

Pete Weston - Evacuee and Band Leader

Chapters Five and Six

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and twisted in half like a hair pin then tied up in bundles then put into a tank of water to make them pliable & ready for the next thatching period. I can remember an old saying that he had! We would ask him which way was the wind blowing & he would always reply UP JACKS A!!! IN AMERICA) his mane was Bill Tuck. This always stuck in my mind all those years back.

CHAPTER FIVE.

All livestock was recorded by the Ministry of Agriculture so they knew how much stock you had. Some of the fields would be planted with Kale a very tall type of cabbage And Mangles which would be stored in clumps. You would dig a trench in the field line it with Straw pile the mangles in And cover over with Straw Then put the soil over it to hold the Straw and keep the frost out. When the winter came we would load these on the cart and put them in the mangle grounder by hand and turn the handle this would chip them up then feed to the cattle as in the winter months the cows were kept in the cow yard away from the weather.

The Kale & Mangles were cut & collected by hand. To cut the Kale it was winter & covered in snow & frost so your hands would suffer from frost bite this was painful.

While the cows were kept in during the winter the stock yard would pile up with cow manure. So this had to be removed to the fields. Using one of the horses & the Dung cart we filled it up then took it over the fields, this we would unload in small piles across the fields then we had to spread it with a four prong pitch fork. Later It took two horses to pull a chain harrow across the fields this would break it down into smaller pieces. Next Job was to plough the fields that took two horses to pull the plough up & down the field that would take several days each field come rain or shine. Not many people had watches in those days so when the 12o/c midday train passed by about a mile away we known it was time for lunch. Jack would have his sandwiches & the horses had their nose bag full of Oats. This would continue until 3pm Then it was back to the farm to start milking the cow's. When this was done the cows would be bedded down on fresh straw for the night. It's now about 5 30pm & time for the farm workers to go home. They would take their daily ration of milk in a small tin flask.

On Sunday's a day of rest for most, Farm workers still had to milk cows & feed live stock starting at 5am in morning & finish about 9am. The rest of the day was theirs at leased until 2 30pm when they would start again to re milk & feed for the night. Then return home through the snow or rain.

In the cow yard there was a large Barn with big double doors front & back . this is where we stored the winter Hay after collecting it from the rick yard. By now the hay & straw would be packed down & compact so it needed a hay knife which was a large metal blade with a double handle to cut it, then loaded onto a farm cart to be taken to the barn .

When the barn was full of hay there was a large beam across the centre of the roof which we had made a swing with a piece of rope & had an old piece of wood as a seat, there was a large plank of wood hanging from the ceiling so we would swing as high as we could kick the roof board then jump of the swing into the hay, Great fun. I must say all the buildings made a good site for Hide & seek which was one way of enjoying ourselves . On Thursday evenings all the family & us children would go over to Cheveral village to Mrs Cox's mother's farm where she lived until she got married. There we children would either play around the farm or go over to the railway lines which passed through the farm & collect Train names & No's

That was the good old days when it was steam trains

. They all had names on them & we had a book with all their names in it so we just ticked them off as we saw them. We would crawl through the wire fence & put our ear on the rail to see if we could hear a train coming in the distance. Not a good idea. If the weather was bad we had a tin box which was always kept in the house there full of farm animals so we would play with them. We always kept ourselves amused,& kept out of trouble. There was one occasion when Mr & Mrs Cox went to Cheveral on their own as we were having a good game at home so did not go. When Kathleen fell & broke her Leg. There was no telephones about in those days So Bert the eldest boy ran across the fields to Cheveral to alert the family what had happened. So they come home & took Kathleen to Hospital, fortunetly Mr Cox had a car although it was an old one. Very few people had cars in those days, it was an Austin ten. Although later he changed it for a Morris 8 I can still remember the registration Number it was PN9966 we called it pretty Nancy. Just think I cannot even remember my latest car Reg yet PN 9966 was over 60 years ago.

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Every evening when it was bed time we all lined up for our evening wash & brush up, remember the farm was always covered in mud so we got pretty dirty running around playing. Just remember in those days we always wore short trousers & welly boots so our legs were covered in Mud & got very sore. Also we would get lots of stinging nettles stinging our legs.

As there was no running water just an old hand pump with a large handle to pump up water which most on the time did not work unless you poured some water into it to start it off, but when you got the water it was the most fresh tasting you had ever tasted. With only the old black kettle on the stove it was one bowl of water to wash us all. Before we went to bed with a glass of milk and a candle to light the way upstairs to bed. Each evening although we were in the middle of nowhere MR Cox had made a black out screen which he would have to place over the window to keep the light from showing to prevent the enemy planes from bombing us.

I must say that we were all very happy living in this house, we had a small amount of toys but we made our own enjoyment in many ways.

I can remember playing trains, this I did by using a hay fork with two prongs I dragged it through the mud to make two train lines then every now & then would make a circle in the track which was a station then make other sidings off of it. Very simple & cost nothing to do, but great fun. Kid's today would not know how to enjoy themselves unless they spent £100's of pounds on some sort of electronic device. Which after a few day's throw away. Also we made Bow and Arrows from the hedgerow stuck a piece of mud on the end to weight it then fire into the air, its amazing how far the arrows would travel.

