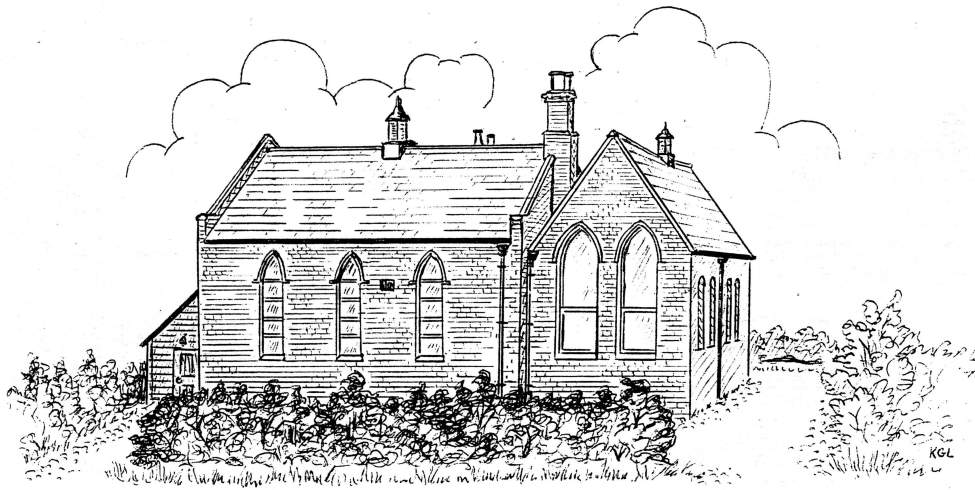


## HOW IT WAS

It was Friday 21st October 1988 from Mum's retirement bungalow at 41, the Avenue, Blunham Rd, Pat (my sister) and I went out for a drive to Sherehatch Wood. We were paying a visit to the riding where our Dad's ashes were scattered in 1977. A lovely tranquil spot that Pat was hoping to enhance by sowing a few seeds of the Colorado State Flower – The Columbine. It was her last opportunity before returning to Denver USA the next day.

The sun shone on this beautiful afternoon. As we drove towards Moggerhanger, my thoughts turned back the clock to a Moggerhanger as it was from about 1935 onwards, - before the changes that we see today, and the likes, which Mum and Dad knew.

We drove up the hill from Blunham, through Charlton with Moggerhanger on the hillcrest ahead. A slight dip in the landscape took us by Moggerhanger Village Hall on our left. Its flat roof had recently been converted to an angled roof. I saw it as it used to be – the old school that had served many years as an active village hall.



THE VILLAGE HALL (THE OLD SCHOOL MOGGERHANGER)

The two old classrooms were used for whist drives, a dance hall all the usual community functions. The old teachers room served as a kitchen. It was here that many a soiree was held and many a tanner hop danced to. No discos then, only a lively local band of village lads – Clifford (Puff) Watts on the piano, Billy Wilsher on the fiddle with his right foot thumping out impeccable 'Victor Sylvester' style timing, Doug Dean on the drums, sticks twirling and symbols crashing. It would have even made Gene Crouper envious. My word how they set your feet tapping and then after God Save the King one had to find the last of one's energy for the uphill trek back to the village.

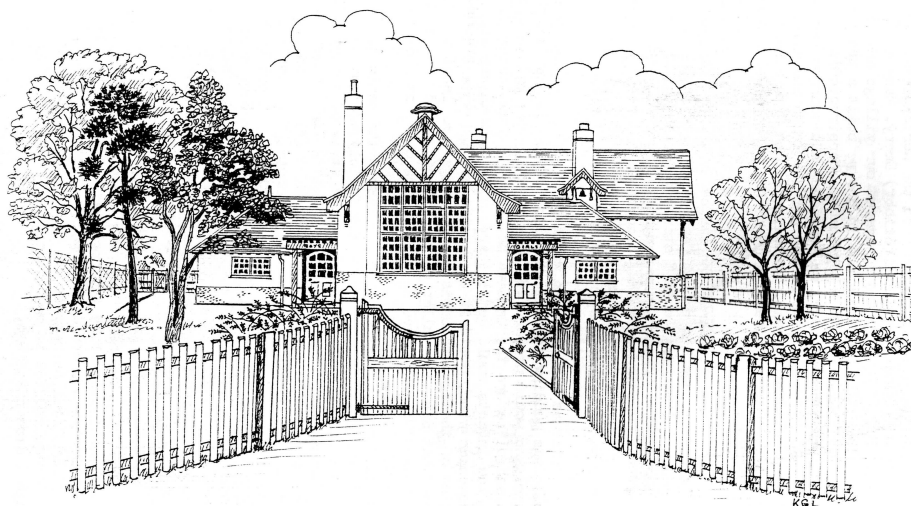
Another pianist entertainer at various villager hall social functions was a gentleman who lived in Hatch by the name of Dai Edwards, a veteran of the First World War. In battle he suffered shell shock and was blinded yet managed to entertain the others at the piano. He would walk from Hatch tip, tapping his way along Budna and St John's Road guided by his faithful black Labrador dog. His pianist prowess at tinkling those ivory keys was a credit to a blind veteran. Across the road from the village hall were the allotments. Dan had the next one to Harry Watt's plot. Many a crop was grown there to grace our table and in my own small way I helped out hoeing, picking peas or beans and picking up potatoes. It was quite a sight to see Dad pushing his bike loaded down with 2-hundredweight sacks of spuds – one sack balanced through the frame and one lodged between the saddle and the handlebars. Lord knows how many journeys he made to bring home that harvest. Dad would then get a truss of straw from

Matthews Farm to insulate the potato clamp that he would construct in the back garden. Inside the clamp he would store his potato crop through the winter months.

