The Village Hall - "The Hut" (part 3)

The Mower

Usually pulled by two horses, harnessed side by side, and divided by a single wooden shaft. The machine itself was really very simple, consisting of two metal wheels with treads cast into the outside to give enough grip to provide a drive for the long cutter. The actual drive was made by connecting rod, which turned the rotary motion into a reciprocating one. This rod was made of wood to give a weak link effect in the event of something, (A Piece of Wood or Similar) getting caught in the knife, thereby causing serious damage. Very wet long grass could be a serious problem. The knife was made up of many triangular knives joined to a steel bar , which had to be kept very sharp to be efficient. This knife ran through "Points", or fingers which combed, and held the grass for cutting, this could all be lifted up by means of a long lever, to stop the actual cutting, but there was no way of easily stopping the drive.

The knives themselves would have to be kept sharp, this was done by individually filing each triangular blade while having it clamped to a bench made for the purpose, these blades were riveted to a main spine. The rivets had a habit of working loose so this also had to be taken care of at the time of sharpening. This aspect of haymaking would often be taken care of by an older retired Farmworker. At the end of this beam, which could be five feet long, was a board set at an angle to deflect the last nine inches or so of the cut grass to prevent the driving mechanism getting tangled up on the next pass. Ratchets in the wheel hubs allowed turning, and reversing, at the corners, without locking one wheel, different people had different ideas regarding this turning action, but most would opt for square corners which gave less chance of jamming the cutter.

This was one machine that we as Children did not get to use as it was not a very heavy pull for a pair of powerful Horses, so they could sometimes be rather difficult to control.

We would of course become involved after the conversion to Tractor power. Although having said that, it was sometimes very difficult to lift them up at the corners of the field, but this aspect would markedly improve when the proper tractor mower came on the scene. My last involvement with such a machine was with a six foot cut (Albion), which not only required two people to hook it up to the tractor because of the weight on the drawbar, but was also known as a "Knife breaker", as it certainly had a penchant for doing just that. You soon learned to always stand behind the beam when Horse drawn for the sake of your feet, and legs This machine had quite a comfortable cast iron backless seat mounted on an arm behind the axle,which when in use would almost certainly be covered by a hessian sack, this could be kept dry, and also added to the comfort. It has to be remembered that many hours would be spent sitting in these seats so some degree of added comfort was very welcome. Most of the machines would have a similar seat.

The Swathe Turner

This was a machine for turning the swathes of hay for drying, and would leave the hay in a "Fluffed", up condition, and in rough rows. It had two sets of "Rakes", spinning on an axis at right angles to the ground, and would be drawn by one Horse.

The Siderake

Mounted on three smooth cast iron wheels, this was drawn by one Horse, and consisted of a frame carrying two large revolving discs, which in turn carried a number of toothed rakes, consisting of steel spring tines. These were mounted at such an angle, that as they rotated they swept the hay to one side, and were driven through gears from one of the wheels, this entire unit could be raised or lowered by the operator. Any jamming into the ground or other problem would simply cause the driving wheel to lock, and skid, a state of affairs sometimes encountered on those ridges, and furrows. These wheels would become incredibly smooth and polished after a few days in the hayfield. A similar seat to other machines was usual; a hard ride was normally the case.

The Horse Rake or Hay Rake.

This was pulled by one Horse, and it consisted of a row of semicircular tines mounted between two smooth cast iron wheels. At the point decided for the row, you would pull a handle, which lifted the tines clear of the ground tipping the hay into neat rows, (I very much doubt). There was a version called a pony rake this was very light in weight, and had foot pedal which was connected to the tines through a drive from the Wheels, thus making the work of the operator easier, the Horse actually doing the work. A further version (Expanding Rake), could be jacked up, and the tines opened out to increase the width after passing through gates. Once again it was important to run at right angles to the ridges, and furrows to keep the tines in close contact with the ground, particularly with the expanding version. These tines would be locked up for travelling to, and from the fields.

