

Through an Open Gate



A Journey Through Life

By

Tony Jepps

Forward

This collection of bits of History, bits of Family and bits of This'n That" is an attempt to write down (up?) some of the various Events, Locations, People and their tenuous connections with a life story, in itself not remarkable, but which could be interesting to a casual reader.

The original book – "One a day, Two on Sundays", is included in these more up-to-date recollections.

My thanks go to the various people mentioned, to their recollections of the real events, and to my long-suffering Editor, Debbie, without whom I would not have been able to include the Family Researches.

After some 88 years memories may not be so accurate but, Dear Reader, it is the telling that makes a good story.

15 Pauls Croft,
Cricklade 2019

The Book is dedicated to Audrey

*"The best gift you could have given her was a lifetime of
adventure"*

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The Promised Land

Once more we were on the move; from Kent to Bedfordshire to Buckinghamshire to Nottinghamshire, all in a little over seven years. While we had arrived in Weston Turville on the back of the 'bike, no way could we leave by the same mode of transport. Pickfords came and estimated they could just about put everything into one large van.

"You would like it delivered for Monday? Not possible. The best we can do is the middle of next week".

How on earth did we manage to accumulate so much stuff?

So, Audrey took the two children and **CRO** to Campton, while yours truly took the train to Newark; even walking from the station to North Muskham, with a suitcase, rather like Dick Whittington. (Well, we were trying to seek our fortune). Like all good adventure stories, the first step is the shortest, on the long march to the Promised Land and this would be no different.

I had settled the 'Ingoing' with effect from Lady Day, March 25th. The preceding tenant, Tom Ulyott was effectively looking after the farm for me until I arrived a week later. How to learn the Milkround? Will the furniture fit in the farmhouse, which Audrey had never seen?

Questions, questions and very few answers! YET; this was our first farm, over which we had full control and which would hopefully provide for our future.

The first Monday morning, when Ray (a dour pipe-smoking man), lugubriously said:

"Morning, Boss! I thought I would tell you that the ***** Fordson is bust!"

Such a nice welcome to start the week with agro! Oh well! There

is always the milk round to do:

Cheer up! First pint of milk sold at the farm entrance at 7.00am for 5d - summer price. (2.1p) "Fresh Farm Bottled Channel Island Milk from T.B. tested cows". Much the same price as a loaf of bread from Mrs. Squires at South Muskham Post Office, (this comparison was true all the way through our time at Trent Farm; ending at 1/- (5p) in September 1970)

Anyway, on with the Milkround. A day's help from Tom Ullyott enabled me to know where I was lost! Tom was moving to open a Butchers shop in the nearby cathedral town of Southwell. Eventually the first day ended - tired-out but happy.

Must get some kip as the family were due to arrive sometime... and Pickford's did promise to come on Tuesday.

"Where are they?"

Eventually a telephone call:

"Should be with you later this evening!"

"When?"

"No idea!"

Sometime in the evening the van appeared a different crew, eager to drop the furniture and return to Lincoln before midnight. We needed all the items on the van; cooker, wash boiler, tables and chairs and beds, as the house was empty of most furniture.

"Put this in the front room.....That - in the bedroom at the front."

Well organised? not on your life!

Faithful CRO eventually arrived, 90 miles over unfamiliar ground. Audrey was with the two children, Nigel plus Debbie (in a blow up Lilo carrycot), pram, food, clothes plus all the hundred and one things which are so essential for small children.

In the spirit of the Wild West, she had travelled north to a land unknown to her, hoping to arrive at the unknown village and the even more unknown farmhouse, let alone the farm. The more important decisions had already been made; our own farm, cropping, livestock, machinery, in fact all major details had been

made without the most important fact hardly mentioned! Would the 3/5 bedroom farmhouse be OK?

"Put the kettle on!"

Such homely requests have rested many a weary traveller; not least the mother of two children, seeing her new home for the first time.



"Let's see round the house!Well, you can move all this furniture from here to the other room, and bring the other stuff back in here"

Yes, you have guessed it; everything was in the wrong room. All needed moving before the children and ourselves could get to bed. Eventually sleep overcame us; dreams of the future or just tiredness?

Tomorrow would be another day.

A quiet chat with the local Garage, S.V.Milnes and Sons, over the problem of the No-Go tractor, secured the eventual delivery of a brand new Fordson Major Diesel, complete with every extra: Belt-pulley, P.T.O., Road lights, special comfort seat (no more iron seats with a sack-bag for comfort) - this was the Bee's knees. All for £556. less the p/x of the old E27N Fordson with its

con-rod hanging out through crankcase. In stark contrast to today's Business Terms, we agreed to pay as and when, without ANY Contract or Paperwork = OK.

(Sid turned down the offer of 2 pints of milk free for life! He would have made more than twice the cost by the end of 1970).



Fordson Major Diesel

Whipped Cream and Turkeys

So the daily routine settled down; up early for the milk-round, back for breakfast and then out again to take the school meals out. We had a contract to deliver school meals, cooked in the village school kitchens, to three other schools in the district. This contract paid the princely sum of £200 a year, nicely equalling the Rent due. No worries on that score for the first five years.

“Any business can make a Profit; it's the Rent that causes a Loss” - Dictum of TCW

Then back home for midday meal before collecting the containers in reverse order. Wash the bottles for the afternoon milking; the day was gone before you could tie a shoe-lace.

In more up-to-date times, it would have been known as Diversification. To us, just starting, it meant a positive cash income. This was very necessary with a young family and two men to pay each week. The rent of £200 per year was the same as at the turn of the century; we were the sixth tenants to take the farm since the end of the War. So was farming more profitable then?

Ray and the new tractor got on well together; (an unkind thought crossed my mind - did he engineer that breakdown?) It was a

busy time completing the drilling of the remaining spring corn and planting the potatoes. Our first harvest looked promising – the cows were milking well, but there were still unfilled places in the cowshed. Expansion was needed to justify employing the two staff - would we be earning more than them?

TCW's dictum - "You must earn at least one third of a man's wage extra for every one you employ" was likely to be difficult to achieve.

There is always the Harvest to look forward to, hope is eternal.

One day Audrey missed Nigel, then aged 2 and a bit. Where was he? The River Trent was ten feet deep within a yard of the bank; had he run away? Drowned? A quick run up to the end of the drive;

"Have you seen a little boy in gumboots?"

(this was directed at the first person in the bus queue).

"Yes!"

"Where?"

"See that chicken house across the field?"

"Yes, Yes!"

"Well, he crawled in the 'Pop-hole' and has not come out!"

The relief of the mother was clear, while the little boy was in the dark, surrounded by a flock of flapping hens. He obviously had a liking for adventure.

So the first summer and forthcoming Harvest approached. Hay time was 'catchy'. Rain came and went and went again and came again. We had cut our best field of seeds hay on Whit Monday; it was now getting to August Bank Holiday (the first Monday in the month); it was getting blacker and blacker, after each attempt to dry it out. The contractor, Frank Swannack, was getting adept at taking the tarpaulin off the Baler and then putting it back on again in just five minutes FLAT!)

We eventually managed to bale it in a sorry state and then to haul it all to the edge of the field and tried to set fire to it. Good

job that there was a requirement for the Outgoing Tenant to leave a year's hay in store for the Incoming Tenant.

Harvest was not going to be a problem; a second-hand Minneapolis Moline PTO combine enabled us to complete the 60 acre harvest in reasonable time and condition. Frank Swannack did the baling and the lifting of the potatoes, with his 'Ladies'.

The summer of '57 saw England in the grip of the Asian 'Flu epidemic, and it was no surprise that I succumbed to it with Glandular Fever thrown in for good measure. So much so that my normally svelte figure dropped to a little over 10 stones; I was not well. Cousin Wilfred, one of Newark's leading doctors, was eventually called. Temperature almost off the Scale! Recommend Bed. No can do! (Who will do the Milk round etc. etc.?)

"You can and you will".

So, it was off to Broadstairs for parental treatment. Audrey was now in the thick of it; two small children, milkround and school dinners.

"Do you have our Milk?"

This enabled her to make her way around the 14 miles of houses, with faithful CRO. Nigel was looked after by Mike and Boodle in Lichfield, where Mike was doing his first year as a G.P; while Debbie was just put in the back of the van in a carry-cot, amongst the bottles.

Blood tests at Margate Hospital were taken; have you ever had a broken hypodermic needle extracted from one's 'derrière'? A truly delightful experience!