A little further on and on the left hand side a single-track road leads to a farmhouse in open farmland. Next to the farm buildings there was a large old triangular shaped orchard. This was an open invitation to go scrumping – when in season. But, once caught, twice shy. Continuing up the hill to the village proper we came to the council houses round the crescent. My sister Jill and Terry now live there. No road or houses were there in those early days, just a ditch by the side of the road and a steepish clay bank overgrown with Ash and other hedgerow bushes including some wild plum saplings. On the other side of the road a spinney protects the row of council houses from the north winds. In one of these houses lived my old school mate (Stibby) Emery. Many a time we spent together touring the highways and byways of the village and the surrounding countryside, climbing trees. In one of those trees we built a tree house. Once the spinney at the bottom of Sandy Road we constructed a hut, which we graced with a concrete floor. We had found a discarded bag partly filled with crumbly cement power. We sorted out the lumps and mixed the power with sand from a roadside heap. The water we got from a handy ditch and we had great fun mixing and spreading it with our hands. I wonder if that floor is still there?

### EARLY DAYS AT SCHOOL

Opposite the council houses stands the impressive new village school where we were taught the three R's, parrot fashion. There were no computers in those days. At first when I started school there was an elderly lady teacher, a Miss Chapman, who taught the infants. My sisters told me that Miss Chapman wore long bloomers that extended below her knees and these had a pocket in for her hanky. They thought it was hilarious. Miss Chapman remained a spinster after her fiancé was killed in the First World War



MOGGERHANGER SCHOOL.

Just before Christmas Miss Chapman would get all the infants to bring to school, various Xmas pudding ingredients which she would then take home with her. There she would prepare and cook a yummy Xmas pudding. On the last day of school before the festive holiday she would bring in the pudding and all the infants would get a share. Miss Chapman was also noted for her homemade wine. Could it be I wonder, that just a little was used in the mixing of those tasty Christmas puddings? At least all the infants went home that day with smiles on their faces. That could be the reason why Miss Chapman urged us all to lick our plates clean so that we didn't waste a drop!

Miss Markham was the headmistress and she taught the seniors. She was very keen for all her pupils to write neatly and legibly when using the pen and ink. We were encouraged to use the copperplate style of script. "Now children," Miss Markham would say, "Don't forget, it's light on the up-strokes and heavy on the down strokes." Her examples written on the black board couldn't help but to encourage our efforts. How sad it is that the ballpoint pen was ever invented. It has taken all the skill out of our handwriting, - the art has gone – no blobs to blot, just incomprehensible scribble. Darts could be made out of the old nibs, not so with a ballpoint. The points could be broken off leaving the two sharp side barbs. The curved end would then be careful split between the door and the doorframe; a paper flight could then be inserted in the split. Woe betides anyone caught throwing them!

During the war an influx of evacuees from London were billeted here. Roy, Terrance and Beryl were just a few of them. In all about 1,500,000 were evacuated from all the major cities and dispersed to various parts of the countryside. At the peak of the Battle of Britain, London had 57 night of non-stop bombing and in December 1940 over 12,000 fires were started – London's greatest fire since 1666. Also during the war 38,000,000 gas masks were issued out to the whole population.

Initially they were carried about with us wherever we went. They were snugly packed inside cardboard boxes about 7 inches square by about 5 inches deep with a carrying cord. The ones for the toddlers were called Mickey Mouse gas masks and were colourful red and blue. They were produced in this fanciful fashion to encourage the youngsters that it was all in good fun to wear them when, and if the need arose.

Those extra pupils (evacuees) put an extra strain on the existing staff and so a teacher was also sent from London with them. That teacher was a Miss Meredith Church. At 24 years she was much younger than the other teachers and she added a refreshing sparkle to the senior pupils during those wartime restrictions, especially when she would sit cross-legged on the corner of her desk. Miss Church was billeted with a Mr and Mrs Hales in the council house across the road from the school. She wasn't too keen on their outside toilet as the elderly Mr Hales wasn't always too particular. Their son was an insurance salesman and would call round and collect your penny-a-week contribution, - no such coinage now. It was worth then 1/240th of a pound.

Miss Church soon had girls knitting mittens and balaclavas for the forces. She also got my sister to knit some cami-knickers for her. They took my sister quite a time to knit and one could gauge the time taken by the degree of discolouration on the earlier parts as the garment slowly grew. In my liking for drawing and painting I was called upon to copy a picture of a particular scene of some rocks by the seashore that Miss Church was fond of. Later on she had it framed. With a surprise visit to the school after almost 50 years Mrs Rowe sought my sister Jill and gave her a package. She said "Give this to your brother Keith – I don't want it thrown away when I'm gone" It was the painting I had done all those years ago!