The Hayloader. (Pitcher Locally)

This was attached to the rear of the wagon as you would a trailer, and it was driven, again by two smooth iron wheels with a pair of castors at the rear to allow turning and setting the required height from the ground. A three-sided slatted wooden box extended from ground level to a point just above the load height, the hay being lifted by several rakes, running the height of the machine. These were driven from the wheels by eccentric Arms, (Crankshafts in Modern Parlance), which imparted a rising falling motion, thus sweeping the hay to the top. 0nce again freewheels were fitted in the wheel hubs to allow turning without problems.

A further version had rakes mounted on chains at right angles to the direction of travel, like tracks on a tank, these also being driven by the wheels. Difficulties with this device were that they had a habit of being just that bit higher than the tree branches you wanted to go under, a failure to appreciate this fact might well mean

uncoupling, and some hard physical effort by those present, the chances of getting several Horses to go backwards was hardly worth the trouble.

It was just sometimes possible for those on top of the load to raise small branches clear with their forks while you travelled gently underneath, whatever the outcome you would be very unpopular for the next few minutes, at least until the next crisis arose. A second problem arose when hitching up, you had to persuade the Horse to reverse the wagon close to the drawbar while some "Brave", person stood holding it up until satisfactory contact was made. Sooner or 1ater it would become your turn to be that brave person. This machine would be transported to and from jobs by fixing the drawbar in such a way that the castors were held clear of the ground. This had the added effect of lowering the overall height. Working on top of the load was very hard work, as you had to keep the hay moving, this to maintain forward progress, and to keep the loads coming, there was always some rivalry between the two teams. There was also some rivalry between Farms, so if you could see the neighbour's rate of progress, you would almost certainly want to beat it, with more and bigger loads.

The Wagons

These were principally made of wood with wooden wheels, larger at the rear, all being shod with iron tyres; these vehicles were both heavy, and wide. There were varying versions of these wheels, some having one piece tyres, and some having them made up of segments, and fixed on with 1arge metal square spikes. Normally painted yellow they would have the name of the Farm, and the Owners name painted on the front. The timber part of the wagon was quite complicated, having wooden "Pegs", down the sides to reinforce them, and iron bars, at either the wear points, such as where the wheels made contact with the body or at other points that were more heavily stressed.

The braking system consisted of the Horse laying back in the shafts, or a chain device to lock the back wheels, (Either or Both), to prevent them rotating, (Fields only), if used on the road a considerable flat was quickly worn on the tyre so treated. A skidpan was usually carried for roadwork; this was just an iron pan connected to the wagon body by a chain. The wheel being simply run into it, and riding inside, so with no contact with the road it didn't rotate.

These pans would have to survive years of use but, as hills on the road are not usually too long, no problems normally occurred.

There was also a "Drop down", bar (A kind of Spike), underneath the rear, which when lowered would prevent the wagon running backwards, by just digging into the ground, necessary when Horses were used, but not needed b the tractor, although sometimes used for parking in the fields.

It was normally trailed when working in the fields, and so you had to remember not to try to reverse when it was lowered as an empty wagon could overrun it, and a loaded one could simply break it. A nice soft spot in the field could soon render it ineffective by just digging in, so it did need some care in use particularly on those steep hills that we were accustomed to.

The bed of the wagon was quite narrow, starting from the front, waisting in at the centre, then widening again at the rear. This narrow "Waist" allowed the front wheels to have at least a limited turning circle. The front wheels were mounted on a wooden "Forecarriage", which allowed some movement between the axles parallel to the ground, but added little to the overall stability particularly when on full lock.

Over-the wheels ran a form of ladders, not dissimilar to full length mudguards, this arrangement allowed a much larger load to be carried, but did bring the width close to that of normal gates, calling for some care on the part of the drivers, particularly when several Horses were used. Probably these "Mudguards", would have originally been higher than the gateposts, but as the wagons wore deeper and deeper ruts, this advantage disappeared.

