire netting. I slowly cleared all this area but I was helped greatly by Mr.G.; I only had to ask if I could borrow the tractor I used during the day with cultivator, plough or tractor and trailer to fetch a load of sand from the warren for our driveway and he always obliged and was always satisfied with only my thanks.

I must mention that there were no numbers on the properties in the Cemetery Road up to Maids Cross Hill so we decided to give our bungalow a name after living there for a while.. There were two mature beach trees on our plot, one in the front garden and the other behind the bungalow so we decided on 'Beeches'. We did contemplate 'Brown Lawns' as this was usually their colour in summer as the soil was rather sandy up there, but 'Beeches' prevailed.

CHAPTER 18 - NOW WE ARE THREE.

During the first week of December 1960, saw Mary going off to the maternity ward at Newmarket Hospital. Her mother took her there and I went in the Morris Minor that evening to visit her. I remember it was a very foggy night but I arrived there OK. Mary was in the delivery room feeling very uncomfortable but, with visiting time over I returned home. Next morning I cooked my breakfast, probably the first time ever, and then went to the High Street to use the phone box to see if there was any news. By which time I was feeling very unwell with stomach pains; was it my cooking efforts? Mary's mother was so concerned about me that sometime later I was also in Newmarket hospital across the way from the maternity ward. They tested me for this and that but I don't know what conclusion they came to but I know that later on I was in bed looking at the clock and thinking it would soon be visiting time. I thought that no way would they let me visit Mary so, when the time arrived, I slipped my clothes on and crept out.

Mary was having a hard time as our baby was very reluctant to arrive. I was upset because of Mary's distress and returned to my ward to face a tongue lashing from the Matron. Early the next morning I was given the news, by a nurse, that we had a daughter and that mother and baby were well. In fact after two days in the delivery room Mary was absolutely shattered. I cannot recall if they kicked me out the same day or not or if they gave me any medication but one thing I am sure about is that during the fifty years since I have suffered with a dodgy stomach and take prescribed medication for it daily. As for the cause of it I was jokingly informed by all and sundry that it was sympathy pains!

I do remember the first time I saw our beautiful baby Helen Elizabeth, in those days the new babies were not kept beside their mother but in a special room containing all the babies in their cots and were only taken to their mother at feeding time. This babies room had a glass screen through which the new fathers peered at all the cots until a nurse would open the door to let them in for five or ten minutes to see their offspring. When Helen was in there, there were about ten or eleven cots occupied, two of which had the surname Turner on the label. I was one of the last to get in there and found another father standing admiring Helen so I had to tell him he was looking at the wrong baby and that his was the other one marked Turner. I could have said that his was the one with the very red hair but I did not. In those days mothers and babies were kept in hospital for ten days but the day eventually came for me to bring home Mary and baby Helen. I don't think any baby could have had prouder parents!

CHAPTER 19 - A BIG MOVE – TURKEYS.

In the following summer of 1961 an advert appeared in the local paper for a farm worker; it did not give much information as to where it was but I have always been good at putting two and two together and making five so I phoned the number as I thought it was on a farm not far from our home. A turkey rearing firm from Radwinter in Essex had bought this farm and were turning it into a turkey farm. I did not know too much about turkeys but, as it was on our doorstep, I applied for the job. I had to go to Radwinter for an interview and got the job; I may have been the only applicant, I never did find that out.

We were in the middle of harvest and I did not want to inconvenience Mr.G. so I asked Mr.Evans if I could delay my starting date and he agreed. I knew that Mr.G. would soon give up the Undley smallholding and that would mean that I would have to travel to Risby every day also his youngest son had started doing some of the jobs I had been doing and I thought I now had two bosses which did not seem the same. I gave in my notice to Mr.G. the best boss I ever had and the next four years turned out to be the most uncertain period in my life as I had five different jobs in that time.

I started my new job about the end of September 61; the young manager was a twenty-one year old from Northumberland. His father was an estate manager for the Duke of Northumberland in Anwick. Nigel was educated at Eton College and knew all the aristocracy in the area such as the Fishers from Kilverstone and the Agnews at Rougham who he would visit at weekends. He lived in a small caravan at the farm as there was no house there though later they did build him a bungalow.