At the back of the school and beyond the playground stood a row of brick-built toilets (bucket type) and on the other side was the school allotment. During the war, some time was given to growing food for Britain in the 'dig for victory' campaign. The block of toilets and the playground was divided into two, the girls and infants on the south side and the boys to the north side. The only time that the boys were allowed in the girls' playground was during the quite frequent country dancing lessons. A partner of mine was usually Daphne Hall. Most of the boys were not averse to those lessons. In the winter months the boys were given the consent to water part of their playground that was adjacent to the partition fence that was shaded from the winter sun. Prayers for a frost were greeted with shrills of delight when answered. Playtime never went faster than when we were sliding down that sheet of ice.

When it snowed showers of snowballs would fly over the partition fence into the girls' playground until we were admonished by one of the teachers.

When Miss Smith was teaching at our school in those wartime years, she and her fiancé were married. He was a sergeant in the parachute regiment and was in action during the D-day landings in France. We then had to get accustomed to calling her Mrs Rowe.

One day Mrs Rowe was casually watching the girls playing ball in the playground. From the classroom window she saw the ball bounce over the fence at the bottom. Knowing the gate was locked and the fence was high, she thought, "That's the end of the game". However, moments later she glanced through the window again and saw that the girls were continuing their game with the ball. This intrigued her because she was sure that the fence was too high for the girls to climb and even harder getting back from the other side. Feeling sure that the ball would soon sail over the fence again, she kept watch to see just how it would be retrieved. Patience was rewarded when over the fence went the ball again, sure enough, moments later back came the ball and play continued. No one had climbed over the fence and Mrs Rowe was sure there was no one working on the other side, so how did the ball get back? The only other thing she had seen was Noreen (Wink) Dawson visit the toilet after the ball had gone over the fence and then return again when it was back in play. The next day Mrs Rowe kept a discrete watch again, this time from the top end of the playground.

It was almost the end of playtime before the ball went over the fence. Sure enough, Wink headed for the toilets closely followed by Mrs Rowe. She was in time to see Wink coming back up through the hole in the box-shaped wooden seat. Wink had found a way of pushing the bucket to one side and opening the flap at the back of the toilets and bringing back the ball. That unsavoury method was barred from then on and the flaps were secured.

The boys' cloakroom was on the left side of the school and was over shadowed by two large poplar trees and one Scots pine. Only the Scots pine now remains. The girls and infants cloakroom was on the right side of the school and on that side stood a clump of two or three white flowering cherry trees. Only the occasional mini-cherry would ripen and they were bitter – except for the birds.

On the right hand side of the flower and rose bordered drive that led from the road to the school there was a plot of land that was cultivated by Mr Whiteman. He and his wife were the school caretakers and for a while I would help Mrs Whiteman (especially on Friday evenings) with the sweeping, scrubbing and desk polishing to make the school spic and span for the next week. In the winter I would fill the scuttles with coke for the all-night burner. When required, I would clean out the clinkers from the bottom of the stove. The coke was kept in a brick barn behind a small orchard on the left side of the school. For those that liked hot milk the half pint bottles were heated around the hot stove.

In the orchard there were apples, plums and pears. Often I helped Mr Whiteman pick the fruit from these trees and I was allowed to take a few samples home. The gathered fruit was carefully taken to be stored on suitable racks in a barn built into the back of the Whiteman's council house, which was conveniently opposite the school gates. The aroma from the fruit when one opened the door was, to say the least, mouth watering. The stock had to be checked and turned regularly because one mouldy fruit could soon spoil the lot.

Mr Whiteman performed many gardening, handyman and funeral tasks in several local areas. Blunham cemetery and churchyard were cared for, Moggerhanger churchyard was also kept in apple-pie order and grave digging was carried out in both villages. At Sandy, Doctor Marshal's cars, garden and orchard were all kept clean and tidy and on Saturday mornings I was employed to help out where and when needed. Mr Whiteman was also adept at making the useful besom from beech twigs and he had a rack on which to make them. He used the



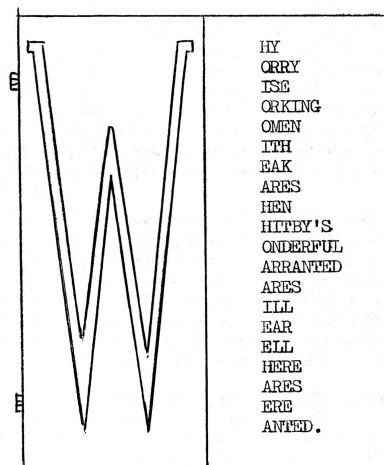
Spanish windlass method to tighten the bundle of twigs then split a hazel strap which was wound round the end of the bundle in two places about four inches apart. Mr Whiteman's sedate, tall moustache was most notable when he rode his bike as he went about his business at his usual leisurely pace.



BLUNHAM ROAD.

Regular as clockwork – as indeed most people and things seemed to be, he would come running out of school on certain days when Mr Whitby's Trojan van could be seen parked outside the council houses. Very patriotic was Mr Whitby because he had his van painted red, white and blue. The van had a headboard mounted over the top of the cab in the centre of which was secured a working alarm clock. Also on this board were slots to allow the day and the date to be displayed. Mr Whitby sold many useful things to the housewives on his rounds from Zebro grate polish to elastic and from pins to paraffin. He also had a zinc-plated tank that shone like chrome.

