

## Betty Gatley (née Needham)

*My first 14 years at Fox Holes*

### *Farm*

My parents farmed in Lincolnshire and came to Fox Holes before I was born. With my two brothers and four sisters, we needed a large house. It had six bedrooms, two big front rooms, a kitchen, a scullery, two dairies and a bacon chamber, a back and front stairs. Most of the floors were stone, and scrubbed brick ones in the kitchens. Every room had a black fireplace. Our bathroom was a tin bath by the fire, used on a Saturday night. All our water was heated by a copper and boiler one side of the kitchen fire and an oven the other side. We had a pump outside the back door and one in the stock yard. No mains or electricity, only paraffin lamps and candles. No telephone, or any motor transport. Nancy and I had a pony, "Polly", and we all had a bike and a carbine lamp in the winter. My mother had a supply of lamp wicks, Aladdin mantles, matches and other items you wouldn't see in the shops these days. White hearth stone, black lead, salt peter for pig killing time, carbolic soap, sylvan soap flakes, friar's balsam, dolly blues, mouse traps, pen nibs, teats for cade lambs and plough shares.

Fox Holes was a mixed farm. The land went as far as the beck at Norwell, and over the railway to the North Road at Cromwell. The arable land was worked with horses and in about 1936 my father bought a new Fordson Major Tractor, the first in Muskham, with the advice of Nancy's boyfriend Sid Milnes who worked at Brooks Garage in Newark.

When Nancy and I came home from school we had to work, either in the house or in the farm yard, feeding poultry, and cade lambs, and fetching the cows from the fields for milking, chopping sticks and taking buckets of coal and logs to the fireplaces. We used to fill the water jugs on the wash stands upstairs and in the winter it would be frozen, so we kept a hammer by the side of the bowl. At hay and harvest time we would have to take the



Betty Gatley 1923 -2016

workers' tea in a tin can and the food in a butter basket, our piano practice and homework took second place.

We had two or three working dogs, and a new Foxhound pup every year from the Rufford Hunt, which used to hunt on our land. I remember one winter a fox killed most of our Christmas turkeys, as all poultry was free range.

We had a few tradesmen call. Jack Brown the butcher from Norwell would call on a Friday night in his van. Newark Co-op would deliver groceries. Sheffield Rep would call once a year selling Yorkshire blankets (pure wool). I still have one today. Not forgetting hawkers, gypsies, tramps and scrap dealers. We all felt safe in those days, we never locked our doors at night.

My mother was an excellent provider and a good cook. She used to separate milk and make butter and cream cheese. Lots of jam and a cake in a dripping tin. In winter a pan of broth hanging over the fire. She made ginger beer, wine and pickles. We had a good supply of jams from fruit from the garden and orchard. We had vegetables grown on the farm. We had our own eggs and poultry. My brothers enjoyed shooting when they had time. Rabbit pie was a favourite. Also roast pheasant and partridges. At Christmas my Aunt and Uncle came to stay with their five children. They lived on a lonely farm in the Lincolnshire Fens near Sleaford. It was nice having playmates. Mother would boil a whole ham in the copper and make plum puddings and bread. Apart from all the extra food there was a big round of Stilton cheese at supper time. Uncle Arnold drove a large Armstrong

# North Muskham *capturing memories*

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Sidley. Nancy used to say the washing up was never ending.

We always had a pig killed in December. Each worker was given a dish of pigs fry and a pork pie.

After the harvest was gathered in and all the stacks were thatched, Mr. Bob Hough would come down the lane with his threshing engine, drum and elevator. All the wheat, barley and oats had to be threshed by the Spring. The straw was needed for cattle bedding and the corn for sale and feeds for the animals. Mr. Hough and his helper had lunch and a hot dinner with us in the kitchen. My father was the water carrier for the engine, he had wooden yokes on his shoulders, and two buckets on chains.

We plucked all our poultry by hand and saved all the feathers to make feather beds, pillows and cushions. In the winter evenings mother would peg snip rugs. Nancy was six years older than I and she used to go to cookery and embroidery classes held in the school once a week.

In the autumn my mother and I would walk across Mr. Burns' fields in the dark to a whist drive held in the school on a Friday night and, after refreshments, a dance was held for the younger ones. When the Newark Band had a break, Nancy would play the piano and Sid Milnes would play the drums.

Mother had one holiday after her illness. She took me to Skegness for a week. An uncle took us in his car and we stayed at a boarding house in Scarborough Avenue. It was the first time I had seen the sea. At that time Billy Butlin had started with a few amusements on the sands. I thought it was the happiest time of my young life.

Before mechanisation the horse was the backbone of the farming world and after a day's work it had to be stabled, rubbed down, fed and watered, cleaned out and fresh straw, all from a lantern. Most fields had a stone trough and a well.

My brothers would come home wet through on rainy days and we had to have an extra fire to dry their clothes. After we left Fox Holes, they didn't continue farming.

On Saturday morning Nancy and I would work in the fields picking potatoes or singling sugar beet for a penny a row. We often went to Newark in the afternoon to spend our earnings at the new Woolworths store in Stodman Street, nothing over 6 pence was Woolworth's

motto. I bought a pencil case once before going to the new Savoy Picture House to see a film.

My daughter Jill lives in North Yorkshire and when I travel on the intercity from Kings Cross I always look out for Muskham Church and Edna and Ronnie's garage and all the pigs! I noticed at Fox Holes Farm that all the small fields have been made into one, but my memories are still there.

The toilet was an ash pit type and built a long way from the house at the end of the cart shed, through the orchard. It was a two seater with an oak seat. Tom used to go on his bike.

When I was married to Tim and had two children we went to live in Muskham. Tim worked for Sid Milnes as an agricultural salesman and we lived seven years at The Grove. Owing to the new Newark bypass a bridge was to be built where our home stood, and with the old garage going to be pulled down, we had no prospects of a home or a job. Tim rejoined the R.A.F. for twelve years. When I visit Muskham and see the bypass and bridge, I can still picture The Grove.

## *Description of 'The Grove'*



*The Grove in the 1950's. Betty with her children Robert and Jill*

The Grove was a large house built on the corner of Vicarage Lane facing The Great North Road. It had three bedrooms at the front and a landing. Walking down four steps to another landing, was a window which had a bedroom on either side. Mr. Fineral had the over the kitchen made into a bathroom with a toilet.



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Downstairs, the two large front rooms each had a fireplace. A large hall, with a heavy oak front door and a passage with a tiny pantry at the bottom.

At the back of the house a small kitchen, with a black cooking range, just an oven no boiler, a stone sink, and only room for a table and four chairs. It was very draughty, it could have done with a porch or conservatory.

At the other side a large wash house, with a copper and a stone sink. A water toilet was built inside, with a door bedroom outside. There was once an outside toilet, next to a brick coal house. The Grove had a large garden and orchard.

Written by Betty Gatley, née Needham

These memories have been typed by Gail  
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