For hay-work a ladder device was added at the front, "The Foreladder", (I understand that this action turns it into an Oxfordshire wagon, this overhung the Horse, thereby much increasing the available load area. Also "Raids", would be fitted, these consisted of a removable post held in an iron socket at each corner, joined along each side by a "Net", of ropes. When unloading, these "Raids", could be untied, and lowered, and as there was a proper method of tying-the ropes for this, Woe Betide! anyone getting it wrong. It was a bit of a "Mess", if it came untied during the run home, shedding the load in all directions, and it was just as serious a "Crime", if it couldn't be untied at the rick site. These "Raids", extended outside the normal width of the wagon which didn’t improve that passing through gates in any way, and like the "Pitcher" were very prone to catch on to any low branch, or other obstacle. The tailboard would be lowered, also to increase the load area; this was normally supported by a pair of chains.

At least two Horses would be used during the "Picking Up", operation. So the overall length was considerable, things like the terrain, (That Ridge, and Furrow rearing its ugly Head again), the fact that there was a limited amount of lock available, soft ground, those previously mentioned low trees, and keeping on the row, all had to be taken into consideration when driving.

To overcome the dual use of horse, and tractor, the shafts were left in place, and a cruciform shaped drawbar was used for tractor work. This was a long wooden pole with metal attachment points at both ends, and a crosspiece of metal to support the shafts firmly, thereby forcing them to move in unison with the tractor. This device whilst probably being the best solution at that time to the dual use problem, had the effect of making the overall length somewhat unmanageable on some of the tight corners encountered.

On top of the Wagon would normally be one or two men, (One Man, and His Boy sometimes), working very hard, depending on the thickness of the row, if this was too thick then the loaders would suddenly be swamped, the person responsible not being very popular. The speed forward, was also a contributing factor.

The loader's job was to build up the load as neatly as possible, so first the maximum quantity could be carried and more importantly that it was safe, and wouldn't shift on that so often rough journey to the Rickyard Site.

Horses had one advantage on this job, you could hear the loaders shouting, and accordingly would heed/ignore what they said, the Tractor was much too noisy for this. Think! All that good advice going to waste.

Sometimes before the start of the season, these wagons, or perhaps just the wheels would have to go back to the wheelwright for repairs, this was a very interesting place, probably on a par with the Blacksmiths shop, but too far away for us to visit regularly, here of course you could see both metal, and woodworking going on side by side.

The nearest to us was at Chilton, so when we were, young this was a trip very much 1ooked forward to, but the problem was that if the wagon was left at the wheelwright's then you had to walk back home, along the footpath across the fields or, if not too many, an Uncle Tom Cobbley type ride might follow.

One other spring task was that of greasing the wheels on the wagons, and indeed on several other machines. Normally this would entail the removal, of said wheels, greasing the exposed axle with heavy grease and replacing. I have seen a kind of wooden jack capable of reaching the chassis of these vehicles but it was common to employ a long wooden pole, using an empty oil drum as a fulcrum, then with plenty of encouragement or possibly "Words", having that effect, the wagon would be raised, and the task would be completed. The construction of these wagons was such that apart from the axles and the rungs of the ladders I can't recall there being any other straight piece of wood used.

Reading this back, once again I marvel at the fact that we didn't have any serious accidents. The nearest Medical attention available to us was some five miles distant, so it had to be quite serious before you made the journey, or called the Doctor out. Depending on which one was called they could make the journey on foot, (In ear1ier Times), Pony, and Trap, or Motor Car.

The Elevator

This was the "Big One", being much longer, and probably heavier than any of the other implements. It would be towed to the site by several horses, depending on the terrain encountered on the journey, and then gently manoeuvred into its working position with its wheels resting on timbers to prevent it sinking into the ground, and to keep it level, it has to be remembered that it could be stood there for some considerable time. Next would come the hard work of unfolding it to increase it's length/height, and then raising it up to the required height, both these operations being accomplished by winding two large handles. It would be raised periodically during the building of the rick, always just high enough to c1ear the bui1ders heads. If it was raised too far, then on a windy day the hay would be blown off course as it fell a hurdle or sack might be hung at the top to try, and prevent this.