This was mounted at the back of his van and filled with his supply of paraffin. There were various zinc-plated measuring cups hanging in a row. There was something for everyone. If he had not got it he would bring it next time he called. He was only too willing to oblige. One outstanding feature of his forceful salesmanship was displayed on the length of both rear doors of his van. It was his own unique personalised prose to advertise his wares. It was ages before I was able to memorise the Whitby logo shown below.

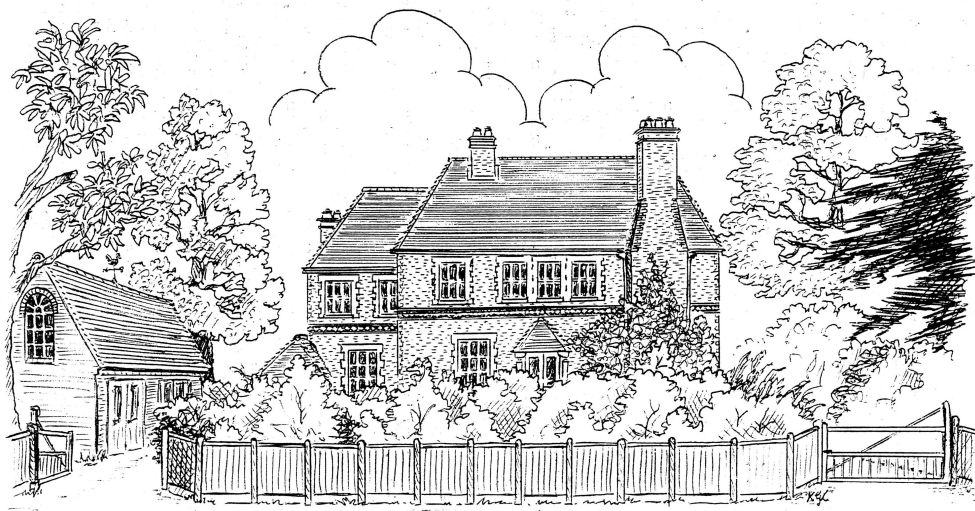


## BEYOND THE SCHOOL

Not far up the road from the school by the end of the row of houses there was a short lane that led to a small thatched cottage where the Wilshers lived. Billy the impeccable fiddler in the local band lived there. He had a brother, Ted who had acquired the nickname 'Flem'. Where he got that name from I never knew. It is strange how some nicknames evolve. Take, for instance, young Mick Craft who lived in the Bedford Road. He was called 'Worm' until one day it transpired he had swallowed a sixpence and a calamity ensued. The doctor was called and he told not to worry but to make a regular check on Mick's motion. Hopefully they would be able to retrieve the coin! Duly the coin came back into circulation so to speak. Then the nickname 'sixpence' remained with those in the know - nod, nod, wink, wink!

The opposite side of the road to the lane leading to the Wilshires' cottage stands the imposing building of The Vicarage. It is now in private hands and is a vicarage no more. The front of the vicarage was discreetly hidden from view of the road by an overlap slatted fence and high shrubs. There were two gates at each end of the fence and both wide enough to accept entry of a car. These gates were linked by a crescent shaped drive that visitors to the main entrance hall obscured from view of the road. The entrance now is in direct line to the front door.

The Reverend Davies was in residence in those days. He had two cars, which were kept in the old stables across the yard to the left of the house. I only ever recall seeing just one of them being in daily use. The other was a Riley with a dickey seat at the back and used on Sundays. A large horse chestnut tree stood between the old stables and the road and a path led into the vegetable garden, which Mr Whiteman also tended. Adjacent to the fence enclosing the garden from the road was a nice bush of Filbert nuts – nice and they were tasty too!



THE VICARAGE.

Page 11

The garden between the stables and the school had paths that were edged with twisted rope like tiles. There was an abundance of fruit trees growing in the garden including one pear tree that was overhung with the large hawthorn hedge on Gurneys' meadow side. It was not often that the fruit on that side of the tree managed to reach maturity and the holes in the hedge became a means of access for the more adventurous explorer. At the back of the vicarage there was a neat flower bordered lawn with an iron railing fence. The view from the lawn looked across the lawn beyond Gurneys' meadow to Sandy and the sand hills about 2 miles away.

