The village hall - "The Hut" (part 5)

The Binder

This is a Machine used to cut the Corn and bind it into neat Sheaves with string fed from a large ball. The operator sitting at the back has to watch for sheaves coming out untied, which can be as a result of running out of string, a somewhat serious offence to those present, or more hopefully for the operators sake the Mechanical Knotter has decided to take a rest, over which you have little or no control. In either case he has to make the Tractor driver hear so that not too many untied sheaves are produced. In earlier days he would have had to control the Horses, although there most probably would have been someone leading the trace Horses, much depending on the number in the team.

Thinking back this was also a case when the rear Horses were run in pairs separated by a pole but normally with a single trace Horse. Once again we see that the tractor/implement combinations of those days normally required as many men to operate as with horses.

The main saving on manpower would be that there was very little preparation required, basically you just had to start it up and go.

The build of the Binder is not unlike a much larger and more refined Mowing Machine the cutting bar being arranged in a similar manner, but with the aforementioned Canvases, running behind, and parallel to the Knife, these carry the cut Corn to the gathering and tying device.

All of this is Driven by a large "Spudded" Wheel which also carries the bulk of the Machines weight, this could be raised, and lowered by a rotating handle, and would control the Machines height from the ground. A limited amount of control is available to the operator, while on the move.

This was a Machine that due to its width would have to be transported sideways between jobs, and through gates which necessitated a considerable amount of setting up on site before use. First you would jack it up using the height control handles, then remove the transport wheels before fitting the drawbar, and you could get started, this procedure would have to be carried out just to move to the next field, unless as in some fields a wide gap had been left in the hedge.

There was a set of wooden "Sails", running over the Knife to force the Corn back so that it could be cut, and to lay it down on the Canvases, the cutting bar could be raised, and lowered by the Operator. All straight forward; what could possibly go wrong? One of the main problems was that the Corn might have been blown down by a storm sometime earlier, and as result the Binder would not be able to cut it, because the Blade would run over the top, and the Sails would be unable to pick it up. Add to this the Fact that, in that area, both Corn and ground would probably be

very wet, which even if you could cut it, it might well cause the entire "works" to jam solid.

To try and overcome this the operator, riding on the back of the machine would carry a "Poker". This was just a long wooden handle with a wooden peg sticking out at right angles at the business end. When a problem looked like occurring with the way the corn was entering onto the canvases you would "Poke, and Puggle" with this device hoping to defeat the jam before it stopped the machine. On one occasion I was doing just that when the end of the "Poker", caught in the rotating sail, the other end unknown to me was pointing at my midriff the result was that I was very sharply and neatly deposited on the ground. Before I was removed lifted me over the raised back of the seat and fortunately apart from a few bruises only my pride was damaged.

To digress, in earlier days these patches plus any other uncut Area would probably have been cut with Scythes, or again might fall prey to the "Gleaners", or "Leasers", both being terms to describe people who went round the Farms with permission to gather any odd Corn left after the Farmer had finished Harvesting.

The people involved would most likely be women who kept some Hens and/or Pigs. They would mow down any Corn left with Scythes or "Fagging Hooks", the local term for small hand held cutters (Sickles), and Thresh it by hand. The Scythe was to me a strange device, I suppose that I was never exposed to one for long enough to really tailor it (Set the grass nail) to suit my requirements. They were very much a personal tool, but nevertheless very efficient when in the right hands. I have seen my Father mow the cricket table with one but I also think that this implement disappeared from the farming scene quicker than anything else I can remember.

Getting back to the Harvest:-

The Binder would travel round the Field in the form of a rectangle, or probably it would be better to say that you would start off following the shape of the field hoping that as you progressed the shape would improve. This normally meant stopping and reversing at each corner, or in some cases turning a full outward circle to clear the cutter bar, and to bring you back in line with the standing corn, any sharp turn made while the cutter was actually working resulted in a "Jam up", the uncut area getting smaller of course as the day wore on, eventually there would be nowhere for the Rabbits, Foxes, Rats, Mice, etc. to hide and so the people involved or visitors to the Field would gather round to see what emerged and to try and bag a "Tasty" Rabbit. A less tasty Dish I personally have yet to try. Rabbits have very great difficulty in running over the stubble left by the Binder, but it was not always easy to catch one.