One more of our games was to place a plank of wood into the side of the hay rick, one of us would be king of the castle standing at the top & the others in turn would try to pull us off to become king them self's So far I have not mentioned that we had a brown & black coloured. Dog who was Bob a nice old dog. He came with the farm when Mr Cox took over the farm about 1937.

Mr Cox was raised on his father's farm in Worton it was called Home farm. After leaving his fathers farm he rented a small holding close by in the same village until he had built himself up & was able to rent Hurst Farm of some 100 acres or more. Also on the farm there was a few semi wild cats to keep the Rats & mice down each afternoon they would be given a saucer of bread & milk to help keep them healthy. I can remember the time when all us boys had chicken pocks & we were all confined to bed so we had to stay in & make up games to pass the time of day. On one particular day we had Sheppard's pie for lunch & can remember playing at farmers as we eat it.

CHAPTER SIX.

It must be now about 1941 when the other two evacuees Bert & John Longhurst went back to London with their family. So I was the only one left on the farm.

Down by the old mill where the old water wheel would have been driven the river would have to be diverted with a set of slue gates to redirect the water from the river so as to make it flow under the mill & this would drive all the mechanics of the mill itself. As this has not been in use for many years the old river bed that fed the mill had silted up & was full of black sludge. The wall which prevented one from falling into it was Brocken and a large gap was left in the middle. Like children do I was playing with a stick dabbling it over the gap & fell in, Well I managed to get out & was covered head to toe in black slime, I ran back home crying & stood on the door mat. Mrs Cox took one look at me and said take all of your cloths off then she had to wash me down outside. Not having learnt my lesson some months later I was standing this time at the edge of this old stream yes you guest it I slipped in again. In the winter months when in was freezing this strip of old black sludge would freeze over then we would risk going on it & made slides.

I was getting to the age now where I was old enough to be aloud to take the horses down the village of Worton to the local Blacksmith's to be re shod, This was two miles so it would take some time to ride them there. All we would do was to put a Halter on the horse then ride it bear back no Saddle, On most occasions the local smithy who's name was Mr Arthur Goss would be busy shoeing other horses so would tie up the horse & wait my turn. It was interesting to watch him work. He would have

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to pump up the farness with a set of bellows to keep it red hot, then take a length of steel place it in the fire

Until it glowed red hot then he would place it on the anvil then hammer it into the shape of a horse shoe after removing the old shoe he would place it on the hoof of the horse then reshape it to the size of the hoof. The place would be full of smoke & the smell of burning hoofs, although this did not harm the horse. They would just stand there while the refitting was carried out. Then after our horse was done would have a nice long ride home, this was always a joy for the horse as they know their way home so just let them have their head & off we went. I can remember also that at the end of summer Mr Goss had a large cider press in the yard where most of the villagers who had Apples would take them to him then he would press them into Cider then of course we all had to try it to see how good it was with great success. In the centre of the village lived the squire a Captain Brassey who lived in a large house called Prince Hill House But unfortunately he was killed in action during the war.

Sometimes when leaving school I would take a short cut across the fields, it meant going up the lane at the side of the school pass the church over the stile down the first field & cross over a small river into two or three other fields. In one of these fields there would be three horse's on most occasions & I was always concerned that one of these horses would chase me so I ran as fast as I could.

As Graham had a birthday coming up in May Mr Cox bought him a pony for his birthday, it was a white one so we used to have rides on it around the fields. I seem to remember that this pony was Topsy & replaced with a brown one which had two white marks on its side so he was named Corporal. I recall one day I was riding it when he suddenly broke into a gallop up the field then for no reason he did a sharp turn & through me off his back, I hit the ground with a thud but was not hurt. It was about now that Jolly the big shire horse was to go & replaced with a younger one the same colour chest nut brown. Although he did not last too long as he had a poison leg, I can remember the Vet coming to treat him. They tied a hessian sack around his leg then filled it with hot bran to draw out the poison as a poultice but it never seem to get any better so jolly number two also went after a short time.

Living in one of the cottages next to the mill was a Mrs Farrington she lived there on her own, not sure she may have had a husband in the forces, I can recall some times when she was cooking roast potatoes she would give me some of the crispiest bits left over. Growing over the front door there was a red climbing rose with a very sweet smell, even to day when I smell this type of rose it takes back then. Looking at the front of the two cottages part was painted red & parts were Green, this was when they painted them they only painted the parts that were reachable from the up stairs window. These two cottages were attached to the old mill & if you went into the mill on the third floor you could go through a small door into the loft of the cottages & at the side of the cottages there was an out building which was there wash room with a small hand pump outside for their water supply.

Talking about potatoes the farm would have to grow a field full of them as part of the war effort. Two horses would plough a single furrow down the field then the men would walk behind & plant potatoes in the furrows one foot apart then they re ploughed over so as to grow until it's harvest time then they are re ploughed up next we walk along the furrows with a bucket & pick up by hand. All the very small potatoes were collected up separately & saved for the pigs.