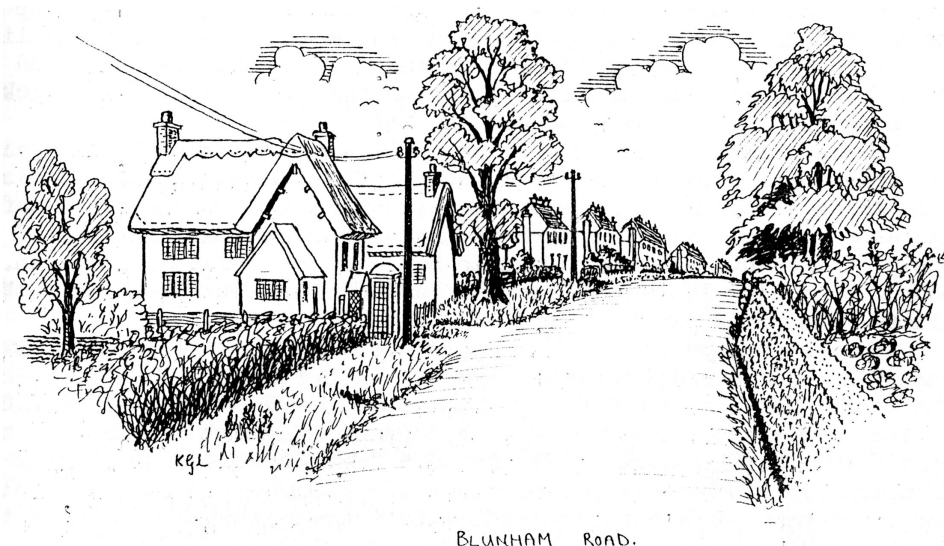
Next to the vicarage stands St John's Church. As with most churches it shrugs off all changes. Saint John the Evangelist was erected at the expense of the late Mrs Dawkins at a memorial to her husband The Rev E.H. Dawkins who died in 1859. He was buried in the chancel. The church was consecrated on July 31st 1861. There are memorial windows to Lieutenant Col Thornton and Jeremiah Titmas, the first Parish Clerk. The church register dates from 1861. The heating for the church was positioned half way along the north side of the chancel and was a large coke-filled stove. Sunday school lessons were held round it in the winter and the coke was kept in a grass-covered bunker on the meadow-side of the churchyard wall. It was entered by going down some steps through a door let into the wall on the inside of the churchyard. The coke was replenished through a metal cover in the top of the bunker. Sometimes the top of the bunker was used as an effective podium when opening fetes and other such occasions in Gurneys' meadow. The meadow eventually became the village playing field after the war. When the Rev Davies retired The Rev Phoenix followed him. He was of much smaller stature than his predecessor however he became a very popular gentleman and was liked by all. The ringing of the single church bell brought the faithful to Sunday morning and evening services. George Jacobs played the organ and I was a choirboy. On occasions I was called on to pump the organ bellows in the vestry. The Rev Davies and Mr Bull, a lay preacher from Harrowden Rd, Bedford alternately conducted the services. Mr Bull either cycled or bussed in to take up his duties depending on the weather. I preferred Mr Bull's evening service because his choice of hymns was more to my liking. The other church in this alternative arrangement was The Church of St Lawrence at Willington.

There was an avenue of six yew trees that lined the path to the main door of the church. Several white Horse Chestnuts overhung the south wall. These were the providers of many conkers when in season. There was also an Oak and a tall Redwood – one on each corner of the east wall. There were two Red Horse Chestnuts, midway on each side of the front church wall. Behind the one on the left and a little way inside stands the War Memorial. On Remembrance Sunday Dad would stand proudly bearing the standard for the local branch of the British Legion. At the sound of the trumpeter's Last Post he would dip the flag in memory of those that's served and died in both wars. One year Dad had the honour of carrying the standard at the Remembrance Service in the Albert Hall. It was a nervous time for him but a proud one.



ST JOHN'S CHURCH. MOGGERHANGER.

Opposite the churchyard gate there was an open cultivated field behind a trimmed hawthorn hedge with a 5-barred gate for access. The licensee of the Old Guinea (or One Pound One), as it was affectionately called was a Mr (Dolly) King who used this ground as a market garden to supplement his running of the public house. Further along that side of the road and on the wide raised grass verge stood a fully-grown Elm tree. This tree shaded the first of three thatched cottages and out barns. These cottages formed a square yard between them. The post office was on the left. Burridges' cottage was at the back and Mr & Mrs Rayne (Betty Simms) was on the right. There was a communal water tap out in the yard.



The cottage nearest to the Elm tree sadly caught fire one fateful evening and was well alight when Terry – my brother-in-law and I came home on my Norton ES2 motorbike, (LMJ6) from an evening at the Grenada in Bedford. Some anxious moments were had by both of us as we sped along the Willington to Moggerhanger road hoping that it was not the cottages near the crossroads where Terry and my sister Jill lived at that time with their baby daughter Karen. As we reached the edge of the village near the crossroads we breathed a sigh of relief when we realised the fire was burning along the Blunham Road near the post office. By the time we arrived on the scene, the cottage where the Raynes' lived was in a sorry state. Hastily removed furniture and other belongings were piled in the yard and all the firemen could do was to hose down the thatch on the post office and the Thatch on the Burrage cottage. At one time the corner of the ridge of Burrages' did catch fire but the firemen were quickly up to it and clawed away the burning thatch and extinguished the straw by a concentrated jet of water.

The Daniels who ran the post office and store were also very concerned for their home and livelihood. The police took charge of the post office safe and had organised a party to go in and evacuate their possessions should the need arise. Luckily this was not the case, damping down of the now burned out shell and the fact that that the mild breeze blew in from the West had saved the other buildings.

### **THE NEW BUDGIE**

During that period when my Norton was new, Mum had a pet budgerigar called Micky – Green and yellow he was and a proper little chatterbox too. When I rode home from work and up the path into our back yard, Mum would say to Micky “Keith on motorbike Bip, Bip, round the corner”. It wasn't long before Micky was saying it – especially when he heard the sound of my motorbike coming up the path. Often Mum would leave the cage door open for Micky to fly around the kitchen. When he had had enough he would return to his cage and sit on his perch.