They would sometimes hide in wide cracks in the ground, and although I have seen several pulled out of one such crack, and rapidly despatched, it does take a bit of nerve t o put your hand into the unknown. A Rat, a Stoat or something just as unpleasant might just head the queue waiting to get out and their bites are not very pleasant.

Of course the Lads would be at a suitable Vantage point keeping a wary eye on which team were getting close to the end, so that a rapid dash could be made to the scene of any impending action.

Having cut and tied the Corn it would now be built into "Stooks", or "Shocks", (More likely Locally), which means standing each sheaf on end corn heads upwards in sets of six or eight in the form of small tents to dry. There was a proper way to do this as the sheaves are tapered at the bottom, and so will only remain standing when this is correctly placed.

We Children could do this, as well as anyone, but there was one lesson you soon learned, this was that it was not very clever to work with your Sleeves rolled up. First there was the inevitable Thistles and secondly the Corn itself was very abrasive and by nightfall you had some pretty sore Arms. It was the kind of job that at the end of the day you knew you had been at work, because mostly you would have walked some distance, plus those problems mentioned previously. When finished you would also be "Judged", by your Colleagues and/or your Competitors as to how straight your rows were and by how many of you: "Shocks" fell down unaided. "The Wind was to blame"? was not usually an acceptable excuse.

Later came even more hard work when it was time to load it for transporting to the Rick yard. Much depended on how the Binder had been set as this determined the size of the sheaf and without a doubt the bigger the sheaf the heavier it is to "Pitch" onto the Wagon. This really was hard work. It is done using "Pitchforks", which are rather bigger versions of the Hayfork, necessary because of the height that you have to toss the Sheaf. You do this by only just piercing the sheaf with the tines so that as you swing the Fork in an arc you can release it and gain an extra foot or two of height.

On top of the wagon you would mostly handle the sheaves with your hands, those thistles once again being particularly unpleasant.

The Skill of "Tossing the Sheaf", was sometimes tested at Village Fetes, when a straw bundle representing a sheaf would be tossed over an adjustable crossbar usually supported by a couple of scaffold poles lashed to gateposts, the highest throw winning a prize.

A second variation to this was that sometimes a sack of straw was used, this did present problems if you pierced the sack as it would often cling onto the tines of the fork, with the result that the fork went too. One sure way of gaining some elbow room.

Back in the Field, that competitive element would again rear it’s ugly head if you could see how big the neighbours loads were, or the acreage cleared, you just did not have to be beaten.

On top of the load could be a dangerous place with Pitchforks flying in all directions while you were trying to arrange the sheaves into a decent looking safe load, like most things to do with the Farm you had to keep your wits about you at all times. When the loading was complete it would be taken to the Rick yard, and sent up the Elevator in much the same way as the Hay before it.

The site of the Rick yard had probably been decided years before. It would be close to the Cowshed if Hay and have to be easily accessible to the Threshing Machine if Corn.

The self propelled Combine has now of course coming into it's own along with the baler and the people required for any given job has decreased considerably. Much of the straw is now burned in the field, although this practise will soon be outlawed, the remainder being baled for feed and bedding use.

You might next get involved with the "Top" Job in the Farming Calendar, "Dung", "Manure", or just plain "Muck" spreading. This again was hard work, plenty of Muscle, but not much brainpower required, a time to think? This was also the time to work off any frustrations; you could really let yourself go.

It would go something like this:- First you would load it in to Horse drawn tipping carts at the Farm, or at a previously built heap in or near the field. You would then take it to the Field and tip it into heaps the size of which depended on the amount per acre that you intended to spread at.

There was a kind of long handled Fork with the tines bent at right angles to form a "Drag", this was used to pull the "Dung" out of the cart as it was sometimes reluctant to exit unaided. These carts could only be tipped completely, there was no half measures, so alternately and equally helpful it would all come out in one large lump. This was a job where it was easy to get some first class blisters as the "Dung" had a habit of spreading itself onto the handles, drying out and thereby acting like an abrasive. No one that I can remember ever wore gloves. Next would come the actual spreading which just consisted of throwing the "Stuff" uniformly all over the place.