My job at first was helping Nigel, and another old boy who used to frighten us when he had one of his frequent asthma attacks, fencing in these grass fields of six or seven acres with six feet high wire netting which must have cost a fortune. The turkeys began to arrive, about twelve weeks old, roughly three hundred at a time, to be fattened up till they were big enough to be shipped back to Radwinter to be killed, plucked cleaned and, I think, frozen. My job was to drive around these various fields with tractor and trailer to feed all these hundreds of turkeys and I came to the conclusion that they were some of the most stupid creatures to walk this earth. From time to time a lorry would turn up for about two hundred fat birds; we used to weigh them one at a time in a special crate to see if they were heavy enough. By this time they were about twenty five weeks old and were expected to weigh sixteen pounds for a hen or twenty five pounds for a stag. The job had a few perks like overtime at weekends and even after tea occasionally; it was also close to home and I could get there in about four minutes.

There was also a breeding flock of about one hundred hens and a few stags; there were always a number of cracked eggs so we were never short of eggs for breakfast and baking. One of the jobs I liked best was a weekly trip in one of these new minivans to deliver eggs to Radwinter where the firm's incubators were. Another perk was turkey breast; on my daily feeding round I would sometimes come across a gang of noisy birds attacking a bird they had picked on, usually a hen bird. I would drive them off only to find this poor bird with a raw bloodied neck and back although still alive it was a death sentence for whatever we did to try to help it to recover it would never feed but just pine away and die. It got to the point where I carried a spade on the tractor to finish off the poor birds and bury them. They would perhaps weigh up to fifteen pounds and, though their back and neck were raw, their underside was untouched and, to use a pun it was no skin off anyone's back if after wringing it's neck, I plucked its lovely plump breast, get out my pocket knife and we had a tasty meal for the morrow! Nigel and

I got on well together but it was a different matter between me and the turkeys.

One weekend Nigel went off on a break leaving me to check that things were OK at the farm. We had a large building where some of the younger birds were kept in for two or three weeks before being put out in the field; there were large heat lamps hanging from the roof about three feet above the floor, they were spread all over the floor space to provide warmth for the birds.. Water was laid on and plenty of troughs for food.

This weekend I suppose there were between three and four hundred birds in there. On the Saturday afternoon I went down to the farm to see if everything was alright, including this particular shed. The heat lamps, the water and the food supply were just as they should be but, on Sunday morning, when checking again I had the shock of my life; all the lamps were on as normal but under each was a pile of living and dead turkeys; scores were dead; what was I to do? I could not contact Nigel so I had to phone Mr.Evans and, after a few heated minutes he decided to come and see the disaster for himself. Tests were carried out and later I was told that they had died from a form of poultry hepatitis.

That was it; I made up my mind I had had enough of turkeys so that job had not worked out well. I did not put myself out of work as I had a word with my brother Ernie about the prospects of a job on Mildenhall base where he had been working, for some time, in the freight section. He told me that he and a fellow workmate were about to move to another section that worked twenty-four hours a day; it was shift work but the money was better and that's what it is all about. This section worked loading and unloading aircraft, the section he was leaving dealt with lorries rather than aircraft, anyway there would soon be vacancies due to their transfer. I decided to apply and after an interview and a medical I was successful. I gave in my notice to Nigel and it was farewell turkeys.

CHAPTER 20 - GETTING TO KNOW THE AMERICANS

Myself and two other young chaps started at the same time as driver/handyman to mainly sort freight and driving fork lifts. The first week they sent us, with about ten others, to the driving school where they told us all that could, or could not, be done while driving and working on the base. They also brought to my attention the consequences of bad driving, by showing us several very gory films of road accidents on American roads. The freight department was situated in a large hanger; on one side of which was Commercial Transportation where I had now started work. On the other side was Air Transportation where Ernie worked; we had half the hanger floor space and two rooms on the side, one an office for the American Lieutenant in charge and one for two or three G.I's and us civilians.

The work consisted mainly of receiving freight that had been unloaded from aircraft and transporting it to the hanger where it was sorted for all the different bases all over the country; there were about thirty bases at that time. Next morning we would load it all onto British Road Service lorries, it was interesting work and not too hard. We worked 8.00am to 5.00pm during the week but did overtime at weekends which helped increase our wages; during the slack hours on Saturday and Sunday out would come the playing cards and our loose change. The G.I.'s joined in too.