When it did occur it could either be blown over the side of the rick or the builders would have to move it over the length of the rick. It was quite difficult to walk on the loose hay, it would only become compressed as time went on, and so you had to be very careful not to get too near to the edge. We as young children would not normally be allowed on to the ricks at this time, despite our earnest desire to do so.

The working parts of the, elevator, consisted of a series of rakes attached to chains, once again similar to the tracks on a tank, the Hay being fed into a hopper at the bottom. This task was easier from the wagon, than from the ground due to its height, so every effort was made to prevent any hay falling onto the ground also any hay trampled on the ground would make the surface very slippery indeed.

Two main methods of driving the elevator were employed, one was small petrol driven engine, and the second was by a Horse. 'This way had the Horse travelling continuously in a limited circle, while being attached to a wooden shaft, this shaft in turn being attached to a kind of gearbox which drove a rotating shaft that in it's turn drove the elevator.

A distinct advantage to the workers was that the horse also got tired as the day wore on, not the theoretical case with the engine.

It was prone to plenty of stop, - go, which provoked much shouting, and threats to it's well being, it would of course get a rest while the wagons were being changed over.

The engines were not without their faults either, usually being more than a few years old, and when a problem did occur they were often rather more difficult to restart than the Horse, being water cooled they also had a tendency to boil up in the hot weather, partly due to hayseeds collecting in the cooling tank, and blocking the system, and as a result might, need time to cool down, as did the Horse, and the workers, certainly towards the end of he day.

Once the work had been completed it was time to lower the elevator, this could sometimes require a lot of care, as now it would be at its full height, and as a result could be somewhat unstable. It also had to be pulled clear of the rick before the lowering process could begin. The usual method was to make sure that the wheels ran on timber supports to prevent any sinking into the ground occurring, and winding it down as it was slowly pulled forward. Some rickyards were paved which of course made this task easier, and safer.

This vehicle was sometimes the best way to transport those long ladders mentioned previously, as normally they would be going to the same place, and both were of a similar length, the problem being the weight of the 1adder, and the height it had to be 1ifted, as even when folded down the elevator was quite high.

The Tractor.

In the early days they were standard Fordson, and comparatively easy to drive, having only one pedal which operated both clutch, and brake together. To park you merely hooked it down with a hook on the floor, which released as you next put your foot down on the pedal. You would almost certainly leave it in gear, when starting because as the vehicle got older the efficiency of this system rapidly declined, and it became very difficult to get it back into gear, without much grinding of same,

But already being in any gear would with some force allow you to change into the required one.

The problem of stopping also increased, particularly when fitted with pneumatic tyres, and travelling on the road with a trailer, or other heavy device. The only way to be safe when descending any steep hill was to get into a low gear well before you got to the top as none of the trailers or implements I ever encountered had any braking system fitted. This would be put right in later years of course.

The engine speed was controlled by a hand throttle lever; there were three forward gears and reverse. Some had a high top, not really suitable for pulling but just for travelling light. They all ran on paraffin, after starting on petrol, and changing over when warm. As they got older and more worn it was best to keep them close to boiling, because there was a tendency for the plugs to "Oil Up". When new they had a built in radiator blind, a bit crude but reasonably effective, probably made of' heavy cotton, which as it aged became quite prone to tearing, particularly if it got caught on the odd piece of tree or hedge, a folded sack hung over as well re-inforced your intentions. The radiator cores would also become clogged with hayseeds or other debris, so sometimes they ran hotter than you intended.

The overall system worked well when the owner gave you enough petrol for the job in hand, but so of ten was the case t hat he preferred to use the said petrol in his car, and if you stopped too long for "Dinner", then you could be in trouble, as the temperature would neither be hot or cold, but just awkward enough to add to our re-starting problems.

Once again we as Children (Twelve), onwards would have to pair up to swing the engine, there being no self starters fitted, once having got going the other one would return to duty elsewhere, so you quickly learned not to stall it. If you were unlucky or careless enough to stall then you right just get it going alone if it was hot enough and it would start with just a pull up. None of us were strong or tall enough to turn the starting handles a full turn on our own, and would have to use both hands just for this.