The "Dung Cart"

This consisted of more or less rectangular body carried on two metal shod wooden wheels similar to the wagons, the Horse supporting roughly half the weight. The tipping device was basically a hinge mounted at the rear of the shafts, held from tipping by a wooden bar reaching across the width of the cart. The operation was simple; you just withdrew the bar and gently reversed the Horse. There was no control over how far it tipped, so it was mostly all or none. There was a removable tailboard and so sometimes with loads like "Dung", you might leave the board in place hoping this would retain some of the load at least. To return the body to the level position you would insert the locking bar into a convenient anchorage point, urge the Horse to go slowly forward while at the same time pulling down on the bar. You then had to get the locking bar into position before the Horse stepped back and tipped it once more. The terrain could play a large part in the successful or otherwise operation. The carts, like all of these type of vehicles, were made to a very high standard of finish indeed.

The Hygiene situation was not at it's best when working in the Fields as washing your hands in ponds or ditches of stagnant water would result in them becoming dirtier than they were already, so in practise you just didn't bother, other than a quick rub on a suitable looking patch of grass without thinking too much about what may previously happened to it. That "You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die"

was always the saying. Like most other jobs on the Farm this "Muck Spreading" and loading is now done entirely by Machine. After this was completed the whole cycle of cultivation could start all over again. I do remember one incident in particular that occurred while doing this work. The Baker had told everyone just previously that the next delivery of Bread would be made with "National Wholemeal Flour", it was! I also remember the Sandwiches that first day, first of many, when we compared the consistency and the colour of the new Bread to the loads we were dealing with, of course now such bread would be considered as "Healthy eating". Food of course would have to carried with you, complete with flask of tea or bottle of home-made lemonade, (made from Eiffel Tower Crystals if I remember correctly). You would hope to find a cool spot to leave your "Dinner Bag", a Tree, or some other safe place to hang it away from Cows or any other curious Animal, Jackets would have to be treated in the same way. Farm Workers like many other outdoor people got extra tea, cheese and I think butter rations, as of course there were no factory canteens to go to.

In the Village the distribution of "Woolton" pies took place just as for anywhere else. I seem to recall that there were also sausage rolls but the fact that we have since learned that there was no meat in either comes as a bit of a Shock.

Sheep shearing would be done at the appropriate time, this being men's work and not much for us to do. We might get involved with the moving of the Sheep, (Unpaid Sheepdogs) and perhaps help with the rolling up of the Fleeces. On some Farms the power to work the machine clippers was provided by hand, and so someone had to keep the handle turning, but in most cases the Stationary Engine, as used for the Elevator would be used.

The cleaning up of the Fleece at the rear end of the Sheep would be done with hand clippers, before shearing, a process known as usually "Dagging". The resulting "Revolting" product of this operation would be dropped into large containers filled with water, a five gallon oil drum with the lid removed usually being favourite, where it would be regularly stirred, ready for use later as a very high standard liquid Manure, very beneficial to Sweet peas or Peas of any kind. Shearing was a very dirty job as the Oil from the Wool would travel through any Clothing and I was never sorry not to get more involved. Of course just as with most other things we would have a go at it plus making attempts to throw a sheep onto its back, the way sheep are usually held for shearing.

The Fleeces were shorn off in such a way as to give the largest single piece of Wool possible. It was then rolled up for collection by the Wool Merchant, I believe he came from Thame.

At some time during the year the Lambs tails would be cut. They would later be skinned and fried, imagine a tiny solid fat filled Sausage with a Gristle filled centre and you've got it. Others had other parts of their anatomy treated likewise.

The Sheep would be marked as proof of ownership, although a good Shepherd knows his Sheep, as they are all different in some small way. My Grandfather was a Shepherd and discovered that two of his charges (Small Lambs) were missing. Furthermore he had a good idea that they had been "Borrowed" by a neighbouring Shepherd. He also knew the most likely place to find them so after taking a discreet look inside a nearby shed he later, and now accompanied by their Mother, paid a

visit to this site and there sure enough were two Lambs who rushed to greet her. Nothing was ever mentioned regarding this incident by either side, but I am sure the message got across.

My Grandfathers way of carrying Lambs always amused me He would just wear them round his neck like a collar, holding their legs in front of him. Some Lambs can be quite heavy. His Collie was trained to work with Sheep and would only show an interest in them. Our Dog on the other hand was trained for Cows and so would ignore Sheep. As with many Dogs used in the Field ours went Blind, it was always reckoned that this is due to Pollen and Seeds in the Grass.