After about six months a vacancy came up for a driver on Air Freight where Ernie worked and I got a transfer; the money was much better as we worked twelve hours on and twenty four off meaning we had alternate day and night shifts and at weekends too. I liked it more because you had to unload and load the aircraft; some nights, especially foggy nights, there would be no flights in or out so, after doing everything there was to be done we had the cards out and around midnight we would get out our mattresses and get our heads down until about six thirty when we rise and shine sweep the hanger floor and clock out at 8.00am.

That was the time when my bodyweight began to rise from ten and a half stone to about thirteen.

CHAPTER 21 -- NOW WE ARE FOUR

One morning in June, I was woken by my supervisor who informed me that we now had a second daughter as Alison Mary had arrived.

I drove home from my night shift rather pleased to think that it had not been such a protracted delivery for Mary this time. Alison was born at home at Maids Cross Hill with local midwife and Mary's mother in attendance. The midwife was Mary's Aunt Leah who had been Lakenheath midwife for many, many years and was Mary's father's sister. When I arrived home there were these three very proud ladies ready to show me the new addition to the family. Alison seemed very different from Helen who had been all arms and legs. Alison was much heavier and more rounded and while I admired her I said that she looked like a little fat duck. Forty years later as I drove past the old home with our youngest American granddaughter, I told her that was where her mummy was born and that, at the time, I thought she looked like a little fat duck and Hailey was most offended. Helen was a bit poorly with measles, at the time of Alison's arrival but was happy and pleased to think she would have a sister to play with although, at two and a half, she was a very contented little girl and would amuse herself for hours with the simplest of toys. Ali grew up also, to be happy and contented although much more cheeky. Mary and I were glad that things had gone well as we were a bit out of contact up there, the nearest public phone was down in the High St. I don't remember anyone near us that had their own, not like today when everyone has a mobile attached to their ear.

Four or five months after Ali was born, I was getting used to shift work and with twelve hour shifts on Saturday or Sunday; I was earning good money, when a bombshell was dropped. Uncle Sam was short of money and several of us civilians were going to be made redundant. It did not make any difference if you were a good worker, or not, the policy was last in first out and I was one of those. Another good job gone!!

Most of the civilian workers on the base came under the British Staff Organisation and they provided a short list of jobs that were available on Mildenhall and Lakenheath bases; there was only one I considered suitable for me. It was a driver/handyman in the warehouse of Lakenheath Base Commissary, the supermarket. I put in for it and started there as soon as my time expired on Air Freight.

This was a basic week with hardly any overtime; the money was not as good either so I was down to about a third less wages. I began to think we were heading for hard times but really we were luckier than most because we had never been saddled with a twenty five year mortgage like most young people at that time. This was due to the fact that I married late and had accumulated a bob or two and, also, to the generosity of my father who was now in a position to help his children financially.

I did begin to worry about my low income; I had taken out a couple of insurance policies and did not think I could afford to keep these on. I contacted my 'man from the Pru' but when I was told the amount we would get if I surrendered them, about a quarter of what we had paid in, we decided to carry on with them, When they matured many years later we realised we had done the right thing and we had a good reward..

The job in the warehouse was fairly light work; in charge was an American Staff Sgt, or two airmen and myself. We unloaded lorries that brought in goods for the commissary, using a forklift, and stacked these in the warehouse which supplied the store as required. One nice little job was to walk to the motor pool, sign for a one ton truck and go round to collect goods that were stored in various other buildings scattered around the base. Another job I had at times was to keep watch outside the doors while the Staff Sgt., who I got along well with, nipped into his little office to get a plastic cup and his whiskey bottle that he kept stashed away in his desk drawer, so he could have a quick booster.

After I had worked there about three months, a chap came up to our home to offer me a job; he was actually married to one of my cousins and he knew that I was looking for a better paid job. He and his partner ran a small transport business; every day one of their lorries would call at the warehouse to collect and take away the rubbish as they had a contract to collect all the trash from the two airbases. I would usually have a chat with the driver and his mate who I knew.

