

# Pete Weston - Evacuee and Band Leader

## Chapters Four

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& sit in the barn to eat them. AS you looked out across the fields there were two or three farrows worn into the ground as the cows would walk in a line after being let out from milking The day's work started at five o'clock am that was to milk the cows then the general farm work would begin , finish work at about five pm & walk home again that was his life apart from having a pint or two in the local pub The George & Dragon. Work days were seven days a week although Sundays only the milking took place, so after morning milking the men would have a few hours off until they started again at 2 30pm. In their spare time they would have their own gardens to maintain as all their vegetables had to be home grown to live. *(The old pub know as the George & Dragon in the village of Potterne has a plaque on the wall, in the days of Oliver Cromwell his troops stayed at the inn & when they left did not pay the inn keeper for his services there's a letter posted up in the bar to this effect. Also you can still see some cannon holes in the brickwork outside. This was on the eve of a battle with the roundheads Outside Devizes)*

### Chapter four.

Now winter was upon us, and when you looked out of the bedroom window it would be covered in ice As it was absolutely freezing in the house as there was no form of heating except the kitchen range used for cooking. So to look out you would have to breath hot air from your breath to see out.

Our bedroom was facing East & so was the Kitchen window as you looked out the fields were facing you they swept upwards on the hill side in the middle of the hedge there was a break in the hedge where the main dirt track led to the other fields, the main part of the farm was facing you. There was a very large Elm tree right by & a small muddy pond where the cattle would be able to gain access to water in the winter months as it dried out in the Summer.

At the rear of the farmhouse were more fields also a large vegetable garden. To the left was the main track that lead to the main road with more field on either side of it. One of the fields was called to Rick yard as this is where most of the corn & Hay ricks were built for easy access in the winter months.

Its now spring 1940 May /June time the trees are covered in blossom & the grass in the fields has grown tall, the corn fields have been sown ready for summer crops. Garden vegetables are on their way

Its coming into haymaking time this is a time I enjoyed because it meant lots of horse & cart work happening also the other machinery such as grass mowing then it had to be turned over to dry with a swath turner this is a machine that tossed the grass up in the air to help the sun dry it & turn it into hay then it was raked together this was all done by horse power. Finally the hay would be loaded onto a hay wagons then taken near to the farm buildings & stored in the form of hayricks Then thatched over to preserve it. This area was known as the rick yard in a near by field close to the farm buildings, That meant there was lots of rides up & down the fields in the empty carts between loads, This work had to be in addition to the normal farm work such as milking the Cows.

When the afternoon milking had finished the men had a quick tea Mrs Cox would make up a picnic tea for them & flask of hot tea, we would have this in the fields & us children would have lemonade then back to haymaking until dark 8 or 9 o'clock. Just remember they started work at five am & worked through, it made a long day for them. I can recall that when they had finished for the day Mr Cox would give them some home made Cider to see them on their way. Jack would then have to walk home across the fields & the other man would cycle back to their village.

Mr Cox also had two or three fields in the village of Worton so when the haymaking took place there most of the locals came out for a get together.

Once the haymaking had finished come August / September it would be time for the Harvesting of the corn. I can remember my parents coming down to the farm for the weekend the Railway station near by was Lavington Station although this has now been closed down & only the railway is left, this was the old GWR great western railway these trains were brown & cream in livery, now known as British rail. some two or three miles away. On this occasion they were met at the station by horse & cart, Darkey the little black cob horse on this occasion this was a two wheel milk float we sat in the back ,I recall that all the way back to the farm Darkey would lift his tail & pass wind, my mother held her nose all the way back. This was a break for my Parents as London was now in the mitts of air raids.