One day I was getting ready to go out and was about to have a shave, I poured a kettle of boiling water into a bowl in the sink and was lathering my face when a flash of green and yellow swooped down into my bowl of hot water. With one vigorous flap of wings Micky managed to extricate himself from the bowl and fluttered to the floor at my feet. Panic stations, we picked him up and put him in his cage. It was soon obvious that he had badly burned legs because he could not grip the perch with his claws. Mum sorted out an old cardboard shoebox and lined it with a hand towel. We let him lie on that. I finished my shave and off to work I had to go. Mum got ready to catch the next bus and with Micky in the shoebox they went off to the vet. The vet was not too sure he would survive the shock but said the only thing we could do was to apply some anti-burns solution to his poor legs twice a day. Mum returned home with the solution and Micky safely in the shoebox. The ordeal of the morning and evening routine of applying the treatment began. His poor little legs looked red and raw. In fact, with no feathers they looked plucked and ready for the oven.

The best method we found to apply the solution was to paint in on with one of my old watercolour brushes whilst holding Micky on his back with the other hand. He would mildly protest and the medication would crouch at the bottom of his cage when we had finished. As yet he was still too weak to clasp his perch with his poor feet. Mum would put a drop or two of whisky in his water and would just about talk to him all day. Not a peep came from him. I don't think Dad noticed the level going down in the whisky bottle! A few days passed and Mum saw Micky haul himself up the side of the cage with his beak and then back onto his perch. There, unsteadily he leaned against the side of the cage and managed to stay on. We knew he was getting better because it became unbearable for us to hold him in our hand. He would twist his head round and bite with his beak as hard as he could. We then had to leave him in his cage. It was difficult to paint his legs through the bars of the cage when he would squawk and run backwards and forwards along his perch until we had finished.

Not long after that we saw new feathers starting to grow so we stopped further treatment on his legs. He soon looked fully-fledged and his old self again. We had not expected him to speak again after such an ordeal but he surprised us all and was soon chattering all day long. I was sure it was the whisky that did the trick. Needless to say he wasn't allowed out when I shaved or vice versa.

### **THE POST OFFICE ~ SHOP**

Back to the old Post Office and shop. This was one of the three stores in the village in those days and now there are none. It was a busy little shop and you entered through a diamond latticed front porch, which had a board seat on either side. The Post Office counter inside was to the left just inside the door and immediately alongside was the letterbox that had been let into the front outside wall. The store counter faced you as you entered. There was a gate flap in the counters that led to the Daniels' living quarters at the back of the cottage. The other door to the right led to their private front parlour. Outside the post office on the left end of the picket fence stood the old red telephone box and next to that, a telegraph pole. At times you could shelter from the rain in the comfort of the phone box and watch for the bus from Sandy to Willington. When they came into view you just had time to make a quick dash to the bus stop at the cross roads. Sadly the old red phone box is a thing of the past and the new one no longer serves that convenience being positioned now is - opposite the vicarage.

Across the road from the post office stand a row of lime trees and when lime blossom is in full bloom its heady scent wafts down to meet you as you pass. The air buzzes as hundreds of bees hurry to collect the bountiful supply of nectar. Quite a lot drips to the ground to be pounced on by ants and other insects. A 5-barred gate between the lime trees led to Gurneys' meadow that ran along the churchyard wall. In line with the end of the churchyard wall in the narrow strip of meadow was one of the many ponds that were dotted about the village. It has now been filled in, as it was heavily overgrown with Brambles, Wild rose bushes and Hawthorn. Just beyond the far corner of the churchyard wall where the Redwood tree stands

there was a wooden black-tarred shelter for Mr Gurneys' two shire horses. He actually lived in Barford Road Blunham. Inside the stable against the back wall was a wooden feed trough. On the outside stood a galvanised water trough.



BEE ON LIME BLOSSOM.

### **CHILDHOOD AND GAMES WE PLAYED**

In the meadow there were numerous Elm trees growing. It was in one of these that Stibby (Ron Emery) and I built our tree house. There was a bramble hedge that divided the meadow between the stable and the Sandy Road. In the middle of this hedge stood the two Elms. Stibby and I used to see if we could shoot our homemade arrows over the top of them, - we lost a few arrows that way. Another game we would play at dusk was to stand together in the open meadow and fire arrows straight up in the air. We would tense up waiting and listening for their return to earth. We would also shoot up at the bats as they weaved their way overhead. At first we never gave it a thought as to how dangerous those games were. Needless to say, we never actually hit a bat.

There were big patches of cow parsley growing in the meadow and we had great fun carving tracks in it. At that time we were living just across the road at No 1 Dynes Lane. We had a couple of pet rabbits and we would take them into the meadow where we would construct tunnels made up of hooped twigs covered with long grass and cow parsley leaves. We would then let the rabbits in one entrance would then block off this entrance with our coats. We would then try to guess which one of the other entrances they would emerge. Unfortunately the rabbits would either just sit inside and munch away at the grass or push their way through the sides of our maze. The white rabbit was called Elsie and the black and white one was called Jim. They were kept in separate hutches at the rear of our barn. The buck had a bad habit of cocking his back leg, and then fire a well-aimed squirt at anybody that ventured around the corner of the barn. To avoid being splashed, one had to pretend to round the corner then at the last moment dart back for cover. For some reason Jim only seemed to be a 'one shot' rabbit.