He offered me a job and for a few pounds more a week and I became a trash man; soon I and another chap were going round the houses of the married quarters, the barracks and parts of the airfield at Lakenheath emptying trash bins, what a job! It was heavier work than I had been doing lately, no wheelie bins in those days, everything had to be carried. I was soon driving one of the lorries with a young lad as a mate, the job had a few perks as, when families and single men from the barracks were posted home, they would throw away all manner of things that they could not take with them. It's a bit ironic that I was now unloading trash on the very same dump from which my mate Len and I had beat a hasty retreat all those years before after we had accidentally set it on fire I never mentioned this at work and things went well for several months until the boss told me one day that he had a deal with Mildenhall base and had bought a large amount of rubber inner tubes, about three lorry loads, which he had sold on and wanted delivered somewhere in the middle of London, We loaded them up and the next day the plan was to go to London in convoy; I was expected to drive one of these lorries. I told Geoff the boss that I would rather not do that job; he was a bit annoyed which was understandable. I had only driven to London once before and that was when we went on our honeymoon in the Morris Minor; this was much different. Driving the lorry, which was not the easiest vehicle to handle, I could imagine doing someone, or myself, some damage and that was that. Geoff did not give me the sack but I knew I was out of favour and I started looking for pastures new and another change. Geoff and his partner built up the business over the next ten years after I left until they had a fleet of eight lorries and a workforce of thirty people but, sadly, in the mid seventies, one Saturday morning a disastrous fire occurred; buildings, machinery and tons of salvaged cardboard and waste paper were destroyed. The business almost folded as nothing was insured; I don't think Geoff or his partner really recovered either as neither of them lived long enough to enjoy retirement. Hand on heart neither Len nor I had anything to do with that fire!

CHAPTER 22 - WORKING IN BRANDON

Although I left several jobs, not once did I put myself out of work, I always made sure that I had a new job to go to straight away, you were able to do that at the time but it is not so easy today. I began to work at Brandon working for a firm that made all types of sectional wooden buildings and I was now working with wood full time something I had always enjoyed doing. Toleman's of Brandon was in three parts; wood kilns that dried all types of hard wood for different furniture makers and even for the motor trade when they were using ash in the manufacture of vehicles like the Morris Traveller. Another section used soft wood to machine thousands of shaped pieces that were used in the shoe trade for wedge heels. I worked in the section making sheds of all shapes and sizes, from small garden sheds upwards to offices, canteens, and even dormitory blocks. All jobs were piece work which meant that the faster you worked the more you earned; that suited me and I got to be quite nifty with hammer and nails although there was more to the job than that. We worked in pairs mostly with an ex-professional Scottish footballer who showed me the ropes when I first started there. We would be given a job such as ten garden sheds which would be ten floor sections, ten roofs, ten plain sections, ten door/window sections and twenty ends, all doors and windows were made also.

I really liked that sort of job, a few sore fingers and thumbs but that was part of the job. Toleman's at the time were getting orders for large buildings which were clad in cedar wood, a very nice wood to work with as it had a lovely smell to it. It had to be handled carefully as it was easily damaged. Boards were nailed vertically, not horizontally like the usual shiplap boards that we used; in cedar work all nails were hidden from view. The first large cedar buildings I was involved with were three dormitory buildings for Cranfield Aeronautical University near Bedford. Most of the shed workforce would help to make these and then a team of four would go out to the site to erect and fit these out. I was asked if I would go and, as we had two small children at that time, Mary had to consent. She agreed but I don't think she was really keen as it meant that I would be away from Monday morning until Friday evening. We had digs arranged for us, sometimes very good and sometimes not so good. We were four or five weeks on this job and I took the Morris Minor most weeks. Unfortunately during that time it let me down twice and I lost a bit of confidence in it and later I traded it in for a Morris Mini, the wonder car of it's time. That was a very big mistake; it was nippy and agile but very small with a tiny boot that, when we put our little fold up pushchair in you could not close the door plus the fact I never found it economical with fuel. I regretted selling my faithful Minor many times.

On this job it was summer time and we could put in a few extra hours but we could still visit the local pub to have a drink and a game of darts. On other jobs away during the autumn or winter when the days were shorter we had to finish earlier and that meant spending more time in the pubs and I was spending money that I would not be spending if I was working in Brandon. So we asked for, and got, a few pounds expenses otherwise we would not work away.

The next away job was on a large office block for some oil company at Killingholme the other side of Grimsby on the Humber, where they were building a large new oil refinery. That was a long way from home and early every Monday morning my spirits would be rather low. There were usually four, sometimes five, of us; our charge hand was an ex German POW who had stayed here and married an English girl. I think his name must have been Gerhardt but he was Jerry to us; he was the nicest man you could wish to meet.