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Back to harvesting one of the first jobs was for the men to cut the corn around the edge of the field by hand using a scythe then take a handful of straw then tie it up in bundles ,as every bundle of corn was essential for feeding the nation Once a strip of about ten feet( three mitres) was made around to edge of the field the binder was used to cut the main field, This was a machine pulled by three horses side by side, the corn would be cut & tied into bundles know as sheaves .Next we had to stand the sheaves up to dry this was called Stooking or hyling they would be put into piles of 10 or 12 piles, the next thing was to collect it up & take to the rick yard where the corn ricks were built, they would be made into round ricks. To save waist the ground would be covered with old straw first then the new cut corn would be stacked upon it. .It was easy to make a round rick as you laid the sheaves of corn with the corn ears to the middle so as not loose the corn seed or have it washed away. You would start by laying the outer circle first then go round in ever diminishing circles untill you filled one layer, & so on until you made the rick high enough then finish off by pointing it like a tent. until it was time to thrash the corn out. & the corn stored until the Autumn, when it was thrashed & the corn bagged up for food or feeding of the live stock.

I remember that one day when threshing the corn us children were climbing over the straw catching field mice as the corn was full of them, we went home for our Dinner Graham said I've got an itch in my back his mum pulled out his shirt & out jumped a mouse.

There was always jobs to be carried out so we did our bit as well we would go round the fields & collect up all the broken branches off the trees then chop them up into fire wood as we needed to keep the fires going, all the hot water & cooking had to rely on the fire so it was important to gather as much as we could. Small pieces we chopped & the large branches we sawed up into logs then stored in an old shed, as Coal was rationed probably only half a bag a week if you were lucky. At harvest time it was time to pick fruit from the trees, most of this went to the market but we had a lot for home use also.

Mrs Cox would preserve jar after jar for the winter & pots of Jam all types as Jam was also on ration, you either had one pound of Jam or 1 pound of Sugar but not both. The hedge rows were full of wild dog Roses & when they turned into rose hips we had to go round the fields & pick basket after basket of them & the Government would collect them up to make Rose Hip Syrup as a supplements for babies vitamin C or D. there was rose of jars of preserves made up for the winter months apples pears plumbs & black currents, which we would collect large baskets full. The hedgerows were full of Cob & Hazel nuts & one old Wall nut tree.

I used to take apples & Pears to school for the other children which was wind falls.

One Sunny afternoon at school it was playtime when my teacher called me over, do you know who this is? Well what a surprise it was my friend from London June Moss & her brother Kenneth they did not go to country with the rest of the school at the beginning of the war but now have joined us once again. They lived in the village of Worton so we were back in the same class. At the house was another girl staying with them her name was Pat Jones.

Come my next birthday November 21<sup>st</sup>. I had a party so June & Pat were invited along with the rest of us on the farm, for tea & games, we played simple things like banging nails into a log to see who could knock them in straight in the least amount of goes .or another game was to form a circle & spin a bottle & kiss the girl or boy where to bottles stopped pointing at

For this birthday what a surprise my mother & father had saved up & some how managed to give me a tricycle it was a blue one & from that day on every weekend would wash & clean it with some Paraffin as the farm was always knee deep in mud.

One day Mr Cox sent us round the farm looking for new places where the Hens would lay their Eggs as they ran around the farm all over the place in free range some would lay in the sheds others under the hedge rows he said if we found a new nest he would give us some money .I found a dip in one bank without eggs but I took some eggs from another place & put them in this place, but unfortunately the eggs that I had taken Mr Cox had already put them where I found them so I was caught out .Just shows it doesn't pay to cheat. Some weeks later there was a Petrol can which someone had made a hole in it with a nail, when asked who did it nobody owned up so I got the blame for it although I did not do

It & I still remember this to this day being wrongly accused of something I did not do. That will teach me not to cheat in future .Never did find out who was responsible to this day.