The 200 turkey eggs, which we had set in the incubator in the spring and hatched out, were getting up to weight for Christmas. With a typical down-to-earth approach, Audrey had found a number of local ladies who were recruited to help with the plucking.

Audrey's skill at poultry-dressing, learnt with the Biggleswade

YFC, was put to the test. She did all the killing and dressing; the kitchen was the centre of operations with buckets for the guts, heads and feet. Eventually they were all done and father-in-law came with the lorry to take them to London to sell to the shops.

Our first Christmas on our own farm, eating our own Turkey; all seemed well for the future!

Practical help in the purchase of a baler, from Audrey's father, set us up for the next year. The Allis Chalmers baler was a Godsend; with it I was able to complete the next hay time and straw baling in good order. Contract-baling, at 6d. (2.5p) a bale, earned its keep in baling for other farmers in the district.

Coming new to the farm and keen to try out some of the practices learnt at Shuttleworth, and the other farms on which I had worked, saw us gradually improving the farm.

First of all we needed to increase the number of In Milk cows, to ensure a reliable daily production for the Milkround; the mainstay of the farm's income. We started to buy in young Guernsey heifers. Audrey's eye for a 'Good Un' saw her travelling to Leicester and other Markets, while her 'eye' for an exceptional animal in Newark Market was praised by the Auctioneer –

“It's got to be good, Mrs Jepps is bidding!”

Audrey's eye for a good animal was put to good use, (the YFC certainly trained them well; even if she could not throw a rolling-pin). She became quite well known as she attended Herd Book sales. The Trent Herd, becoming graded-up to pedigree, was eventually entered in the Guernsey Herd Book Register- a notable achievement, due mainly to Audrey's good eye for cattle.

The Milk Stand at the end of the Drive (ex-wartime Morrison Shelter) was soon seeing a few more Churns each day full, not like those of Tom Sampson's neighbouring farmer at Treyford.

Meanwhile Strip Grazing was practised – a new-fangled idea which local farmers were yet to embrace, although after a few years this became more usual in the district. This was a new

system whereby an electrified wire kept the cows in line, only grazing so many feet a day across the field. The grassland used for the cows was on sand; with a low rainfall of about 21" per annum. Careful management of a fresh yard of green grass each time they came to the field made sure that none was wasted. The other farmers in the parish soon began to follow suit.

To keep the grass growing, it was essential that the grazed area was quickly fertilized with Nitrogen, to aid quick re-growth. The old-fashioned full-width plate fertiliser drill was slow and cumbersome; (even it was better than spreading it by hand, as I had done at Weston Turville) so down to the local Manufacturers, Nicholson's of Newark.

A PTO Spinner was just the job, quick, easy to use and could take just sufficient fertiliser to spread a small area every time. Again, this was used for a bit of contracting in its first year or two, before others acquired their own.

I remember the beautiful copper-plate hand-written letter which old Mr. Nicholson had sent to us the very first week at the farm, welcoming us to the area and *'ASSURING YOU OF EVERY ATTENTION!'*

However, the pressure of keeping two men on the 100 acres became uneconomic. Wages were rising faster than the output to sustain them; so eventually one left for a more urban existence where he could spend as much time as he liked watching Nottingham Forest lose frequently, leaving Ray as our only employee.

Ray was in the only farm Cottage, so was likely to stay a little longer. Although TC Ward's dictum about pipe-smokers was true:-

“Never employ a man who smokes a pipe, he will always spend at least 10 minutes an hour keeping it alight!”

He was not always keen to do things differently, being convinced that the old ways were best. Careful consideration was given to

this problem – as a result Ray and I parted on friendly terms, he to South Muskham, me to seek another man.

Patrick Thurston became part of the family. He had been Top Student at Brackenhurst College near Nottingham and was eager to put into practice his ideas.

The pressure of work increased, the milk-round was expanding, more poultry around, and we had acquired two in-pig Gilts from the local butcher in Norwell. Feeding them was causing a headache.

The cereal acreage was increased by the addition of the odd field. Harvests were bagged off the combine (memories of Patrick and our contracting) and stored or sold off; some new thinking was required.

Meanwhile our poultry enterprise was due for an overhaul. Our contract to produce fertile eggs for a hatchery was up for renewal. We had a good record of over 95% fertile and of those a 90% hatch-out,

“Will you double your flock?”

We were being paid average egg prices plus a fertility and number hatched-out premium.

"Only if you give us a five year contract so that we can afford to put up a new, purpose-built shed."

No takers. A new contract would be needed to pay off the new sheds, if we were to increase the size of the flock. Our present sheds were a collection of ex-army Nissen huts, railway wagons, traditional chicken houses and what you will. So the poultry enterprise declined as the buildings themselves declined. A good job on reflection, as the hatchery itself closed down within two years.



Ex-Army Nissen Hut

As the Milk round was expanding, there was a need to supply fresh eggs, in addition to the butter and cream which Audrey was

selling.

We had taken over a small Markham Hammer-mill, which we used for grinding barley for the pigs and wheat and oats for the poultry rations. Hand-mixing was a bind; so British Wagon came to the rescue, and a mixer was obtained from Maltby's of Newark and coupled-up. We were now able to grind our own grain, mix with concentrates and minerals, producing a cheaper ration. The saving was the same as haulage charges per ton, on and off the farm. The Mill Book showed that I was grinding and mixing some 4+ tons a week, occasionally running during the night.

Even a very heavy Roller Mill, from brother-in-law, Stan, was dismantled and transported by our own lorry to be hauled up over the Mixer, (shades of 'Elf'n'Safety!)

In the village and surrounding area there were a number of small livestock farmers; whose acreage of grain was really too small to be of commercial use for contract combining by Frank Swannack, so I combined their grain and returned it to them as required as mixed meal, enabling me to build up quite a thriving business. This contra-working helped in other ways. Frank Swannack, the local contractor, had his gang of piece-work potato pickers; he gathered our crop while I, in return, milled and mixed all his poultry food. After a number of years we were still quits. The Mill, which was used for general food preparation came into its own as a source of revenue and certainly earned its keep, although the electricity bill was bigger than I liked.

We, in common with most village homes, had the weekly grocery supplies for the house delivered by the Grocer, Tea man, the Butcher, and Fishman. Local shops would give Stamps which could be redeemed for all sorts of useful items, most were of good value and lasted a considerable time - Green Shield Stamps appeared - later to be transferred into Argos. There was a thriving round by the

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The principal grocers in Newark used to call on a Tuesday for the order which would be delivered on the Friday. They later changed to being 'Self Service'; the Till Roll would come to at least a £1.00 a foot! Perhaps worth about £100.00 today?

No.10

In about 1960 Audrey and I went to London to attend Cousin Paul's Wedding to Pam, meant an overnight stay in the Capital City. While Audrey's ambitions in the World of Politics were a well-known driving force, yours truly thought that a visit to Downing Street, the home of the Prime Minister, might be useful for the archive pictures in later life. So a 'Photo



Opportunity was taken to have a 'Mug Shot' outside No.10. Despite being a 'Handbag man' for Audrey in later life, Politics did not really call me. Perhaps I was a closet Liberal at heart with my Yellow Canary Waistcoat all those years ago?

At about this time, Nigel had started at the Newark Prep School, (Highfields). After an initial period of suffering the indignity of being taken to school with the milk, he indicated that he was quite old enough to go by bus; which he did; later taking his younger sister to school. On one occasion he was spotted on a double-decker bus.

"I just wanted to go home on a different bus".

"Yes, but we do not live at Lincoln!"

Butcher Brown, from Norwell, was the ideal person to sell us a couple of Large White In-Pig Gilts. For £44.00 the pair, these two provided the foundation of the Pig herd, using a boar from Uncle Jack's prize-winning herd, he soon had lots of piglets all over the

place – we were into lightweight pigs for ‘Cutters’, a useful size of pig which had many uses in the Pork and Bacon market. A pig is an ideal source of income -

“A Pig is always worth its money - however old it is”
- *TCW dictum.*

In farming, there is always the loss of an animal, from disease or accident and sudden death which cannot be explained: Tetanus or Lockjaw is every farmer’s nightmare. We had such a death of a young boar which meant that the Police had to be informed, no movement on or off the farm, the dead animal had to be burnt. The Vet came and took blood samples; no obvious cause but there were strict procedures to be followed with Police and Fire Brigade in attendance all needing to be fed and watered, until everything had been disposed of. Right up to the time we left the farm, nothing would grow where the funeral pyre had been.