Our digs were in Immingham where we were put in a conservatory on the back of the house and it was as cold as ice. There were about twelve lodgers in all; the landlady must have made a fortune. The fifth member of our group was Alan, a very good carpenter, he also played the double bass in a group and he would tell us that his group had backed Jim Reeves, the American singer, when he visited Lakenheath base. Alan also suffered badly from asthma and at breakfast when he got off coughing and spluttering it was very off putting, not a good start to the day. Alan always travelled alone in his Morris Minor van and, I remember, one very wet Friday afternoon he drove all the way home with no windscreen wipers.

Next it was down to Stevenage to erect and fit out a building that was to be used as a pre-school nursery; once again very poor digs there. Then I had two weeks down at Bicester helping to finish off a large timber house for the Forestry Commission that we had made with all home grown timber. I remember when we were close to finishing the house we all came home on Friday to watch the World Cup Final; in those days you could not go into a pub to watch football; we were chastised by the manager for coming home but we all wanted to see England beat West Germany, even Jerry had an interest although I forget who he wanted to win.

Then back to Stevenage again to erect a large canteen building for the new Lister Hospital that was being built there. We had almost finished fitting it out when some important looking chap turned up and said he wanted us to stop work and clear off for an hour because he wanted to use the canteen for a union meeting, so we had a break.

These jobs away from home took place over a period of about two and a half years though most of the time I was working at Brandon.

Around this time I decided I had had enough of our Morris Mini and swapped it for a Ford Cortina; another car everyone was talking about, mine turned out to be a bit of a disaster even though it was more of a family car, it proved to be rather unreliable.

We went onto Lakenheath Base to erect an extension at the Rod & Gun club which was then situated where the base golf clubhouse now is. We were working up on the roof when we heard sirens go off and soon found the clubhouse surrounded by five or six air police cars with their lights flashing from which a number of police jumped out brandishing their guns. I think someone had got the wrong idea seeing us up on the roof and pressed the panic button.

The last job I went away on was to Fawley Oil refinery just south of Southampton to erect an office block. We travelled down there in the Cortina and Jerry's little green mini van which we used quite a lot. We found our digs which were in a very nice large house and looked very promising; we left our cases and went on to the oil refinery and, as it was getting late in the day and we didn't do much. We were sorting out a few things when a man on a bike turned up; he eyed us up for a time and then started asking us who we were working for and to what union we belonged. We told him that there was no union at Toleman's; I for one was very anti union, and he cycled away. Next morning we started to erect the building but, after about two hours, this man returned with his mate and told us to stop work at once if not they would call out the whole refinery on strike. After a few discussions and a few phone calls it was agreed that Jerry would stay and show a gang of union members how to go about erecting the office although he could not even pick up a hammer himself. The rest of us had to collect our tools and bags and come home; when arriving back home I had to take a workmate home to Hockwold where he lived and, as we were travelling along Lakenheath Station road the water pump on the Cortina packed in. It was lucky because we were both within walking distance of home; it could have been worse.

Some time after this, rumours began to circulate that the firm was in trouble and this turned out to be true. We were all made redundant and I was sorry because I had enjoyed working there for nearly four years. While working out our notice, a chap who had left a few months previously came into the factory and said he was earning good money at Sprites Caravan factory; it was 10shillings per hour, which is 50p in today's money, and that they were expanding and setting on new people. I and one or two of the others from Toleman's went over to Newmarket and were taken on as Sprites were setting on several people at that time and that our first week would be in the training school. The week that I had to wait to get into the school was the only time I was idle from the time that I started work down the farm at Pearson's, aged fourteen, to the time that I retired at sixty five, although I had changed jobs several time. How times have changed!

CHAPTER 23 - WORKING AT NEWMARKET

Working at Sprites factory at Newmarket meant a round trip every day of thirty miles and as several men from Lakenheath worked there I was soon in a group of three who shared a ride. As we were all car owners it meant one week driving and two weeks as passengers.

I found work very different there as I worked in the sub assembly department where many large and small items were put together to supply two caravan production lines. Some jobs were very small and every job had a time; some times it could be as short as three decimal points to the minute; these jobs were all timed by the Time & Motion method, an example could be pre-drilling one hundred pieces of wood with a time of a minute which would equal thirty seven and a half minutes, could be very boring and you could not stand back and admire a job like that. To earn a good bonus you had to book in about 75 to 80 minutes per hour.

A new worker would on starting be classed as B grade, to be upgraded to A grade and a better rate of pay would take a month or two as you were required to master quite a few different jobs around the section; some would be satisfied to stay as B grade if they found a job they liked. To get my A grade I was asked, by my supervisor, if I would consider going onto a radial arm router; these were used to router all the hardboard panels used to line the interior of all caravans. I wasn't all that keen on this as it was a dirty and noisy job but I soon got the hang of it and, as you worked on your own, I liked that.