These early tractors were fitted with manual advance, and retard settings, which in short meant if you advanced the ignition too far you could, get a quick reminder when the very large starting handle came back

In quite a big hurry, though not as sharp as the smaller one on a car, they made up for it by being heavy, and large, more of a problem when there were four little hands to get out of the way, and made worse by the fact that the handle would almost certainly rotate freely in this reverse direction several times. They were not removable, but when running they were clipped up, you would be reminded of this when they fell out of the clip by the horrible "Clicking", sound that arose as a result, caused most likely by running into the hedge at a turning point thereby unclasping t hem.

The seat for these was made of pressed metal, and mounted on a long steel multi-leaved spring; these springs could snap under certain conditions.

Mine happened when I was travelling on the road after previously towing a set of seven gang mowers, and as I was standing up at the time, no problems occurred, but a bit of a shock nonetheless. The spring leaves probably being previous2y cracked, and with the bouncing, due to it carrying no weight, although on pneumatic

tyres at the time must have just sprung out, the first indication that I had was when I heard a strange noise behind, which of course was the seat bouncing merrily on the road surface.

Originally these Tractors would be left in the field, and sheeted where they were being used, you had to wait until they had cooled down before sheeting, but the practice soon grew up whereby they were brought home at night.

This had several advantages, first an adult could help start them in the morning, secondly it saved taking the paraffin, which was carried in two gallon rectangular cans, accompanied by a large funnel that allowed a can to fit into the top, plus the oils, grease guns, and all the paraphernalia required, out to them, and thirdly, if say rain or some other reason forced a change of task for the new day then it was close at hand. It probably saved time, as the time taken to walk those quite long distances would soon add up.

The rear wheels had "Spuds" to provide grip; there were various types of these, and as later models came out, they changed considerably. All had one thing in common, they gave a very bumpy ride on the road, or any other hard surface, (It didn't half get the Wheels Clean), and, so .you would travel along the banks as much as possible to avoid damage, to the road. This of course meant that unless the bank was particularly wide and flat you were unable to tow anything behind. This improper use of the banks would not be too popular with the roadman, I would imagine, as it tended to drag mud onto the road, and of course did little to, improve the condition of the said banks.

In those days the grass or whatever on the banks was kept short. As time went on there were many different devices to overcome these road going problems, ranging from wooden bands, bolted between the spuds, which would be left on for light pulling back in the fields, and would probably be left in place for the haymaking, and harvesting, to metal bends.

These "Road Bands", bolted onto the outside of the wheels, these were for road use only, as their name implies, and again meant that only a light load could be towed behind. When travelling in top gear it was advisable to watch out for loose "Spuds", as apart from the horrible noise made, they had a nasty habit of flying off with some considerable force. The early tractors had mudguards that covered the wheels completely but as the War progressed they became smaller, and smaller, we were able to ride on the early versions with some degree of comfort, and safety, but the later ones were not nearly as good, but of course riding was always preferable to walking safety could be considered some other time.

Much later would come the pneumatic tyre, I would guess towards the end of t he War, and t hen f or a 1ong time only on t he rear wheels. The accuracy of the steering left something to be desired, but not really a problem as most of the use was in the fields where the flanges could sink into the ground, also there was plenty of space available. When pulling something like the disc harrows, they had a greater tendency to go straight on even on full lock, this was partly due to the soft cultivated surface, and also the fact that under heavy load the front end became rather light, later would come tractors with independent wheel brakes to overcome this problem.

I would think the reason for allowing Children to do such work was principally, that we were very eager, we didn't have any "Hang Ups", regarding the use of "New Fangled", machines, and it was probably much easier for us to learn to drive, than for an older man to learn new skills.

I suppose it could be argued that we came cheap, and at that age did not require the "Dreaded Insurance Stamp", though I doubt if that was the reason.

Driving the Tractor was usually the easy part, it was the implement it towed, that really had to be understood, and controlled, for this you spent most of your time looking over your shoulder.

The arrival of this vehicle caused many problems as most of the Horse drawn machines now had to be crudely converted for this new way of life, as of course many would have to be still drawn by Horses as well as tractors.