On the Sunday that Jim died, our Uncle Bert and Auntie Cis came to tea and it was befitting that Uncle Bert officiated at its demise. With due seriousness, Uncle Bert knotted his handkerchief in each corner and solemnly placed it on his head. He positioned his spectacles on the end of his nose and with hands holding a pretend prayer book he committed poor Jim to the ground. Us kids weren't quite sure what to make of all that but it seemed to ease the loss of our pet – in part at least.

Lots of plants grew amongst the grass in the meadow. Sorrel had an acid vinegary flavour. We would dig up Pig Nuts, skin, and eat them. The flowers of the cowslips were plucked and popped into our mouths to savour. The hedgerows also provided a feast. The first new leaves of the hawthorn were our bread and cheese. For the life of me I don't know why we called it bread and cheese. Blackberries were in abundance and after them came the Haws and the Sloes. These were tart and made your tongue fur up. Although Hips were collected during the war for their high content of vitamin C, these were turned into Rose Hip syrup. We only used them for the short stiff bristles round the seeds. We collected and used these as a very effective itching powder. Another autumn delicacy that I used to seek out for my Dad was the mushroom and these could grow to the size of a dinner plate.

Wild flowers were plentiful in different parts of the meadow but most widespread were the Creeping Buttercups, the Meadow Buttercups and the Daisies. The Daisies at times looked like drifts of snow. The red clover was a favourite of the rabbits as were the dandelions. Ox Eye Daisies grew in isolated patches and cowslips were scattered around the whole area. At the bottom of the meadow near a clump of spindly Oak trees there was a patch of the meadow that was wet and boggy. Here could be found a few Milk Maids, Celandines and the Goldilocks Buttercups. Growing close to the perimeter hedgerow was the odd clump of Violets. Indeed it was a meadow full of interest to the young naturalist.

One day Stibby and I were scouring the meadow for something to do when, there in the churchyard we saw Owen (Deafy) Hall, a mute gentleman who could only utter guttural sounds. He was tending to a grave. Just for a lark we decided that we would creep up on him and give him a bit of a scare. We crept over the wall and made our way stealthily through the gravestones towards him. We pulled our open jackets over our heads then burst out on him. At first, startled and shocked he stepped back then uttered sounds that we had not heard before. He grabbed his stick and we were off like a shot, weaving in and out of the gravestone as he chased us. We split up and I sensed he was still on our tail and closing so I made a beeline for the wall and the meadow beyond. I was over the wall in a flash and just missed a whack across the backside as he let fly with his stick. I didn't look back until I was half way across the meadow. There he stood behind the churchyard wall waving his stick at me. Wow, I thought, that was close. Stibby and I had a laugh about it later on when we met but we both made a special effort to avoid meeting Deafy for some time after that.

A large slice of Gurneys' meadow alongside the main road to Sandy was taken over by the local council with the intention of improving that narrow section of road. The trees and hedgerow that bordered the road on the meadow side were cut down and uprooted. Earth from a strip of meadow about 20 feet wide, was removed down to within a foot of the road level and the meadow re-secured by an iron railing fence. The advent of war halted this work and so this strip of land has remained as it was left all those years ago. Forgotten by the council, I wonder?

During one heavy winter's snows – about 2 to 3 ft deep, we kids seized upon the opportunity to construct an igloo. With the ample snow lying on that waste ground opposite Dynes Lane we set to with a will. We cut out blocks of snow and built up the walls which, when met at the centre at the top, we were able to stand up inside. We cut a window in the wall and constructed a small entrance tunnel. Proudly we stood by it, waving to the people in cars and

busses as they passed by. Long after the thaw, a pile of unmelted snow reminded us all of, what was for us, a most enjoyable and memorable wintertime.

Back to the entrance to Gurneys' meadow in Blunham Road, on the same side towards the crossroads, there was a beautifully clipped Hawthorn hedge that flanked the back garden of the thatched cottages. This is where the Minneys and the Browns lived. The hedge has been up-rooted and houses are now built on those back gardens.

On the other side of the road between the Post Office and the 'One Pound One' and set back in the field beyond the ditch, stood a stately pear tree. I never did savour the delights of that tree. It was too much in the open for scrumping and too near its owner Dolly King.

### AROUND HOME AND MORE

In the northwest corner of the crossroads stood the Olde Guinea in much the same position as the new public house stands today – facing the main road. The garage building was at right angles to the public house with a large forecourt in front of them and the pub. The tall pub sign stood in the corner of the crossroads.



MOGGERHANGER CROSSROADS.

In the corner of the public house and the living quarters, there was a bay window. Behind this was the bar to the public rooms where Dolly and his wife used to serve. A tap on the bay window would eventually bring a response, whereupon the window would swing open and your wants would be satisfied. There was a bottle of beer for Dad; a packet of Smith's crisps – the ones with the little blue packet of salt, a Golden Lemonade and sometimes the odd packet of 5 Woodbines – though these were not always for Dad. These were smoked either behind the farmyard barn or in some other out of the way spot.

From the front door of the pub, the way to the Gents was across the slightly inclined forecourt and up a passageway between the publican's living quarters and the garage building. Rarely did all reach their goal in time. At the end of the evening the distance that the stream had flowed across the forecourt was a measure of the success of the drinking session' especially during the war when the service boys were in town. "Time Gentlemen Please" and the regulars would reluctantly wend their ways home. Archie's voice above all others could be



heard in his loud, slow, local brogue, bidding everyone individually “Good night”. From then on peace would reign in the village.