The hardboard panels were all plastic lined on one side in various patterns depending on whether they were for lounge, bedroom or bathroom walls. You routed around plywood jigs clamped onto eight panels at a time; all outside curves were cut and with a router blade half an inch wide there was a great deal of muck and dust flying about. Plywood sheets were also cut for floors.

I stayed on this job for three to four years; I had to wear a nose and mouth mask but I don't think it did me any harm. I was also using a cross cut circular saw cutting copper pipe and aluminium extrusions for a long time; also, I had a sit down job using a pneumatic operated punch on various extrusions.

When I first started at Sprites there were very few men in the union and being anti union I was not going to join if I could keep out of it but, during the first ten years more and more joined until the time came that we were informed that Sprites was going to be a closed shop. That meant anyone who wanted to work there had to be a union member so, very reluctantly, I swallowed my pride and paid up. One man did his best not to join but his case went to a tribunal he lost his case and his job. It then came about that every department had to have a shop steward so Sprites finished up with about ten employees who did a lot of talking and not much work

I hated the times when, because of a dispute somewhere in the factory our shop steward would come round and say that everyone must go to the car park for a union meeting. I did not like the way they behaved, when a vote was taken about anything, more often than not I would vote against it. There would be up to hundred people there and when it was time to vote, we objectors were told to move away from the rest to be counted, then the others were counted but that total included all those who could not make up their minds and also those afraid to show any dissent. That's how they usually won!

The early years were busy times and to get extra money I would work on Saturday mornings and, also, some Sunday mornings. In our busiest year we produced twenty-six thousand vans for the home market and most countries on the continent from Norway to Greece. About five lorries were transporting vans to Felixstowe Docks every day, two or three vans on the lorry and another towed behind.

Sprites were part of Caravan International (CI) with about five factories in this country, one in Germany and one in South Africa.

During the seventies thing began to change. The Middle Eastern oil producers greatly increased oil prices causing a big jump in the price of petrol and, with other problems the demand for caravans began to fall. In 1981 at Newmarket the firm said it wanted to make one hundred men redundant. After many meetings with the management the union called for a vote on strike action; this was taken. I again in the minority but we were out on strike. After five weeks of lost wages it was agreed to ask for volunteers to put their name forward for redundancy. Enough men volunteered, myself amongst them, but not until I had found a new job at Omar's of Brandon who make large mobile homes.

I finished at Newmarket and started straight away at Brandon and feeling a bit of a hypocrite I must say I walked away with a fairly generous sum thanks to the union efforts. I still think that the union demands were one of the straws that broke the camel's back because two years later the firm folded completely.

CHAPTER 24 - BACK TO BRANDON

In 1981 when I joined Omar workforce they were expanding and one of my first jobs there was helping to make large timber sections for the interior walls of their factory extension. Soon I was working on the final finish section at the end of two production lines, on one single units were made, 8ft wide, on the other line twin units were made, 16ft wide, up to 40ft long, three bedroom homes. The factory was very untidy with off cuts of timber, metal and plastic all scattered around; it was not much better when I left 14 years later. It was fairly light work on final finish painting radiators, making up and fitting curtains and other fitments like mirrors; later I was put on making up box type gable ends for front and rear of the twin units for the roofing gang to use. Another job at one time was fitting plastic guttering and down pipes. All tools like drills, nail guns and staple guns were powered by compressed air. Everyone had his own personal thirty or forty foot long airline trailing around and when you had plumbers, furniture fitters and door hangers in one van it could be a bit chaotic. Almost all the twin units had mock Tudor beams fitted in the dining room and the lounge area and I later got the job of fitting beams which I quite liked.

The ceilings were low enough to work comfortably from floor level; I did this job for several years and in latter years vaulted ceilings were introduced which meant a great deal of stepladder work which could be tiring on a hot day,.

I was by this time approaching 60 so one day I asked my foreman if I could have a transfer and he could perhaps get a younger man on these stepladders. He agreed and asked me to teach the next chap the ropes; I did this and moved to a lighter job but a few months later this chap said he had fallen and hurt his back, I think he tried to claim for this although I did not hear of the outcome, another chap was found and I showed him how to fit the beams; same result, he lasted about two months and another fall and another claim! By this time I was fitting ceramic tiles in all the bathrooms and kitchens, another job I quite liked.