One thing about these animals we had at home I have never understood. Our cat would normally not have anything to do with the Dog but at night would go some distance down the field to meet him coming home from work. She seemed to know the time. Two of our cats, both female, killed and brought home stoats, probably fed up with a diet of rabbits.

Back to our involvement with the farm.

The feeding of Orphan Lambs can be interesting. They are usually fed with a bottle fitted with a teat, very much as for a Baby. Calves are fed in a totally different way, a small Bucket is used and is filled with the made up food to be given. You then dip the Calves Head into this Bucket, put your Fingers into it's Mouth. and allow the Animal to suck the Juice passing between your Fingers as if using a straw. It could get quite hectic at times if several calves wanted to be first in the queue. Animal feeding was a job much sought after when we were finally let out of School. Animal "Ringworms" were not totally unknown in those days. A sad sound was after a calf had been taken away from its Mother. Then the Cow would "Cry" at least all through the night. It was something of a mournful tune.

The inevitability of Birth and Death came quite naturally to the Village Children as you could see Animals giving Birth and equally see Dead Animals being disposed of. The use of a rope to aid the difficult Birth of a Calf was not unknown and we might be invited to give a gentle pull.

A truly beautiful sight is a newly born Foal; there can hardly be a more handsome creature than a Foal, those first hesitant steps being very pleasing to watch but you do have to watch out for it's mother, as it may be watching it's offspring instead of where you are.

Young Lambs are of course also very interesting, particularly when they gather to "Play" in groups as of course are Chickens being hatched, first the emerging Chick breaking out of the Shell, then the small ball of "Fluff" beginning to move about, they also seem to favour Groups.

A dispute that might happen in any of the Villages and could sometimes get out of hand was the ownership of fences and ditches some of which never do get completely sorted out to everyone’s satisfaction. Maps ancient or modern only ever show part of the story and there is always someone’s failing memory to contend with.

To finish with work, I would say that many of those from my age group, if leaving School at a suitable time (Such as Easter), would most probably work full time on a Farm until the end of the Harvest season. This would give them time to look round for more permanent employment, of which there was very little at that time. One aspect for which we all had to be grateful was that the Farmers in the village always kept our Insurance Stamps up to date when we became eligible for such things. This did not always happen in the surrounding Villages as the local Newspapers regularly reported Court cases of non-payment.

To many it will appear as though work was all we did, but that wouldn't be strictly true. Village life in general was not too unpleasant for most people.

Once a Fortnight or so the County Library Van would call at the School to deliver boxes of Books which were kept in the School for our consumption, the "Library" being opened on one day a week. The business of choosing the Books would mostly be done by the Ladies as many of the Men would be at work, any Volume that wasn't carried on the Van could be ordered, and hopefully would be delivered next time round.

What about the actual Living Conditions?

Many of the Houses were tied to Farms, not a very pleasant system in my opinion and I suspect the same goes for most of the people living in them but it a was policy supported at the time, apparently by all Political Parties the Labour Government of nineteen-forty-five being among them. In all other respects these Houses were pretty much the same as Houses anywhere, most had an outside Earth Closet, the new Council Houses having a Septic Tank.

These houses were cold, and I do mean cold! As a treat or if we could persuade Mothers that we were so ill as to need additional comfort then either one of the cast iron slides from the ever warm oven or a brick suitably wrapped might be put in the bed prior to going ourselves. This would be removed (Much to our disgust), as soon as we arrived, it being decided that Chilblains would almost certainly be the outcome should the heated article be left in overnight.

The average Families were not now as large as they had been in previous times, how they ever fitted into them I shall never understand. The Heating would most probably be by an open Fireplace, complete with an Oven, some later would have Kitchen Ranges fitted, and at the same time would have had Bathrooms built on complete with Septic Tanks as well but this modernisation would have to wait until after the War. Later still would come the Main Sewer.

Before the arrival of the Mains Electricity the main Lighting and centre of the "Universe" at night, for us at least, would be the Aladdin Lamp. This gave out a fantastic amount of white light and also a considerable amount of heat.

This source of heat was much missed after it had gone, they burned Paraffin of course, and had to be kept trimmed in the way of such devices. We were a Family of readers and so that Lamp was very important to

us. The very large Glass Globe looked to me like a Wedding Cake. A smaller Lamp would be used to travel from room to room and of course the Candle was much in evidence. Some other houses would use the "Tilley" or some other form of lamp.