An additional block of land–Davies’, bringing the acreage to about 125 acres of very mixed soil type required a bit more ‘Grunt’ to tame it. A change of tractors from the old TVO Fordson Major to a Diesel crawler enabled me to ‘tame’ this additional land. Memories of AG Street in Canada came to mind; the heavy clay hill fields were improving due to a deeper ploughing and sub-soiling by the better ploughing tractor.

Fordson Major Tractor and Crawler



The increased acreage brought the farm up to just about the national average at that time. The cows had increased to 20 in milk at anyone time; things were on the up.

The Landlords, (Newark Municipal General Charities), had

indicated on one of their Annual farm walks that the other farm which they owned in the village would eventually be amalgamated with Trent Farm, but not yet. We had been gearing-up to this larger acreage whenever a piece of kit needed replacing.

Claas combine / trusser



Massey Harris 735



The Harvesting grew apace and the combine, by then a trailed PTO Claas with a trusser on the back (ideal for the oat straw) was changed for a Massey Harris 735, self-propelled bagger This definitely improved the task of combining an increased cereal acreage. The Massey still had a 6-foot cut - handier in getting through narrow gateways [unlike the time Patrick and I had to run its bigger sister up on railway sleepers to get above the gateposts on a level-crossing on the main London to the South Railway.

Wheat was reduced in area to allow more oats and barley to be grown, satisfying the increasing number of hungry mouths. (Wheat had to be sold off the farm to receive the 'Deficiency payment'; being repurchased if needed for the laying hen rations).

Potatoes were dropped from the rotation as the lifting clashed with the sugar beet time; Patrick was making a bomb with his piece-work rates!

A Trip to Harsvinkel in Germany, flying in the workhorse of the skies – a Dakota, from the grass field near Loughborough to see round the factory which made Claas combines, had been

arranged by the local machinery agents. This provided an interesting insight to other countries. About 12 of us were shown round the factory, beginning the tour by signing a large piece of tubing, with date and time: by the time we finished there was this fully completed combine standing out side the factory, proudly showing that it took just 6 hours to assemble and to be running. What one of the local, very prominent, farmers got up to on the Saturday night – we never knew, as we were all sworn to silence; his eventual clothing array left much to be desired!

The expanding herd meant milking problems in the old 21 stall cowshed. To achieve a better 'through-put', we concentrated on the upper 6 stalls for the milking only. The others were used for young calves.

Previously we had installed water bowls for each pair of stalls; also making a continuous feed manger to stop the feed from being wasted. The calves soon got used to them, blissfully unaware that they were soon to become milkers like the others in the shed.

While Nigel and I were smoothing-off the cement, I asked him to inscribe the date, which he did; -1961.

"That's not right, Nigel."

"Yes it is! 1961"

"You have it upside-down!"

"Oh no I have not!".....

Nigel was obviously cut out to be as someone who knew his numbers, would he go to Cambridge? His expertise with his 'Colours' also stood him in good financial stead with his grandmother! Especially knowing the difference between a 10/- and a £1 note!

The upper part of the cowshed was effectively a 6 stall parlour, bucket milked and then tipped into a churn on a trolley, making the journey to the dairy and cooler and bottler easier. In-churn cooling saved a little of the hard work in filling the bottling machine.

Producer-retailing was harder work than most people realised; but the retail premium was well worth the extra hassle. It enabled us to have a closer watch on the family income - at £1.00 gross per crate of 20 bottles (2 ½ gallons), delivered per day, we knew exactly how much we could live on. This margin grew to be worth over £1,500 per annum, enabling School fees to be paid.

The Farm, meanwhile, still had a voracious appetite for support. An advert in the Farmers Weekly resulted in Simon arriving - he had done his homework, sought out suitable lodgings before Interview. Simon had completed two years at Wye College and was seeking to widen his experience, so we agreed terms and he became part of the farm. Having completed a two-year degree course, Simon's knowledge of Pigs came under strain as he frantically came up to me in the field saying that a sow was about to farrow – what should he do?

“Tell Nigel; he will know where the Heat lamps are and how to rig them up”.

Although we sold farm bottled Channel Island milk, (“You can Whip our Cream but you cannot beat our Milk”- memory from the farm in Hereford) we also sold ordinary pasteurised milk from Lincoln and Carlton Dairies, for those customers who preferred the less creamy milk. The introduction of more stringent regulations for Farm bottled milk, lead to us giving up this side of the dairy and concentrating wholly on pasteurised milk - a move accepted by all our customers except one!

We had, by now, given up the school dinner round, as time was in very short supply each day. The work-load was becoming easier for Audrey; as she was not tied so much to the bottle washing and bottling.



We kept a circular wall chart in the kitchen of the cows which were due to calve:- names and expected date of birth: Bluebell 2nd.; Primrose; Buttercup 3rd.; Audrey. John Mallaliu, the Vet,

was slightly perplexed – was he to do a PD? No need! She was expecting a new baby in late November (the 24th. would be handy for a personal birthday present!).

As luck would have it, a false alarm towards the end of November and a weekend in hospital was preceded by a practical calving demonstration by Nigel and Audrey. A message had been delivered to the farm by someone in the village, saying that a cow was about to calve in the Football field; (country folk knew as much about farming as most people, but not nowadays). Audrey sent Nigel to collect a halter and the calving ropes. Primrose was tied to the fence.

"When she heaves, pull on this rope".

Nigel was soon on to the job in hand. Eventually, with a bellow from the greatly relieved mother, the calf was safely delivered; its nose kept clean and Primrose was a-licking her new-born.

"When you go to hospital, will the doctors do this to you?"

"Not if I can help it!"

-was the heartfelt response of the mother, who was 'great with child'.

Imagine the outcry if it happened today! Children growing up in the countryside were surrounded by the natural cycles of life and death.

On the Saturday, as on the two previous occasions:-

"I must go to Newark Hospital".

"Not now! I've the milkround to do and all the money to collect. Take the car and drive yourself in; I'll come in later by bus to see you and baby and drive the car home"

..... which I did.....much jubilation....

Newark Advertiser, 9th.December 1961.

**Jepps, to Audrey (née Odell) and Tony
a Daughter, Alison Mary a sister to Nigel and Deborah**



However this particular year, 1961, was nearing to its close. Being a very mild December meant a delayed start to the Christmas Turkey plucking time, resulting in a very rapid post-natal recovery by Audrey, as she and 120 turkeys met for the first and last time.

The farm was changing gradually each year. Potatoes and kale were given up and the arable land put to a simple rotation of barley and oats and sugar beet; selling only the surplus after keeping sufficient for the cattle and pigs. The last of the poultry were phased-out as the battery hens moulted. Audrey was making £1.00 a hen at the end of its laying time; plucked and dressed and ready for the 'Take-away', rotisserie which had just opened in Castlegate, Newark.

For the first six harvests, the combines had been up-graded from the MM 6' PTO bagger to engine - driven trailed MM, this had been cut down from a prairie monster of 24 feet cut.

M Prairie Monster

Next was the Claas trailer-bagger with its own trusser. The MF35 was an improvement, being self-propelled, but still relying on another man (person?) to keep the bags filled.



It was the MF35 that had started the contracting side of the job, small enough to go through the gates of the smaller farmers not on Frank Swannack's round (memories of the London to the London to Camberley electrified railway leaps to mind; trying to get a 8ft/6 inch combine through a gateway just nine feet wide: make a ramp of sleepers so that the whole machine can be driven with the cutter-bar above the gateposts - No elf'n'safety then!)

Income from such work enabled one's own costs to be reduced. Having bagged corn meant that someone had to pick up those bags laying in the stubbles; although there was some drying of the corn in the sack, they still needed storing and drying.

With about 100 acres of cereals, I had the same number of days/hours of sun as the bigger neighbours, so combining could be more selective. By good luck, a farm sale provided the ultimate mean machine! I proudly drove home a Massey Harris 726; similar to the one Patrick Moore and I used way back in 1951 with its 8'6" cut and tank, it could really motor!

We needed a trailer for the grain; a quick browse in the scrap yard of the local MF agents produced a chassis of a 3 ton trailer, no floor or sides. A kit of parts supplied the metal work needed; home built wooden floor and sides completed the refurbished trailer with a detachable grain-bin on top.

Walter Bower of Manor Farm, next door, was useful for farm welding; his Bower Strakes were on the Fordson Major, making

the tractor grip that much better. We operated a 'Quid Pro Quo' arrangement - he did welding etc. I did his haymaking - co operation in its best sense. He had been an all-in wrestler and had been 'Britain's Strongest Man' at the London Palladium, but was also a demolition contractor, a useful man to know. (Where did the central heating radiators come from?)