Some of these part conversions worked quite well but most had to be used very much as before, which meant someone having to ride on to operate the raising, and lowering or whatever adjustment was needed.

Some machines that were converted for tractor use required two of us "Kids", to operate the levers, that being a further reason for us to do the driving, leaving the older/stronger person to do the heavy work, and make all the decisions. I remember in particular the Australian Sunshine seed drill, although designed for tractor use, it had to be raised, and

Lowered at each end of the rows, by this massive lever, which would require two of us riding on the long, very narrow footboard, to operate.

Just imagine a wet day, the board is covered with "Basic Slag", or whatever is being drilled, which makes life more difficult, as first the coulters, (The Discs), that "Dig" the furrow for the seed or whatever have a habit of "Clogging", up, and quickly have to be dealt with by scraping with a paddle, the footboard is getting muddier, and more deeply covered in slag by the minute, and you may be trailing a set of harrows. School must have been more pleasant than this. To have slipped off would have been something of a "Harrowing experience", No! Sorry!!, I couldn't resist it. It was probably said at the time though.

Different times of the year would see us deeply involved in other processes. Something like disc harrowing could prove difficult as they required a great pull to propel them, this would, sooner or later see us stuck in a "Boggy", patch up to the tractor axles.

It was no use shouting for help, as you were strictly on your own, and anyway you just didn't ask for a tow which could only come from a neighbouring Farm, (You would never live it down). If luck was with you it was sometimes just possible by reversing the tractor to alter the setting of the discs, (by narrowing the angle), with that accomplished you were then hopeful1y away.

One towed device that could prove tricky when passing through gates was the ring roller, it was used to roll grass fields, or cornfields after planting, and consisted of a series of rings loosely mounted on an axle. The fact that the rings would "Do their own thing", in the field didn't really matter, but if they decided to change sides just as you reached the gatepost then problems occurred, and a large sliver of wood could well disappear off the post. I well remember having my first cigarette, or more accurately half a "John Player", when riding as a passenger on such a machine.

It was not uncommon to attach two implements together for the ride Home after the jobs were completed, this not only made it doubly difficult to get through gates, but it made the journey on the road quite exciting. As have previously said Horses, when facing home, always want to get there in the quickest possible time. One day having safely negotiated the gates, with a siderake, and horserake tied together the crazy Horse decided to make good time on the road, going over the brow of a short hill we are confronted by a City of Oxford bus going about it's lawful business, this leaves me nowhere to go except into the hedge, with a shallow pond on the other side.

In the event the horse did not agree, and still without slackening pace we somehow managed to avoid everything, and thus continued on our merry, perhaps terrified is more apt, way. On reaching "Home", the Horse just stopped, and behaved as though nothing untoward had happened.

It was not unusual that after haymaking, and harvest there would be posts and gates "Missing", or damaged, so a further job that had `to be regularly kept up to data was "Mounding", which was the local word for replacing fences, and gates.

This was a bit boring (No Mechanical Devices), and it mainly consisted of digging a series of holes, making sure there were no "Crumbs", left in the bottom and then "Planting", posts in same. After these had been rammed in tight, making doubly sure, they were absolutely upright, a gate or railings would have to be fixed, this meant some knocking in of nails had to be done, unfortunately this was considered to be a job for adults only.

Hedge cutting was once again a job for experts, as in those days they were cut, and laid by hand, but you might just get invited to help pull out the long brambles that were used to tie the stakes that "Pinned" the component parts of the hedge down.

For this you wore very thick gloves (Hedge cutting Cuffs). There was a prize for hedge cutting, as part of the annual Thame Agricultural Show so some of the Farmers would enter their employee's best efforts each year. This would be judged by strangers, and so a very high standard was the order of the day.

Ploughing, and milking were other skills covered by competitions, these would be similarly treated.

The next job would probably be the ditches these sometimes were very deep or could be just a gentle depression in the ground, either way it was a job for someone who understood the business because at the end of the day it was important that the flow ran in the right direction. All done by hand in those days, there were a few

Contractors who handled this type of work plus the "War Agg", as there was for most other Farm work.