The coming of the Electricity to the Village also of course improved life on the Farms as now instead of having to carry a Hurricane Lamp everywhere you went, there could be light at the touch of a Switch, though in truth not all Buildings were connected.

A further benefit was that now many Pumps and other Machines that had formerly been driven by hand could now be run off the new Power lines. There was no Street Lighting and none needed despite the poor

conditions of the footpaths or, perhaps, lack of footpaths would be more accurate. I only really became conscious of the need for artificial Street Lighting when later in the Army I met Lads who claimed they had never been outside in the dark before and as a consequence did not relish the thought of being sent out on Patrol alone.

At Home we might listen to the Radio for a short time (I.T.M.A.) was very popular during the War. The news was mostly doom and gloom for the early part of the War, but would brighten up as the "Tide", began to turn in our, the Allies, favour. We might follow t he fortunes of the War but would soon drift back to the books. Most any kind of book would be considered good reading, much better than going to School. The favourite reading when young was "Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby" or most any of the "Uncle Remus stories". Any ward or object not fully understood would mean the trip to the cupboard that contained our ancient copy of "Pears Encyclopaedia" which would be the final arbiter in all disputes.

I mentioned earlier "Eiffel Tower" lemonade crystals a quick run through the Prominent People section would inform you that the Tower was situated in Paris, and was built by Alexandre Gustave Eiffel or indeed many other pieces of "Essential", or useless information that we were interested in. A further source of knowledge was a set of Odhams' reference books but these had to be used under parental supervision as they were considered to be too valuable for our solo use.

The Draught Board might also get an airing as might Solitaire, or some other form of Game. Cards were an occasional "Thing" but never became popular at Home with the exception of "Patience", "Snap", and the occasional Game of Whist. We had several Jigsaw Puzzles, which also got tried at times when there was no one else to play with, Marley's Ghost was a favourite along with the Liner Queen Mary, one of which had one piece missing. Where do bits of Puzzle go? No Vacuum cleaners in those days to take the blame.

Main Meals would be cooked in the Oven, and Snacks such as Toast with Dripping Beef for preference made in front of the open Fire. For just Heating it would be a case of burning Wood, but for cooking it would most likely be Coal.

Of course the Chimney had to occasionally be swept, the local Sweep arriving on his bicycle quite early in the morning carrying the Tools of his trade, or occasionally Brushes would be borrowed, and a spate of Do It Yourself was the order of the day. On one occasion this was not a total success when the Brush came off the Rods and

refused to Budge for anyone. After some very careful measuring and estimating a hole was cut on the inside of the Chimney and surprise, surprise there was a Sweeps brush.

On very hot summer days a kind of trivet would be set up outside and the vegetables cooked in that way. At this time meat would be eaten cold. Supper was something of a ritual. Bread and Cheese with Cocoa being favourite, although Cold Sausage Meat Pie was never refused if on the menu.

Every House had a Garden and most Families had an allotment as well, the size of these very much depended on the numbers in the Family and in particular how many budding Gardeners could be persuaded or "cajoled" into doing the work. There must have been as many different ways of doing these allotments as there were actual Plots, but the results would not be all that far removed from each other. For some people certain plants and Seeds had to be planted on certain days, others would ignore this doctrine, and do it in their own way.

Most would use conventional Digging Forks; others would use four pronged long handled "Dung" Forks, to me these were absolutely impossible to use for this purpose. Plenty of the aforementioned "Dung"

was always available and once again a Horse and Cart would have to be borrowed to transport it to the allotments, this activity would normally be reserved for the "Half Day" off, as often it had to be moved off the road or away from some such, before nightfall, causing much use of the Wheelbarrow. This activity would almost certainly be accompanied by the evergreen question – what's got one wheel and flies? Answer - a wheelbarrow load of dung.

The digging up of the potatoes would be a very hard time. It could well "Clash" with a busy time at work, but nevertheless had to be done before the Slugs became too interested. Having dug them up, dried them, bagged them, dragged them home, you then had to be sort them over before they could be stored.

In the early part of the year some potatoes would be separated out from the main stock, carefully placed into shallow Trays or Boxes to be used for seed. Only a very small quantity of new, if any, would ever be bought for this planting, although some swapping with other gardeners may take place. "

Later would come the new varieties such as Home Guard, and then only in small lots as people bought the minimum amounts, and shared for economic reasons. No serious Potato diseases ever came to light that I can remember.