Harvest went well, although the 4cyl.Morris engine eventually gave upon us. So next year, I found a burnt-out MF780 bagger with a beautiful Austin Princess 6 cylinder engine; a bit of cannibalisation saw the tank from the 726 swapped over.

MF 780 combine



MF 726



The old rotary screen, driven by the compressor motor of the ex-Walls Ice-cream fridge, became the pre-cleaner for the Kongskilde grain drier. Grain could now be handled in bulk and blown by the drier-fan to the silo and to a newly built grain shed where I had put a wooden floor, from a redundant village hall, so that I could blow cold air from the blower through the grain for drying- very good for Oats for Rolling.

A close working relationship with the Bibby man - Mr Ludlow. (one would never dream of calling him Leonard) saw us, with some of his other local farmers on a day trip to Twyford Seeds, near Banbury. At this time there had been a lot of concern about nuclear research and its possible side-effects. We were being shown round their Research Greenhouses, and were interested to hear that their Chief Plant Breeder had been successful in irradiating wheat seed to enable mutations to be observed.

“I hope you have had KGB clearance?”

“If that is you, Jepps, then I am leaving”

said Charlie Kimber, who had recently left Shuttleworth College to take up his present position - a small world ?

One's relationship with suppliers was more personal than in today's times: Agents became family friends and were often invited to have a meal with us or to play a bit of Croquet on the not too smooth tennis court. Audrey, in her desire to improve the Dining Room, had spotted that an ex-Raleigh Boardroom table was for sale in Nottingham, so a quick dash over to Raleigh's HQ saw us returning with an enormous mahogany table, complete with 3 'Leaves' and covered in a plate-glass top. When Leonard Ludlow came next on his monthly visit, she called him to see the new table;

"What do you think, Mr. Ludlow?"

Leonard thought for a moment or two:

"Large enough for your growing family but small enough to seat all your creditors!"

It was he who financed us through the 1964 year when our income was at least minimal or even minus, supplying all the necessary seeds and fertilizers and sprays, undertaking to buy our harvest at the going rate. His kindly action enabled us to weather the storms of a poor harvest the year before.

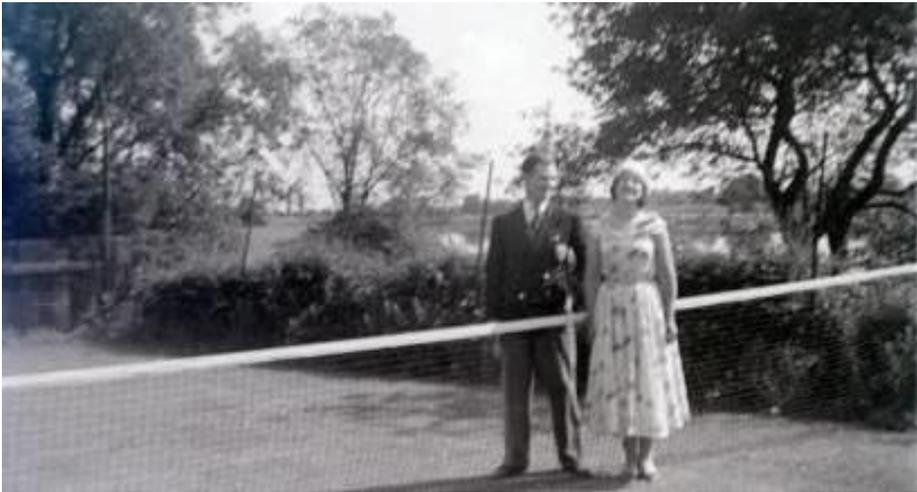
We had bought some extra straw in from the local haulier, Pycket Brothers, as our own stock was getting low; a year later the haulier sent me a Birthday Card – 'Now We are 1 Year Old' with a little note saying: Please! An invitation to play Croquet on the lawn and a good supper saw them on their way home with the usual brown paper envelope!

We were still growing about 15 acres of beet, so the tipping-trailer was more than useful. An ex WD tipper lorry enabled me to take loads of beet direct to the factory: no sweat! Leave the field at 4.15pm: into Newark to unload and back in time for the milking.

Patrick Thurston (Pat Man to Alison, to distinguish him from Pat Dog, our Labrador / Red Setter bitch) was still extorting excessive rates for beet singling; the memory of Treyford was

obviously my 'Achilles Heel'. The advent of 'Prilled' sugar beet seed was just happening; sugar beet seeds are really a cluster of very small seeds which tend to grow together, making 'Singling' essential but with 'Prilled' seed, with over 90% single seeds appearing, the need for hand work was greatly reduced. Eventually Patrick moved on and went to work over the water at Holme...a small settlement of which only one survived the Great Plague by living in isolation in the church tower –food being brought and left outside; the rest of the village succumbed to the Death.

All Work and no Play?



Despite the ever increasing workload, there was more than enough opportunity for the occasional enjoyment 'off farm'. Being alongside the River Trent, it was natural that some water sports should be indulged in; a trip to Newark locks provided the answer. 'Nimrod' was acquired, a 10'6" clinker-built dinghy with centre-board and sail. A small outboard motor provided a bit of 'get up and go' when there was little wind and you were sailing backwards down-river to Cromwell locks!

A severe course in watermanship was required for the children; Audrey took them into the shallow part of the river, where there used to be a sheep-wash years ago, and dunked them under!

"This is what happens if you do not wear a life jacket... but you wouldn't come back up again"-a lesson never forgotten.

Fatalistic fishermen, under umbrellas, provided a useful source of income and also of some amusement;

"Why go fishing when it's raining?"

"To get away from the Wife!"

They were mainly miners or steel-workers from Sheffield.

Eventually a local sailing club started; Bill Ransome, Commodore, was normally a quiet, easy-going individual, ex-navy and working as an Insurance Broker. Put him in charge of a sailing boat and he turned into a veritable tyrant; making up his crew was fraught with trepidation; Audrey finally gave up trying to be his mate!After all she was meant to be mine. However, they were a jolly crowd, camping in the orchard and even going to Whist Drives.

Being a local service, the milkround was useful to our many customers. Not only was it a customer base, for selling milk, eggs, chickens, butter and cream, but also as an opportunity to become active in the locality.

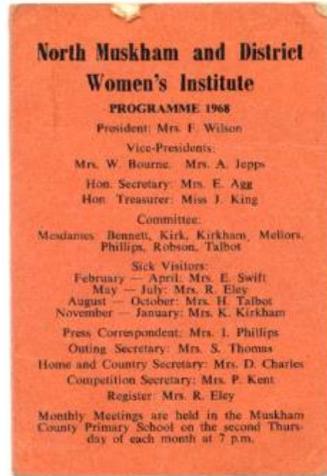
Audrey soon joined the W.I. and eventually became Secretary and President. Who can forget her Presidential 'Afternoon Tea Party' at the farm? I had finished the milking early, to join the many assembled ladies (in Hats!), but was distracted by the sound of 'Flute, Big Base Drum and Euphonium' coming from the Tennis Court (freshly harvested for the occasion); what on earth was this all about? No less than



the local Salvation Army Band - all a'blowing their hearts out like 'Billy-O'.

As they said in a current TV ad, "Time for a quick sharp Harp". Yours truly took a sharp exit and disappeared to Nottingham for the evening! (my memory is cloudy as to what happened, but a good time was had by one and all!)

Barbara Swannack, another stalwart of the WI, wrote, produced and directed an Annual Concert. The aspiring thespians congregated in the Chapel Yard hall, which reverberated to such stirring sagas as, 'The Wedding Photograph', (Flash bang wallop, what a picture! what a photograph !Stick it in your family al-**BUM!**. Tommy Steele, eat your heart out! Cinderella and other well known Pantomimes enabled normally respectable ladies to let their hair down (somewhere, there are recordings of some of the lyrics)



With the daily contact with the customers which the 'round' provided, (including delivering milk, bread, oven-ready chickens and even newspapers to out-lying farms and cottages and the occasional purchases required for them from the three (!) shops in North Muskham and the Post Office and Stores at South Muskham), other needs soon became apparent. Chiropody for the older house-bound and less active people was such a need. Audrey set up a weekly clinic at the Ferry Inn (Newcastle Arms). Appointments and transport arrangements were just an additional column in the Milk Book; No computer database, mailing lists or telephones - just daily contact by the village milk lady, enabled everything to be easily arranged with the minimum of hassle....