In the dairy there was an old fashion boiler built out of bricks with a large metal tub sunk into it with a fire box under, this was a means of heating the water put potatoes in & boil until cooked. The spell of cooking potatoes was tempting on a cold day so we would help ourselves to them for a snack. At this time on one occasion the army were on manoeuvres & stayed in the barn so we swapped some of the potatoes for some of there food, I recall some hard boiled eggs as part of the swop.

It was time to buy a new horse & now along came this gentle giant a dapple grey with a white stripe down his nose he was named Serg'eant. when it was time for him to work you could go across the fields to where he was grazing just hold his main the(hair over his head) & lead him home to his stable after a while you could just call & he would come to you, especially if you had an apple in your pocket. He was easy to handle just stand there while you groomed him & put his harness on. Starting with his Own collar which was placed over his head followed by the halter then the large saddle & breaching ready for a days work, just back him into the shafts of the wagon & hitch him up. During the war days all horses had by law to wear a rope holder under their main holter in case of an air attack these horses could be tied up to a near by tree or fence, not that we had any air raids where we were. On one occasion I remember that I was playing in the track which at this point had high banks either side when coming towards me were all the horse's in Gallup, lead by Prince he had broken the

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fence & they all got out . I just stood there put my arms in the air & shouted at them & they stopped in their track , I'm only about six or seven at this time & not very tall.

These horses would live up to thirty years old. Its said with shire horses if they have four white feet buy, three white feet try, two white feet, fight shy. It might be old wife's tales but most farmers believed in it. There were 10's of thousands during the war years but now a days with tractors taking over Shire's are almost non existent. Except for the show farms & the odd breweries , even to date you still see two or three teams pulling the beer wagons around towns like Devizes. Wadworth breweries still have two or three pairs pulling wagons around the town, but they do tend to slow down the traffic Although its nice to see them in all their glory . just think these horses stand about six feet tall as a children we would only be three or four feet tall, yet we were able to mount them.

When it was haymaking or harvest time we would have to take the horse & carts to the village to gather the crops in on route there was a hill so when coming back to the farm with a full load we had to make sure the horses were able to hold back their wagon. This was done but fixing a drag shoe on the rear wheel so the wheel would roll onto it then we placed a chain around the wheel fixed to the drag shoe to act as a break & hold the cart back when at the bottom of the it would be removed & hung up on a hook at the side of the wagon by this time it was red hot with the friction on the road.

On coming homeward bound with a full load we would sit on the shaft's at the side of the horse & ride back holding the long reins to drive then home. These poor old horses would work all day along with the men handling them all they needed was a bag of Oats or some hay to keep them going.

I was getting to the point where I wanted more interesting things to do so I would go round the old chicken houses & do some repairs if needed. On one occasion Jack was taking the milk float out to the end of the track with Darkey the smaller horse when he got there the breeching strap or as we called it (the belly band) snapped & the whole cart tipped up & all the churns of milk came off the cart & lost that was about one hundred gallons, all that work for nothing & a deal of profit down the drain as would say.

After the main corn crops were harvest in we would take by horse towing the Hen houses to the corn fields & place them over the fields Then move the hens into them so they could peck up the loose grains of corn

Scattered over the land, after all this was helping the War effort & stopped the corn re seeding next year. Early one morning Alf Hail was cycling to work when he came face to face with Mr Cox's Bull heading towards the village, it managed to break loose so Alf got hold of the ring in his nose & cycled back to the farm leading bull behind him. No mean task considering a bull will be one to one & half tons in weight. Once harvest was over we spent some of our time collecting old branches to saw up for the winter fires & the smaller ones were chopped up as kindling wood then we stored it in a dry shed. This was a task that we enjoyed to see the pile gradually grow into a large one, it seems what ever task we were involved in it was fun to do unlike most children today who would fight shy of work .

One of my weekly jobs was to clean my tricycle I would rub it down with a cloth soaked in paraffin to stop it from going rusty, we all looked after our things in those days. I had some toy soldiers made of lead some mounted on horses others marching & some were bandmen. My father was now in the RAF So would send me a postcard from time to time so would my mother, these cards I still have today. They were often pictures of aircraft or ships or steam trains of the war days. My mother sent pictures of London .From my first birthday onwards for several years I saved my birthday cards also the earlier ones would be shaped into numbers one to seven or eight, then when we went to Sunday school we would be given a small book in which we were given a stamp each week so as to record how many weeks each year we were at Sunday school these had their own space for each week so you know which weeks we missed out.

Some times when Mr Cox wanted to go out in his car it would not start as batteries would ware out & its virtually impossible to replace them. So he would take one of the horse's to give it \ tow up the track to get going. I can remember one evening he was driving over to Cheveral & had only side lights on when a policeman on a cycle stopped him for no headlights .He was fined & it appeared in the local press.

Torch's were a must in the pitch dark when working late into the night & battery's were very difficult to buy so to extend their live we would put them into the hot oven warm them up this would put a bit more live into them . Now its time to move back home.