Over the years workers would retire after several years service and it was general practise for a collection to be made on their behalf and a suitable leaving present purchased. On his final day the workforce all assembled below the manager's office and the presentation was made, a few short speeches followed.

As I was approaching retirement myself, I wondered how I could miss this fuss; there had been several periods during my time at Omar's when they were short of orders and we saw various people made redundant and we were put on short time and the summer of 1994 was another bad time. They were going to make twenty men redundant and I was three months short of retiring so one day I asked my foreman how I stood and he told me I was No.1 on the list which was what I expected anyway. So after 14years, in July 1994, I was finished, so three months before my 65th birthday I left with my minimum dues like holiday pay and no redundancy payment as I could draw my Old Age Pension in October.

On my last day I did very little work, I went round the factory and said my goodbyes to special friends and slipped out at dinner time; no presentation for me but I did receive a short note from the Managing Director, who didn't know me from Adam, thanking me for 14 years service.

One good thing about Omar's was , when you had been there for six months you had to join the pension scheme and I did walk away with a small pension which I have thankfully received for the past fifteen years. Sadly, fourteen years after I left they too went 'belly up', was I a bit of a Jonah!

In the autumn of the year I retired I decided that as I was fairly fit and mobile I went to see a local farmer who grew swedes onions, potatoes and parsnips which he washed and packed. I knew that he employed pensioners part time. He told me that he would be happy to give me a trial and I stayed with him for six years. He employed two younger women but the majority were pensioners. They were a happy group of people and we had a lot of laughs but at times I think that I worked harder than at anytime in my working years. Tony was a good boss and also a generous one; we worked mainly during the autumn and winter and sometimes during the summer. At the age of seventy one I called it a day and finally retired.

CHAPTER 25 - THE GIRLS

During the years I spent at Omar's first Helen and then Alison married, both to Americans. Helen married Shawn Johnson who came to Lakenheath base with his mother and step father who was a serviceman. Shawn was classed as a schoolboy dependant; he left school and started work and has been in England ever since. Helen and Shawn married in 1983 and have two children, Monique and Thomas; they are now grandparents as in 2008 Ruby, our little great granddaughter, was born to Monique and her partner Damien. Alison met and married Steve Cross in 1985 when he was in the American Air Force. He was sent back to the States and came back on leave to get married and Alison was gone to the States within two weeks, much heartache for us, and then our many trips to USA began. They gave us three more grandchildren, all girls, Lindsey, Emily and Hailey. Sadly their marriage ended in divorce this year, 2011, after twenty five years together, mainly because Steve wanted pastures new. More about family later.

CHAPTER 26 – LATER YEARS

On giving up my part time job at Tony Pooley's I carried on growing our vegetables on my allotment opposite the Mill Pond in Undley Road until I reached my 77th year when I began to think it was too much. After having it for about 26 years I decided to give it up and concentrate on keeping my garden at home in reasonable order and also spend time walking my dear dog, Henry over our beloved warren. While writing about the warren, I must mention that on May 1st 2009, Henry and I had completed our leisurely walk when we met Dave, also a dog walker with whom we had shared many walks. We sat down on the stone commemorative seat for a chat when I realised Dave was asking me if I was alright as I was talking gibberish and my right arm had dropped uselessly by my side. I told him no and that I thought I was having a stroke; after he got over the shock I eventually asked him if he would take me home. Luckily my car was only about 80 yards away and my legs, although a bit shaky were working. He managed to get me and two dogs into the car and drive me home where we proceeded to give Mary the mother of all shocks. The Paramedics were soon there and assessed me for about an hour then it was a fast noisy ride in an ambulance to West Suffolk Hospital where the stroke team were ready and waiting to wire me up and do all the tests.

For the next four days I was monitored and then told that it was a mild stroke and I could go home. By that time my right arm was more or less back to normal.

I was very pleased with the way I was treated and looked after and, after seeing first hand how the effect of a stroke could have on you, I realise how lucky I was.

Sadly 18 months later, it was our turn for a shock when we learned that poor Dave had died suddenly while on a visit to Cambridge.

Now although perhaps a little slower we carry on as normal as possible with the help of plenty of pills and potions and as Doris Day used to sing 'Que Sera Sera, What will be will be'.

With luck part two of this saga will follow!