So successful was this service that, with the fledgling 'Package Holidays' just beginning, Audrey started a reservation list for

those who wished to fly to Paris for the day: ***Come Fly with Me!*** This was at a time when there were many people in the villages who had only travelled to Nottingham, and as for London - that was an adventure not lightly undertaken. So, as before, another column was added in the milk book; 2/6d. a week and your seat was secured in this very advanced system for Clarkson's Away day to Paris...A Free seat with every 10 bought, enabled us two to go.

An elderly Dakota flew us from Loughborough Airfield; a coach from Thomas's took 22 intrepid flyers for a trip of a lifetime. A five-pound (£5) note was all that could be exchanged for foreign currency, as there were strict controls on taking money out of the country; a daytrip Passport acquired for those who did not have a full one. How the assembled owners looked like Interpol's most wanted criminals! Barley sugar sweets enabled us to swallow our fear... and suddenly we were FLYING.

The day in Paris, Montmartre (flattering sketch of Audrey was done in charcoal) and other touristy sites filled our day; eating strange foods- snails? horse?- practising school French- "where is the plume of ma tante's chapeau?"

Clearing Customs with a handful of gifts, we were treated to a (1/4) bottle of Champagne on the flight home. A 'Grand Day Out', as Wallace would say, at a time when travel of any kind was thwarted by the practicalities of a country just developing after the War. Motorways had only just penetrated the Midlands, by-passes along the A1 were gradually being built to enable the journey time from Campton to the farm to be cut from 3 hours to a quick 90 minutes.

Such was the success of this first outing, another away-day was planned; this time to Copenhagen, no less. With the handiness of Thomas Coaches, villagers enjoyed many trips with the W.I., visiting many of the well known destinations, even taking tea with the Mayor of Nottingham. Having a regular service to the seaside enabled the family to exchange with their cousins at Broadstairs.

The tragic death of my nephew, Rupert, killed when the minibus, in which he was a passenger, was run off the road on the newly opened Grantham by-pass, was a saddening experience to everyone. Tachographs or 'Spy in the Cab' had not yet been introduced to coaches and heavy goods lorries; perhaps the tragedy might not have happened if the driver concerned was better regulated in his driving time.

An advantage of living on a farm was that the children were able to have ponies. Firstly Silver, then Bramble and later Melody who was joined in the winter months by Sooty, a Shetland Pony that used to give pony rides on the beach at Mablethorpe during the summer. Sooty was a real character who wandered loose around the farm each day but appeared inside the farmhouse kitchen every morning at coffee time!



Debbie and Alison with Bramble

Being in the centre of the village, we were fortunate to have a smooth grass field, 'Bell Field', which was used by the locals for football when the cows were not using it or a hay crop was being made. Bell Field was thought to be where the bells for the church were cast in-situ, to save on the travel risks and cost of haulage. In 1963, a very dry year, aerial photos clearly showed the round pits in which the bells were cast.

Although fun and games are normally danger-free, there was a scare when the local YFC were playing, stray cows having been moved from the pitch. An alarm was sounded. The cows had broken into a rich clover aftermath, growing well as a result of the newly installed Irrigation plant, causing them the familiar 'Blow' symptoms. The game was abandoned; "Keep 'em moving, moving!" - was the chant which John Wayne would have approved of as the prompt treatment saved the day and the

pocket.

Not to be outdone, Billy Bourne had his own Cricket field across the railway, complete with a pavilion. This was much sought after by visiting teams; we started bottling 1/3 pints of Orange Juice, an additional line to the school milk... just the job on languid summer days.

Being less controlled by the ever-present TV of today, the spare-time pursuits tended to be more leisurely; the taking of a tea basket to the hay or cornfield, recalled the measured pace of pre-wartime, when horses ruled the day. No Carter would allow the boss to interrupt his horses 'nosebag time' or 'Noggin'.

All Hands to the Baling – teatime

Such pleasurable times are few and far between today. Bigger fields and even bigger machines mean less 'down time', an euphemism for taking your flask and sandwiches and eating them on the go.

When horse-power was really horses, then meal-breaks were a necessity- nowadays the only thing controlling the work in hand is the size of the fuel tank.

"When you bring the tea, can you bring the trailer?"

The ever present timetable of Milking had an influence on all the working times. The ladies of the 'shed' always let you know if you had kept them waiting!

In the cool of an evening, after milking, it was almost a pleasure to stack the bales into sevens - bottom two on their sides so as to keep the strings off the ground, lest they rot, and then nos.3&4,5&6 crosswise and no.7 longways on top, to stop the

rain going straight down. Single-handed, one could stack 600 bales an hour, if the bale-sledge had left a decent row across the field; another additional bit of kit which enabled me to offer a better service in baling other farmers' hay and straw.

Automatic Bale Sledge

Part of the Farm lay well away from the riverside, and rose quite steeply up the hill towards Caunton and Norwell – not a lot of people know that there was a thriving Oil well production site near Caunton and Kelham Hills. The



The 'Nodding Donkeys' were the UK's first commercial production site; producing extremely high quality oil used in Rolls-Royce Merlin engines during the war – a trial bore on our Norwell Road field proved negative – if we owned the land what could we have done with the revenues? The field was abandoned in 1966 after producing some 6.5 million barrels of oil.

Men and Machines

Modern life is much taken up with mobility, meaning in most cases, Motor Vehicles.

A brief run-down, of some of the vehicles owned, produces a total of over 28 to date. This excludes two new tractors and a new Standard Atlas milk van. The old Triumph 350cc. side-valve motorcycle, HYY 166, was transferred to brother Roger when the Austin 10, CRO 163, was bought for the new family. He used it for rough-terrain cycling in the Welsh forests and other devilish countryside escapades.

The Austin came from a local plumber and coal-merchant and was our only means of transport until we took over a Morris 1000 van at North Muskham. Neither vehicle was of much comfort for a family of four, so along came a chance to buy cousin Wilfred's Humber Hawk, - MNN777 at the front, MMM777 on the rear - slight problem; Money..The Morris van was sold, and a couple of empty (barren) cows went to Winter Knight, born as the story goes on a 'Dark and Stormy - Winters Night'- who farmed at the

other end of the village, producing the necessary cash. With CRO taking over the daily milk delivery

The Humber was luxury; big enough to take us in comfort and handy as a tow car. A quick re-paint in black gave it the air of a Police Car; shades of Audrey and her father's Humber, chasing the Young Farmers! The improving A1 road to



Campton gave us the plenty of opportunity for a bit of 'Wellie'. A far cry from the first journeys of CRO which must have taken ages when Audrey set out on her first trip to Muskham.

All went well, until one day, driving along the newly completed Stamford bypass, the bonnet flew open; not very easy to see out! Again, a handy local farm sale, provided a bonnet and boot lid and a better set of tyres (only cross-ply at that time).

This Humber gave many years of service until one weekend on a visit by Audrey to Campton, the old girl blew up - the car not her. The ex-WD Commer engine, which had replaced the original worn-out engine, was not really man-enough for continued high speed, cast-iron pistons do not like high temperatures.

She returned, triumphantly, with her father's new-shape Hawk, 525CAR pale blue and very, very glamorous. It had all mod-cons; power brakes, 3 speed box and electric overdrive. What more could any one want?

On a trip down to London to meet Michael and family, I picked up an American hitchhiker; we covered the 125 miles from Newark Hospital to Buckingham Palace in just over two hours, arriving in time for the Changing of the Guard,

"Gee, some motor!"

No gear changing, just use the overdrive.

Audrey managed to do the 'Ton' on the Grantham Bypass - her enthusiasm for speed, first kindled on the Clophill Road at Campton and the Silverstone Racetrack was undiminished. Her

last car, a blue SAAB 900 really motored: almost as well as her beloved Daimler V8.

CRO (never called anything else) served us well; never ever failing to start in the mornings. However, constant stopping and starting meant a new 'short engine' and a new starter-ring were needed.

A quick replacement was necessary. The ring was sweated onto the fly-wheel in the old fashioned way of the wheelwright; heat the ring in the oven and cool the flywheel in the deepfreeze and 'Hey Presto' a snug fit which would never shift. With a new heart in her, CRO continued for a few more years before being pensioned - off (with the engine driving a generator and the body becoming a greenhouse in Bathley).

The Ford Prefect van, which replaced her, was a great improvement. More comfort but it did not like cold mornings, like its owner. The advertising legend, "You can whip our Cream but you can't beat our Milk" was sign-written on the doors, a reminder of the days at Hereford.