It was during this period of the war when Italy was fighting along side with the Germans ,some of the Italian prisoners of war were moved to Britain for safe keeping where some were put to work on local farms. During this period they had the task of clearing out ditches & small rivers, along the river

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banks they would cut the banks away to allow the cattle access to drink from the river in safety then a fence rail would be put around this area to stop the cattle from staying up the river itself. They would arrive in the morning about nine o'clock in a lorry driven by a civilian man who was in charge of them, he wasn't armed after all there was nowhere for to run too we are an island & most of them were glad to be out of the fighting. These men wore a brown uniform with a large yellow circle on their backs & one on their leg so they could be identified as prisoners. They were very friendly to us, I can remember that when the sacks for Pig & cattle feed was delivered to the farm the old hessian

Sacks they were sewn up with different coloured string each piece one yard (metre) long so I collected these lengths of string up for the prisoners & they would make some pairs of slippers out of them by plating it into lengths then saw it up to form a slipper shape, this was one way of having a new pair of slippers as we could not buy new ones.

Another one of the guys asked if I had a three penny piece this was a small coin with several sides to it similar to a 50p coin only much smaller. They used to make items as a hobby back at their base camp so on this occasion they made me a ring for my finger then engraved it, another time one of them borrowed my pen knife it wasn't very sharp so they took it away & sharpened for me.

As time went on Italy changed sides during the war so the then prisoners were replaced by German prisoners who still carried out other work on the farms. *It was recorded that no prisoners of war ever escaped from Britain back to Germany.* The first sign of the Germans were seen being marched up to the town centre by armed guards that were before being put to work, all the locals were a bit surprised by this at first not knowing where they were going to be billeted.

There was one occasion when word got about that a German bomber plane had been shot down over the near by hills in the next village, so everybody had to go to the site to see for themselves, we was not able to collect any trophies as it had an armed guard around it. It was a twin engine plane a Junkers. 88 as I recall. Not sure what happened to the crew, they must have been captured & removed.

By now the other two boys Bert & John Longhurst had returned back to London as many others had, as now the air raids had eased off & the fear of gas raids had passed. So did June Moss my school friend from my street in Kensington.

On Sundays we all went to Sunday school in the village of Worton So before we had Sunday lunch it was bath time & time to dress up in our one set of best cloths, I had a smart blue suit that my mother had bought for me short trousers as boys always wore short ones in those days until you almost left school. Bath time! Well this was a round tin tub about nine inches deep (24Cm.) about three feet across (1 Metre) remember there's no running hot water so on went two big kettles on the old fire range this was then pored into the tub. Remember there was five of us children, in went the youngest followed by my self & so on until all five had been in the same two kettles of water, by now the water was getting cold. The next task was to clean our teeth which we did on Sundays only, it was a small tin of dry tooth paste so we had to wet the toothbrush & rub it around the tin to make it usable.

By this time Kathleen had a new two wheeled cycle which she rode to Sunday school, on the way back after I said could I try to ride your bike? Yes came the reply So off I went my first attempt on two wheels. Well I didn't fall off I rode all the way to the farm leaving Kathleen to walk all two miles home.

Thursday's was market day in Devizes so when we had school holidays we would go into the town, then in those day's it was a cattle market but the main market square was full of stalls & lots of cages full of chickens, ducks, Rabbits Etc. It was time to buy my first pet rabbit which you had to bid for. Each week we would have to go round the fields with a large sack & fill it up with dandelion leaves or milk thistle to feed them.

The Village of Worton had two small shops one also a post office. There were two public houses The Royal Oak The other The Rose & Crown two schools the Local village one & the temporary evacuees one also A church & a chapel plus the local Garage run by a long standing family of the Bodmans who also ran the local coaches/buses these would have wooden Seats known as utility there was no other material to make them with. One day in the shop I saw some little bars of chocolate one penny each remember we had very little sweets as you only had a few ounces each month if you were lucky. It turned out that the small bars of chocolate were know as Exlax which in fact were a laxative not sweets at all.

Although we had several fruit orchards on the farm we would go in the local fields in the village and Scrup some of theirs to eat on the way home. I can remember that the local village Thatcher lived in the middle of the village and you would see him by the roadside chopping up lengths of Hazle nut branches to make spicks with ( this was cut into three foot or one metre lengths split down to middle