A further job g that came our way was "Jack Thistleing", this consisted of removing all of the Jack Thistles in a given field or fields, by the simple act of chopping them out with a hoe or other tool supplied. Some of these implements were better than others for the task, and considerable argument would take place before work commenced as to who should use what.

I know that I once worked a full week at this "Pleasant Task", for the "Princely", sum of two shillings, (Ten Fence, nowadays>, a big secret, only two of us were paid this special rate the others getting sixpence (Two, and a Half new Pence). The blisters after a week of this activity had to be seen to be believed, but at least we got the cash.

Often it was a promise of apples, in lieu of money, these at best would be windfalls (Pick them up Yourself), and such promises were easily, and reasonably forgotten in the fullness of time.

To make a change from all this talk of work

Sometime along the way the Telephone came, for several years there was only one which was located in the Post 0ffice, later would come a telephone kiosk, and of course there would be more as the Farmers found them essential for business. Probably as with many other devices the War speeded things up, in particular people would want to speak to the "War Agg", but at the time we were amused by the comings, and goings of the telephone men. After the War of course, phones became a necessity, and spread like the proverbial "Rash".

Originally, if my memory serves me correctly this number was Ashendon One, and later became Waddesdon One-Three, both of these early instruments being upright with the separate "Ear Trumpet". When the dialling system was introduced after the War, it had to have three digits, and so became Waddesdon Three-Seven Three. I do remember that the poles. and wires came up the Pollicot to Ashendon road and sometime in the dim, and distant past we had been Ashendon near Thame, the mail being delivered from there.

A bus service started, the City of Oxford Bus Company began running their Buses from Oxford through many Villages to Aylesbury. This service only ran twice on Wednesdays, Friday afternoons, and several times on Saturdays. Nevertheless the freedom it gave to visit a variety of shops the Cinema, and not forgetting direct access to the main Railway line at Aylesbury must have come as a pleasant "Shock", to many people, not previously accustomed to travelling in such comfort.

When people got used to this way of travel, and then later, during the War in particular, they would have to add a relief bus, sometimes more than one to cope with the numbers using the service.

I don't really remember the exact year but I think it was nineteenthirty-nine that the mains water was finally connected up. For some long time the local Water Board had

been digging trenches everywhere, and at the very top of the hill they built a covered reservoir. This took most of our attention during the period of action, but there wasn't much for us in the way of participation.

We would crawl through the long cast iron pipes left in stacks at the side of the road, (It would be a tight fit for me now I fear), and we would use the discarded steel bands off the pipes as hoops, and when we got tired of that we would leave them where they ended up. A further trick was to throw them as far as possible in such a way that they would spin, and roll back in our direction.

After School we might follow the trench that had been dug that day to see what the machine had thrown up, mostly we would find blue/grey shells, and in one particular spot there were literally thousands at quite a shallow depth, this must have been the dining hall for some bird now long gone. One find we decided was a cannon ball, and if in fact it was then at sometime it had hit something with some great force as there was rather a large dent in it, this had clearly not been put there by the excavator. This ball stayed with us for many years being used to crush anything that we decided required such treatment, it did have one strange feature however and that was a hole through the middle.

Round about nineteen-forty the electricity came, you could have three lights, and one power point, if my memory serves me correct, for a fixed price, this meant that it was in the range of most people, so a rash of new poles, and wires appeared. The meters were mostly of the shilling coin in the slot variety, and were mounted on plywood, that appeared to be the favourite food of the Woodworm, at least the one in our House was.

This new activity took our attention for a short while, not the least bit of interest being the way the men climbed the poles. They didn't use a ladder, but having spikes fitted on their shoes, climbed them like Monkey. I think the only activity that stemmed from this was the rolling of the empty cable drums, not very "Upmarket", but any "Port in a Storm" at a time when there was little else to do. The cut off pieces of wire came in handy, not for any real purpose, but again just because it was left behind. The next antic was of course to climb the stay wires, at least up to the insulator that was situated near the top.