Eventually its days were numbered, as the then increasing 'round and the greater number of crates, meant that it could not carry enough. So another chat with Sid Milnes eventually produced a brand-new Standard Atlas van complete with side loading-door. Ideal as a stop – start delivery vehicle except that it did not like idling all day between houses = overheating engine (replaced)...front wheel assembly collapsed through metal fatigue (replaced) as farm tracks are not like town roads.....petrol tank replaced as intake pipe broke off inside tank!

Standard Atlas Van

Although delivered 'New', it had been built some many months before and had spent a long time in a field. Painted in sky-blue and with gold lettering, it was a good advert for the milkround which Audrey was developing along with her other customer benefits. However, mother



disapproved of me parking this "Trade" van outside **EdgeEnd** as it seemed to lower the tone of father's Brass Plate! Nigel thought it was 'SUPER'; much better than CRO, (which he had managed to drive into a gate- post, breaking the hub) especially when his form were collected in it for his birthday party; sitting on bales of straw.

"My Dad has a Jaguar, what's your Dad got, Nigel?"

"This is his!!"

"WOW!"

Eventually, the Standard had its sides cut out, as we were no longer doing the School Dinner round, to make it into a 'Float', It ended its days as a greengrocer's travelling shop in Newark.

Another Morris 1000 was rescued for £10, it had been used for servicing Slot Machines and One Arm Bandits in Sheffield, the front wings remoulded with a good bashing with a mallet on the lawn, (perhaps an ex-GPO van with front mudguards moulded in rubber would have been a better bet?) and repainted in Racing Green and Black. It too, started on the daily grind of the milkround. Over 1000 clutch and gear-changes every day, meant a yearly new clutch and gear box (between milkings). Sold for £10 to Bert Dobbs, who had taken over Frank's business when we gave the tenancy up = NIL depreciation.

Being in the village and part of it meant that everyday life was all around us - the Vicar, the Revd. Hilary Dunn, who came before Revd. Snow, gently reminded me that he did not often see me in church.

"Yes. I can come next



Sunday; but you would not have any milk for your Breakfast”

“Well, in that case I will say a Prayer for you”

The plot of land adjoining the Church (reserved for future Burial needs) provided some delightfully sweet, soft, hay for the calves which Audrey was a'busy rearing...

The odd Garden Paddock, roadside verges, all provided a source of extra feedstuffs for the increasing number of young stock, which were being raised to justify the future expansion into North Road Farm with, hopefully, its new parlour (again supplied by British Wagon). If I could reduce the time of each milking by about an hour then the repayments would equal out the monthly charges.

Expansion and Contraction

Like the majority of small farmers in the years between 1954 and 1970, we were getting bigger and, perhaps, better at what we were doing. The constant pressure of increasing costs - all things became relatively more expensive, including labour. Net returns never seemed to increase sufficiently to compensate farmers when they became retail customers. A.G. Street's dictum that Farmers were always likely to be losers; as they Sold wholesale and Bought Retail = unequal division!

The dairy herd was tending to outgrow its quarters at Trent Farm; the land taken at Davis' had added another 18 or so acres. Marsh grazing rights allowed the young heifers to spend their time away from the very restricted grazing at the farm. When the river was almost in drought, catching swimming calves in the river was a new sport! The loss of Mackley's Lane field to the new bungalows put general pressure on any grassland near to the cowshed and dairy; although the extra milk sold to the new customers was worth a lot more.

The awful summer and winter of '62, (when I fixed the crawler behind the combine to push it up the slippery hill and to restrain it on its downward bout, still remains as an example of the need to

'Do Something'); caused or enabled us to complete two harvests within twelve months. The disastrous drought of '63 followed and saw the installation of a Wright Rain Irrigation plant- using the Fordson County crawler perched on the bank to drive the pump, the pressures on the land were somewhat reduced. Sugar-beet drank water! Moving the spray lines was a back-breaking job, but essential to maintain a reasonable yield. The odd field watered on contract for Frank Swannack, helped to defray the costs.

The knowledge that Baguely's farm, North Road Farm, would eventually come to us, enabled expansion plans to be put into operation.

Audrey took over the evening milking - which she did for 18 months, before the new parlour was built at North Road Farm. The previous Tenant had died and, as promised, the Landlords incorporated North Road farm into Trent Farm's acreage. North Road farm had been built on land that was originally Trent Farm's to allow the Great North Road to be diverted from the village street. Progress in returning fields to the original holding.

We took over the rather run-down additional acres, in the spring: how to make the Rent on this extra land? We just decided that every piece of scrap iron, from corrugated iron sheets to bedsteads, which had been used as Stop Gaps, would be collected together with all the paper bags in which concentrates were supplied (these were baled up so as to reduce their volume) – eventually enough had been collected to take to Newark scrap yard = Half Year's Rent !

At this time, the long- awaited Newark Bypass had started to take shape, McGregor's concrete batching plant occupied the Nelson Lane field. While the extra sales of milk to the contractors were welcome, the loss of even two acres meant problems. Five or six acres were excavated 3' to provide the makings for the bridge; reinstatement was not easy. No end of concrete slabs, kerb stones, cables and all manner of general rubbish were uncovered! As part of the 'Disturbance Allowance', a seepage reservoir was dug out, sited with an eye for the future, near to

North Road Farm's fields. The rabbits did not like the upheaval one bit! Pumping also took place at Davis'; useful when the new land alongside it was due to become part of Trent Farm again.

Eventually, the additional land was ours; taken over in the Spring of 1967. The heifers, which Audrey had started on the bucket in the old battery-shed, were ready and in-calf for calving in the September. Would the new Dairy be ready? Would the new cattle yards and concrete be dry? Wait and see!

We had adopted a breeding policy of using Ayrshire bulls (AI) on the best Guernsey cows to produce a good crossbred animal capable of high butter fat and solids, with a modest appetite. Several heifers were bought from the Averham herd of Miller's, Royal Show winner and the leading Ayrshire breeder in the area. Audrey's good eye for 'quality' was respected by the Herdsman, some of his best were coming to us!

We had also gone to Beattock to buy in-calf heifers direct from a Scots breeder and these were due to arrive before Christmas. A walk around his traditional farmstead saw the remains of a railway siding which led up to his byre -

“Years ago we could have sent the cows direct to you, just like we did to Mr. Miller at Averham”.

(at that time we had a small field alongside the level crossing - known as the Railway Field, it was used for many years in the delivery of coal and the export of peas to the Nottingham and Leicester and Sheffield markets).

All systems seemed 'GO'.....Until the builder decided to go on honeymoon, delaying the building work. Another one eventually completed the conversions. A new parlour was in bits when we took on a new herdsman Brian; his first job was to build it up. The monthly cost, from British Wagon Co. was considerably less than the additional cost of milking more cows in the old cowshed.

All was ready for the transfer of the milking cows from Trent Farm, when Foot and Mouth restrictions put a stop to all movements. The heifers in Scotland stayed put, the breeder actually returning the cheque uncashed!

We continued to milk in the old cowshed, up in the six-stall end while the expanded pig herd was fighting for room in the lower end. To help pay for the extra cattle and expenses of the enlarged dairy, the pig herd had been scheduled to farrow at the end of September. There we were: with sows and litters, literally littering the place; they were all over the place. Multiple suckling took on a new meaning – sleepy, satisfied, sows did not really mind if they fed their own offspring: it was the scramble by their cousins which caused the havoc! The father had the time of his life with so many willing and eager consorts.

Nature has its own fixed programme of events; one was not able to say 'Hold on for a week or two!' Pleas were made to the Ministry of Agriculture to allow us to shift the milkers from Trent Farm to North Road Farm; a belated visit from them and they saw the problem. So, we moved some 20 cows, one by one in the single-horse trailer; they joined their 'dry' sisters, who had been in training in the art of parlour tricks.

By the time the move had taken place and the cows and heifers settled in, the rush was on to fill the churns. As a small peace-offering, the original builders had given us a substantial loading ramp for the churns; useful for the loading of machinery - 10/- from Brooks' each time a local farm implement was offloaded soon added up!. 20+ Churns a day, all full (not like those at Treyford), regularly stood shoulder to shoulder.

By this time sugar beet had been dropped in favour of extra cereals and leys. A simplified rotation was now in place; 60 cows needed 3 acres apiece; one for grain, one for food conservation (hay) and one for grazing = Professor Boutflour's ideal balanced farm economy (Remembered something from college!).

The farm was settling down into a period of consolidation. The 'round' was almost at its peak at 85-90 gallons a day plus eggs, butter and cream; more than enough for Audrey. The arable side of the farm (160 Acres had been gradually increased by land adjacent to Bagueley's, by the transfer of some 30+ acres from a

farmer in Bathley) and the increased pigs was sufficient for me, while 65 cows in milk and all the feeding for their offspring was enough for Brian.