A further task was that of drying. and sorting runner, and broad beans, with possibly a small quantity of peas for seed. These, again, were items that were seldom bought annually. The buying of other seeds would most probably be done in bulk from the Seedsmen's Catalogue such as Suttons of Reading, or Carters, much depending on how the previous generation had performed the same duty. Many hours in wintertime would be spent poring over the current catalogue, a fair amount of loyalty being shown to the family's recognised seed supplier.

On occasions s visit to Woolworths or some other shop in Aylesbury would be the chosen method, and a limited number was stocked by the local shop.

Onions would be pulled, dried, and stored by hanging them in "Ropes", or sometimes called "Plaits".

Apple and plum picking was another job that had to be completed quickly - certainly before the. birds, wasps or whatever, had more than their fair share. Most families would have a mixture of fruit available, masses of rhubarb, strawberries and raspberries, likely, would be grown.

I can't remember anyone growing tomatoes prior to the War. Perhaps this was due to the fact that there were no suitable varieties of seeds: available. Cucumbers, also, came onto the scene about this time.

One crop that some people did start to grow on the allotments was a small quantity of oats. These, of course, were to add to the rations for the pigs. One older resident occasionally used a horse drawn plough to "Dig", the larger plot required for this crop, and it must have been a tribute to his skills as a "ploughman", that he could work in such a confined space. Many gardeners would only pick vegetables such as Brussels Sprouts and parsnips when the "proper" time arrived - they would have to have had a frost on them, and then not be eaten before Christmas Day.

The digging of the first new potatoes of the season would often be treated in the same kind of ritualistic way. The people who didn't abide by these rules seemed to fare just as well. Such was the power of this idea, that some farmers would only plant (if at all possible), their seed crops on certain "specified" days.

The allotments was the place to hear the most up to date news, as someone would know the latest local rumour or national/international news having just arrived home from work; or they may have just heard the latest radio broadcast. A journey to the "pub" was not unknown following a spate of "allotmenting".

Since the start of my story there have been many changes, not necessarily for the better, though this will depend very much on the individuals point of view, and without doubt only those still living in the village can really know. The transition into the twentieth century will have been slow by some standards, but there has been plenty of change. The number of houses has increased by about two-thirds, and most people now probably own their own.

There are now people living in some of those former old barn that have now been turned into luxury homes. The Council has built both old peoples' bungalows and more Council houses.

The population will have increased considerably as, first, some of those who went off to war brought home new wives and settled down. Some of the local girls will have met and married servicemen stationed locally. They will also have found jobs and settled down to a rural life. The new houses will have attracted some newcomers.

Nothing much seems to have happened in the, now often discussed, area of leisure except for the fact that those allotments have now been mostly taken over for a sports field – though I understand that the members of the modern sports team come from all round the area there still not being enough budding "Gazzas" to form a team.

Work is still a problem for the village people. The difficulty of travelling, as I have mentioned before, is still there for some.

I believe the coming of the tractor was the beginning of the end of village life as I knew it – and there have been many other contributing factors since.

The horse now having been dispensed with, no longer would the carter have to go out early in the morning to catch and harness the horses ready for the other workers to join him after milking. In fact, there was no need for a carter – and so it went on.

Now the farm could be run by the farmer and his sons. Anything they were unable to cope with could be done by the many contractors in the locality.

The practice of hand milking would be taken over by machines as now much development work had been carried out on them, and the need for that previously tedious "hand stripping" had ended. Soon would come the hydraulic lifts on tractors, the hedge cutting machines, which meant the need for the large numbers of farm workers disappeared quickly. The supply of one commodity has radically changed. I refer, of course, to milk. It is now left on doorsteps in bottles. Although produced locally, it is now sent away to a dairy to be processed. At last the village has caught up with Ealing in one respect.

For those who had left the farms, some had gone to the local brick works but would have to find their own way to and from. This meant cycling several. Miles - not so good for those getting on in years. Both of these have now closed down. Some would have gone to local building firms - they would be provided with transport.

With the cutting back of the rai1ways a further avenue was c1osed. This, too, had formerly been very labour intensive and, in similar fashion to farming, son had followed father, particularly into the platelaying jobs.

A factory in Aylesbury making hats provided jobs for some, although much of their capacity was for the Armed Services, and would gradually recede as the needs of the forces lessened.