In-between times, there was always the Mill to keep going, providing the feed for cows and pigs and other smallholders in the village. This balance of effort had just a little slack in it, to enable breaks to be taken as and when.

All hands were needed for hay and cereal harvest, but normally things went well. In effect I worked on average every other day, 182 days per year - (1 acre =1 man-day)

All the basic rations were milled or rolled in the feed barn at Trent Farm, being taken as required to the Dairy; bottled milk was delivered to the farm stand (an ex-wartime Morrison table shelter) by Lincoln and Carlton Dairies who also collected the churn milk from North Road farm.

The Fordson Major tractors were eventually re-engined - Take out the crawler's engine, up to Sid Milnes for a thorough re-conditioning, then replace the engine of the first new Major and repeat, no one ever checked the engine numbers against the chassis numbers.

A new 4WD Zetor became a very handy tractor for all top-ground work.

NWJ on-board Zetor 344

Nigel became quite proficient in ploughing, when he came home from Oakham School. The new farmhand, Charlie, and he had many a talk about conditions in school and jail - not so many differences apparently. Charlie, who had spent quite some time 'inside' had it for Free, while Nigel was paid by me to



endure the rigours of a boarding school. It is said that this type of regime will make a Man of you - whether you like it or not! So what was the problem? In a nutshell, the future!



By the time the 250 gallon tank had been installed and actually filled to the brim, we were milking a regular 65 cows, the same number as were milked in the whole of the parish in 1957 (a check on the 4th June, National Census Day for Farming revealed).

The aim of a having a £1000 Milk Cheque each month, became a reality. Not one other farmer in North Muskham had milking cows; a trend mirrored all over the country, as small farms went out of milk. Yet the profit remained static; more cows, more land, more production did not produce more income for the growing family.

School fees were increasing and so were general living costs. Anno Domini was becoming evident; nearly 39 years of age, it was time for a serious re-appraisal of the future. Would there ever come a time when we could ease off? Would tenancy succession be possible; at that time a tenancy died with the tenant (come to think of it we never did get round to signing the Tenancy Agreement!).

So Audrey and I agreed to a 'planning meeting'. One Sunday afternoon we settled down to list the options. A sheet of paper was headed 'For' and 'Against' staying at Trent Farm. Several thoughts were written down, in no particular order. This was going to be a turning-point for our Future...

CONSIDERATIONS:

- The possibility of owning our own farm had been previously considered - several were for sale locally. The real price of land was increasing too fast and the capital required would be too much, even with help
- The children were settled in to school. Would any of them be interested in Agriculture? Would we ever trade as A.W.Jepps & Son?
(Proof reader's note: Or perhaps Jepps & Daughter?)
- We had wanted to farm and our hopes were up again but would more turnover = less profit?
- Would we be able to buy a house, free of debt and eventually able to retire?

FOR STAYING

- Our plans for the farm were nearly complete, the two farms were well integrated, an easier routine established and we were doing what we had set out to do - farm on our own and had done so for thirteen years plus three years in partnership.
- By continuing we would be well placed to help the children with their future careers, perhaps University?
- They had put down roots and were generally happy with the farming life.
- We had put down 'roots', and the farm had a reasonable reputation in the area.

- The future was a very long time away; any major decisions could be put off until nearer retirement age.
- Ex-farmers were generally unemployable; always used to doing their own 'thing' nobody told them what to do etc. etc.

AGAINST

- The Rent was due to be hiked yet again; Could we transfer or sell? Several farms were for sale locally but the capital required would be too much, even with help
- We had put down 'roots', and the farm had a reasonable reputation in the area but what would our future be in, say, ten years or twenty?
- Could we ever amass sufficient capital through farming to buy a house and retire on the income from it?
- Would the relative profitability of farming be maintained or would increasing costs always tend to reduce the net income?
- Succession of Tenancy, would it ever be possible to include the children in the farm business?

A period of quiet reflection ensued; the old adage 'Quit while you are ahead' became more and more to the fore.

So just before Christmas 1969, aged 39, we contacted the Landlords to seek their permission to transfer the Tenancy, on a Lock, Stock and Barrel basis, to a suitable newcomer. Would they agree?

The Agent called in January;

"I hear you wish to give up the Tenancy. Why?"

One main reason will be enough; the proposed Rent increase is iniquitous. Just because the adjacent land has Planning Permission for Gravel extraction, does not make this very scattered farm worth any more in production terms. We cannot make three times the Rent as Income

"Will you agree to a transfer of Tenancy, with effect Lady Day?"

"Yes - subject to the usual conditions".

The Die was cast. Plans were put into effect to advertise the tenancy transfer.

Several local farmers and one or two from afar, came to look over the farm with a view to taking it over as a going concern. A short list was drawn up; Woodcocks of London, who had 'put' us into the farm in 1957 and negotiated the 'Ingoing', valued all the live and deadstock, goodwill and Tenant Right.

We looked set to clear all outstanding debts, Bank overdraft and merchants bills, to leave a reasonable capital sum for The Future. As before, the change-over would be March 25th.

What kind of a job would I be doing? A past farmer could really be considered unemployable.

- Agricultural Training Board? Possible, but not probable, as we had suffered in the past in paying the Training Board Levy, or not; (the Government had its own way by deducting the cost from the Lime Subsidy-a stroke of financial wheeler-dealership of which Arthur Daley would have been proud !)
- Selling direct to Farmers? Bibby's had more or less moved out of the district ...so what about Silcocks? Peter Hayman seemed to be doing well (at my expense - or so I thought!) However, getting paid would surely be as problematic as we had experienced finding the cash.....not really what I would enjoy.
- Fertilizers and Machinery likewise... NO.

Audrey, ever resourceful, said

"What about Cattle Societies?"

"Yes!"

So an application to the British Friesian Cattle Society was sent off. A call to Graham and Dimple Castel at Little Standards Hill Farm, Battle, (where William the Conqueror set up his Standard at the end of the first day of the Invasion 1066) An intensive visit to their farm saw me learning the finer points of the Black & White Breed, so different to the Guernseys and Ayrshires. Their cattle were descended from the Wrest Park herd at Silsoe. Good, strong high-yielders, but oh, so hungry animals. A cold wet afternoon in Hertfordshire, for a practical test for cattle selection, indicated that I did not have the 'eye' for such rangy beasts, not

like Audrey.

Meanwhile an exploratory letter to the N.F.U., in London, produced a helpful response with the promise of details of future Appointments to be forwarded as the occasion arose. But why stay in Agriculture? After all, I had originally set out to use Mathematics, Mechanics and Physics as a basis for University. An approach to Atcost, who had erected the new cattle sheds at North Road Farm, was suggested. Yes - but not anywhere to live!

Country Land Owners gave me a series of Interviews, the York area was pleasing but the Income needed some subsidy-
“Private Income, Mr. Jepps?”

Another non-starter.

Nothing daunted, I set off to Nottingham for an interview with Abbey Life. At my time of life (!) such practical aspects of interview technique needed honing-up a bit, as the last interview was for the Tenancy of Trent Farm... more daunting than asking Audrey's father for her hand in marriage. From Nottingham to Cambridge, a series of interviews let me brush up on my skills. I even had a preliminary interview with the N.F.U. for Leicester. A favourable reply from a minor Public School for a Bursar's position gave continuing hope. Boodle's career options for me had been either- a) Bishop or b) Schoolmaster!

Everything seemed to be going our way with the transfer of Tenancy which would see the resolution of our financial worries and the prospect of starting in a new direction-

Could anything go wrong? You bet!!

Just two weeks before Lady Day, we were advised that the Landlords had received an exceptional offer from our neighbours, the Bowers, to buy Trent Farm, the land abutting onto the village street, and the Toll Bar fields alongside the North Road (now upgraded to a dual-carriage way as part of the improvements of

the old A1 on part of which Sid Milnes had already built a new Garage with the Little Chef (No.11) cafe alongside.

The Landlords would be inviting Tenders for the remaining land and would not allow the transfer of the Tenancy, having had an offer from the farmer, adjacent but on the other side of the Railway to North Road Farm. Despite the original plans for an orderly 'Handover' of the Tenancy, the landlords, in their wisdom, had accepted the offer.

There would be NO Transfer of Tenancy – we would be out!

Having burnt our bridges, there was only one thing to do – have a Farm Sale - set for Thursday April 16th 1970. Woodcocks, who had just completed the Valuations for the transfer now had to organise a Farm Sale within just four weeks.

Mr. Woodcock duly arrived and began the 'Lotting' of all the Farm deadstock while Audrey had the unenviable task of detailing all the Pedigrees of the Cattle for the Catalogue – "Guernsey Cow (aged, suckling three calves, to be sold as one lot)" "Sarah 2nd. calving 31.1.70 ;1858lbs.@ 3.83 Bf. giving 44lbs.daily and Dam to Lots 49 and 55." indicated the potential of the 56 lots on offer. The machinery, tractors and all the paraphernalia of farming were laid out in suitable Lots in the field; a reminder of a dream which we had pursued.

From Woodcock's Sale Particulars: *'The Trent Herd was established in 1966, winning 2nd. place in the East Midlands Ayrshire Quality Milk Competition, with a Calving Index of 386 days, a true yield of 823 gallons (3736 ltrs) Margin over Concentrates of £139.11.6 a head. All yields confirmed by M.M.B. and N.M. R.*

We agreed to the Lincolnshire system of Commission - the Vendor paying the Auctioneer's selling commission – unlike the Nottinghamshire, where the Buyer paid the Premium on top of the Hammer Price.

PLEASE BRING THIS CATALOGUE TO THE SALE

By direction of Mr. A. W. Jepps (Quitting)

**NORTH ROAD FARM,
NORTH MUSKHAM, NEWARK**

Adjoining the A.1 Newark by-pass and the Lord Nelson Public House
at North Muskham

DISPERSAL SALE

58 AYRSHIRE CATTLE

including

29 young Cows and Heifers in Milk, 9 Served Heifers, and
20 Yearlings and Calves. (Milk Recorded and in grand condition.)

IMPLEMENTS and MACHINERY

including

1967 (Sept.) Zetor 3045, 4-wheel Drive Tractor, 1956 Fordson County Crawler Tractor, 1956 and 1955 Fordson Major Diesel Tractors, 1 with nearly new Fore-loader, Massey 780 Tanker Combine Harvester, Allis-Chalmers Model 200 Pick-up Baler, Bale Sledge and Loader, Bamlett PTO Mower, Nicholson PTO Hay Tedder, Blanch-Lely Spider-wheel Hay Tedder, Lister-Blackstone Sack and Bale Loader, Crop Sprayer, 15-row Massey Harris Combine Drill, 5-row Webb Precision Drill, Ferguson 3-furrow Bar Point Plough, Stanhay Sugar Beet Harvester, Mounted Ferguson Disc Harrows and Spring tine Harrows, Ransome Ploughs and Cultivators, Ferguson Trailer, Dung Spreaders, Irrigation Pump, Piping and equipment, Slurry Pump and engine on Trolley, Trailers, Car Trailer for Cow or Horse, Steerage Hoe, 30/40-ton Kongskilde Grain Drying and Storage Silo, Kongskilde Heater Blower and Tubing, Martin-Markham Hammer Mill and 10-cwt. Mixer, Bamford Rolling Mill, 2 Mayrath Augers, Hand Tools and miscellaneous items, in all some 200 lots

which

WOODCOCKS

have been favoured with instructions to sell by Auction on the premises on

THURSDAY, APRIL 16th, 1970
Commencing with the Dead Stock at 12 noon.

Cattle about 2 p.m.

Usual Conditions of Sale. No goods to be removed until paid for.
(Licensed Refreshments available on the Premises)

Auctioneers Offices:

30 ST. GEORGE STREET, LONDON, W1R 0LH

Telephone 01-629 5411

Farm—Newark 3221

Thursday, April 16th.1970 dawned as usual. Brian, who had volunteered to come over from Lincoln, where he was Head Herdsman, was on hand to milk the cows and prepare them for Sale, (a melancholy job).

The day saw a good turnout of Farmers from near and far, who spent freely; the machinery made sums in excess of the Reserves.

Mr. Miller's Herdsman attended and bid freely; his enthusiasm to 'Buy-Back' his own homebred cattle made the Sale go with a swing! and he bought back all of 'his' cattle, thus putting in a bench mark.

"Gentlemen, Lot... Good solid animal. What am I offered?"

"50 guineas, thank you Mr.Miller!"

His influence helped to raise the sale average to £100 for all the 55 lots in the Catalogue as well as the calf at foot!

Deadstock showed a reasonable price overall. Tractors drove away; cattle lorries loaded at the ramp and silence began to reign. In the Farmhouse the clerks were making out the cheques for those who could only just sign their names, a tallying up.

Next day, the enormity of the decision to give up the farm, came home to us. Awake at the usual time for the milkround, not a sound of any animal except Pat Dog.

Trent Farm was DEAD.

Not an animal,

Not a sound was heard nor animal note.

Nothing moved.

What had we done?

Given up a way of life, which was what we had wanted way back 16 years ago.

What of the Future?

Not a lot actually.

No job or Career in the offing and a pressing need to leave the Farmhouse and find another place to live and an income to

support the family.

Despite what the Landlords wanted, we would only leave when WE were good and ready and not before. Our sense of outrage with the Landlords in their breaking of an agreed undertaking was rankling in our minds.

Cheer Up! We had the milkround, which we had forward sold to when we would actually leave North Muskham. It provided us with sufficient income to carry on while Job hunting.

The final balance of the farm sale, less dilapidations, countered by tenants' improvements, would take some time to come through.

This was the time to enjoy as far as possible, the reduced workload, enabling us to take a few days away while job-seeking in different parts of the country. (No Jobseekers Allowances in those days!).

Deborah's mare, Melody had been pronounced 'Not in Foal' by our local vet, just before the Farm sale. So it was sold to a neighbouring farmer at Bathley; no sooner at her new stable she promptly foaled a smashing colt, 'Marcus'. I rather wish I hadn't settled the vet's account! John M had a really smashing wheeze in compiling his attendance timings - just let loose a dashing Labrador to run wild over the farm and who knows?, it will be HOURS before the mutt is rounded up and away!

From the time following the farm sale and the necessary tidying up, I had helped out Bert Dobbs, one of the local Contractors on an 'As and When' basis; allowing me the flexibility and the CASH to survive while the uncertainty of the future was being formulated. Attending interviews, having run round the Milkround early leaving a full day to travel to such places as Cambridge, York, Nottingham, Elkstone, Market Harborough and Lincoln, to name but a few, all the time trying to improve my 'Rating' as a Candidate for such diverse occupations as Cattle recorder, The Foresters, Abbey Life Agent, Atcost Buildings, (hoping to utilise

my ability in mechanics and engineering); CLA, and the NFU Secretaries for Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire; all saw a slight improvement in Candidate ranking.

Then three NFU Secretaryship situations were advertised together - Isle of Thanet, Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire, and two in Shropshire; Wem, Prees and Ellesmere, and Ludlow, South Shropshire.

A preliminary trip to Ludlow on August Bank Holiday Monday, (at the beginning, not at the end of the month), saw us looking over the Town and surrounding countryside. Wem with Prees and Ellesmere, had slightly more income while Ludlow had the better School. Solomon's judgement indeed. Better see how the interviews go.

A crowded Executive Meeting, all the worthy farmers in the County ensured that the proceedings would be traumatic. Absolutely Terrifying! And that was before Questions began.

"What is your position on Fox Hunting?"

Careful how you go, this could be the \$64,000 question.

"I allowed and welcomed the local Hunt onto our farm. My Wife was 'Blooded' when she was seventeen and the Children rode to Hounds - but my own belief is that if the Hunts were any good, then they would have got rid of the foxes years ago".

UPROAR!!!

A fierce debate ensued between the Executive members; Order was finally restored by the admirably named County Secretary, Sam Badger.

"When can you start?"

Our future appeared to be on track again: a turn for the better or no? Only time would tell.

Never mind, we had set out to farm and we had achieved some success. The next chapter would be different, if not equally as exciting. We would need a much bigger furniture van!

As most families had done, we had accumulated an increased inventory; what was originally adequate for the two newly-weds was patently increased by the needs of three children; secondary schooling was an increasing financial burden. Nigel was about to enter sixth-form while Debbie was into the GCE programme and Alison was doing well at Muskham School. Any move of the parents would also influence their future career prospects to varying degrees.

Meanwhile back to Audrey, who had waited so patiently for the news that we would be moving as soon as possible, to start on 1st. September - in fourteen day's time. From a five-bedroom farmhouse to a 2 bedroom flat over the shop (Office) in one easy move.

What had I let us into?