Fortunately for many, in nineteen-forty-six the local Airfield at Westcott was turned into a Government Research Establishment which provided employment for many loca1 people. This opening coincided with the closing of firms such as E.K. Cole, a big employer in Aylesbury. There were jobs for housewives, who probably hadn't considered working since getting married, drivers, skilled workers, apprentices and building trades. There was also one advantage for many as they ran transport to places as far afield as Wendover, Buckingham and Thame. The work here has now

largely disappeared, as has the work in the Aylesbury factories, and that, now often heard, word "redundancy" is as common in the village as anywhere else.

When I left school in nineteen-forty-three the problems were very much as they are today. The choice of jobs was very limited although, it would be true to say that there was a job for most people, but that transport "spectre" was much more in evidence.

After leaving the farms a few of the local men would seek work in the Morris Motors or Pressed Steel factories at Oxford - twenty plus miles to go there, and twenty plus back - in the earlier days by bicycle. They would mostly have to work on shifts. They might also have to take their chance on arrival at the gates at six a.m. as to whether or not there was work for them that day.

With the coming of the car, people now travel further to work than ever before. Oxford appears to be much closer and the hi11s less steep. The wages are much higher but the expenses also. The working week has gradually got shorter.

As I said at the beginning, life would get easier in the village as time and the story went on, but in real terms is it better? Certainly the villagers now have a more interesting and fulfilling life available to them than ever before. Surely it's got to be.

Some afterthoughts

There is now some limited street lighting.

That bus service so heavily used in its early days has almost disappeared. I understand it runs on one day only now.

The large supermarkets, such as "Tescos", run buses around the area, but not actually through Ashendon, although there are still some deliveries of items such as bread and meat, so all is not totally lost for those without their own transport. The "Shop", now rebuilt and enlarged, is still in operation, and I understand it is popular with villagers from the surrounding area, neither Westcott, Wotton or Dorton having one of their own.

The school is now the village hall, and the children are taken by bus to a larger school at Waddesdon some five miles or so away. This must cause some distress to the "first day" children, particularly those who don't have an older brother or sister to look out for them, and it must be a long day for all.

The "hut" has been removed from its old site to end its days as a chicken house at Pollicot.

No roadman anymore, but who needs one? The traffic has got heavier and more frequent and the roads are made wider by virtue of the fact that the vehicles are also wider. Those banks are now torn to pieces daily.

Many of the beautiful trees that survived the "tree fellers", have now gone, many became victims of "Dutch Elm Disease" some years ago. Others have fallen victim to the developers but, of course, many would have been too old anyway to remain standing some fifty or so years having passed by.

0n a recent visit to the villages I was so surprised to see how many trees had gone. The field of view from our old vantage point outside the former blacksmith's shop is now totally different from he point of view of the trees but that overall picture remains much the same.

With the coming of bodies such as the Ramblers' Association, I would think that "rights of way", and footpaths are contested more now than ever before. In my younger days these were left pretty much as they had always been, or perhaps as they were perceived to have been.

There would occasionally be a few well chosen words said in the pub if a regularly used path had been ploughed up or barbed wire had been put across a certain path or stile. The wire would probably disappear in the dead of night, a new path would be tramped out in the fullness of time, and the row would soon die down being considered part of everyday life.

The local people didn't seem to stick to paths across but would skirt round the edge of a standing crop without too much thought – or they might just walk across the middle out of sheer cussedness. A large bull or ram would make walkers change to a different route entirely and arguments as to whether such animals should be put into those fields might well arise. On the whole, I would have to say that relations with the local farmers on all such matters was very good indeed.

"Nicknames" were not uncommon in villages, often being passed down from generation to generation. No one would be able to remember where, when or why they started to be used.

As far as I am aware, there is no Buckinghamshire dialect. Take a trip to the Oxfordshire side of the county and you hear broad Oxfordshire. Go to the Northampton side and it is Northampton (Nuthampton) as I understand it, and so on. But ("usn's" borrowed from the the Oxfordshire language) in the middle, and going on towards London, seem to get saddled with the London tag – at least it was for me in my army days, and on the telephone – although I have never considered myself to have the slightest London "twang"; but probably anyone from south of Watford qualifies for this honour. Now, of course, there gas been a massive influx of newcomers to the district and they will have made their contribution to the local language.

Since starting this story I have dug deep into my memory, and can now see that it must have been very difficult for some of those evacuees for several good (but hard to see at the time) reasons, although I don't doubt that the people responsible for their welfare understood.

First they will not necessarily have come from homes in the same social class. or religion, but may well have had to share "lodgings". This was obvious at the time, as some of the parents came to visit in cars quite regularly while others barely had

any visits at all. No doubt the difficulty of travelling to such an out of the way place was a factor, as was the shortage of funds needed to undertake the journey by the limited public transport available. The second major problem, I feel, could have been religion. We were all, basically, Church of England as was the only church and, of course, the school, so it must have made life quite difficult for some, particularly when parents came to visit at weekends.

One thing that has always puzzled me is that it was quite common for the older women of the village to address each other as “Mrs”, completely ignoring Christian names, even though they could well have known each other for the greater part of their lives. The men, on the other hand, would use their Christian names without thought or may even revert to that previously mentioned nickname.

There were certain pronunciations that might have been local to us, and because of pressure by working colleagues (who "dint" understand) being from outside the area, I gradually lost them. I refer to "gew" for “go” and “dint" for “didn't”. The use of “ennit” or “ain't” for “isn’t it” got used as did “mate” meaning friend. "Ett” for “eat” or “ate” was also common. You might also hear "Bummer" and "Bavour" being used by the much older men. By older I mean they would have retired by the time I was eight or so. The dictionary shows such a person to be an "idler". It was used here to indicate the foreman or gaffer, not that there were many foremen about, but this would not normally be used in serious conversation. The word "bavour", was used to indicate food. “Bavour time" was what would now be called a "tea break", but I can only conclude that both these words were basically redundant as, although we used them for a time, they didn't survive for long. This redundancy was probably hastened by the influx of new people to the village and a greater mixing of the residents with "outsiders", much as my loss of words as mentioned earlier.

A few words such as "fings" (“things”) and "Round the Block" to indicate an area of the "Lower End" that we used to run round as children, or just plain "wiv" came "wiv" the evacuees.

The word "unked" meaning plenty. A strong smell, such as smoke, might be considered "that’s a unked smell". (I am sure that silage would qualify. This, of course, is a substance that came popular during the War) as might a loud noise, is most probably local though only very occasionally used in my time, and oddly enough used by my mother who actually came from the Willesden area of London.

An "oynan" was more likely to have made you "weep" than an onion, though I haven't heard it pronounced that way for many years.

That tasty rabbit that I mentioned earlier was usually better known as a "rabbutt". You would go "Rabbutting".

The word THAT I am told is used much more in the locality than elsewhere, but certainly the books used by the Civil Service for exams says on the subject: "If you mean that say that", so how can we be wrong. There was a tendency for some people to use "seemingly" quite often in conversation, but of course this may have been a personal thing.

There were a few somewhat corrupted words brought back from the First World War, mostly French, and later would come more foreign words brought back from overseas as the people returned from Second World War service abroad, and later those who did National Service would make their own contributions.

I have done my best with spelling some of our place names - "Ogleys Lane", "Brickwell HiII" and "Lynch Hill" being three to conjure with. The hill from Pollicott Ford to Pollicott was variously known as "Furlong" or "Furland".

Many fields also had very strange names indeed and I would suggest that the road is most probably "Furlong" while the fields are "Furland". There are quite a number of "Middle Grounds", and, of course, "Closes" or "The Close".

This more or less brings me to the end of my story and, in an attempt to round it off, I have appended a piece outlining life on the railways, more as I remember it than as it is now romantically perceived to have been.

The main problem for me was that, during working hours, I was cut off from my former "schoolmates", a state of affairs that took some getting used to as, when we finally met up in the evenings or at weekends, I found that I had little in common with them. What had taken place during the week at work would often be a topic of conversation and, of course, their new workmates would be total strangers to me. The other point of contention was that everyone was that much older and, as a result, I had to take all the jokes and tricks that were handed out single-handed. These, on occasions, certainly were "over the top" but never with any malice and, looking back, I feel that it would have been difficult to have worked with a better group.

The short journey and the hours were a big plus and you were sure of your money (on a par with farm wages) and the fact that your cards would be stamped each week without fail. It was also a clean job though, being only temporary, I didn't qualify for a uniform.