At Christmas time Dolly King would allow Celia (my sister) and myself to stand inside the pub entrance to sing our Christmas Carols. Then Mup Harding would take round the hat for us. This usually boosted our collection so that we were able to buy chocolates for Mum and Will’s Wiffs for Dad and some other presents for the rest of the family.

The old hand-operated petrol pumps and an oil cabinet stood against the wall of the garage in which Dolly used to keep his Lanchester car. In those days not many cars were owned in the village. The petrol pumps were a bit of a bugbear for Dolly; especially if he was serving and chatting behind the bar. Indeed, the motorist had to be very patient or he had to risk it to the next town for a refill. Even when Dolly did condescend to serve, the laborious task of hand cranking out gallons tried his patience to the limit. This was even worse if he had to walk back to the bar for change. Still times were more leisurely in those days. Now you have to serve yourself.

The garage buildings along with their pumps have long since disappeared. However a pump and cabinet similar to those can be seen in the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden. The window at the end of the old garage building faced the Bedford Road and in it was displayed motor artefacts, cycle spares and puncture repair kits. All were shrouded in dust, dead flies, wasps and cobwebs. Rarely, if ever, was the display changed or cleaned out and the sun had bleached the packets so that their identity was almost beyond deciphering. The windowsill was of a very fine abrasive stone that was worn away in the middle by countless pocketknives being honed to a keen edge while the owners were waiting for the bus, or just passing the time of day.

At one time you could hire a bicycle from Dolly King at a tanner a time. One time my sister Merle did just that. She decided to ride over to Ickwell May Festival. Whilst there they had an enjoyable time, however, on the way home one of the pedals came off. One of the friends rode ahead to let Mum and Dad know that Merle would be late home. Dad set off on his bike to meet her. When they met up Dad got Merle to sit on her bike and he pushed her home with one hand as he rode along side. It’s my guess that Dad got a free pint of beer out of Dolly for that faulty pedal.

Sunday lunch times Dad enjoyed his pint of beer at the local and his pontifications on current affairs in the confines of the public house earned him the title of ‘The Professor’. Rarely was Dad late home for his Sunday dinner at 1:00pm. Indeed, his pre-lunch pint seemed to whet his appetite and he always ate his Yorkshire pudding with a dash of gravy separately – unlike the rest of us.

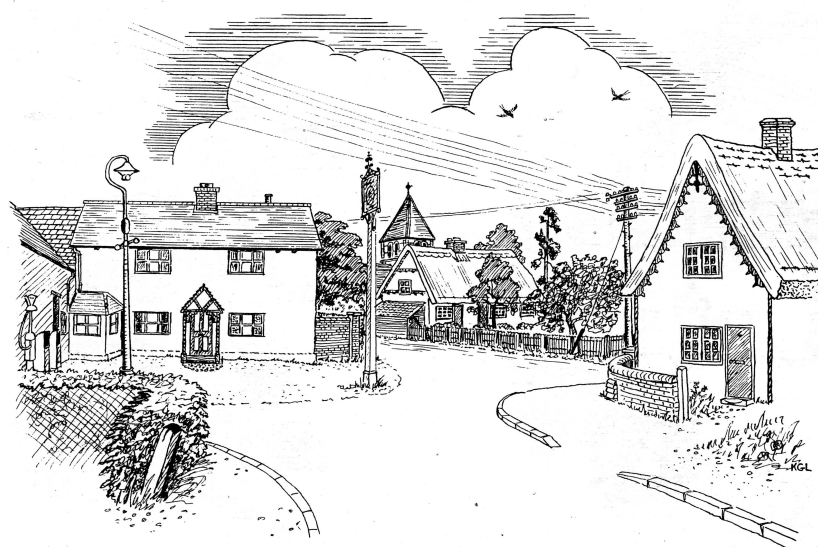
On the South East corner of the crossroads there stood a row of thatched cottages and the Sandy end one was the home of Jill (my sister), Terry and their baby Karen. An additional brick and tiled section had been built onto this end. In front of these cottages was a brick wall with rounded copingstones on top. The height of the wall varied from 2 ft to about 4 ft by the time it reached the corner of St John’s Road. Here a corner pillar was capped with a nice wide square flat stone. It was an ideal spot for teenagers to sit and loiter – much to the annoyance of Mrs Atkinson who lived in St John’s Road end cottage. The side and end windows of this cottage gave Mrs Atkinson a panoramic view of the whole crossroads. She would often be seen peeping from behind her curtains watching the world go by! This was her pleasure and she troubled no one. Now all these old cottages have been demolished and replaced with brick buildings that lack the character of the past era.

On the opposite side on the north east corner of the crossroads and set back from the main road by a long front garden still stands what used to be the double thatched cottage of the Minneys’ and the Browns’. It now has been converted into one home. In the front garden

close to the Blunham Road there was a fully-grown apple tree, which used to crop very well indeed. Standing on the crossroads corner just outside their picket fence stood one of the telegraph poles that lined the Bedford to Sandy main road.

At the end of Brown's front garden there was a medium sized black-tarred, lap-boarded shed with red pan tiles. On Sunday mornings the doors of this shed would be wide open and look out upon the forecourt of the Olde Guinea, and a man-sized chair was positioned in the doorway. There was no need to advertise because a steady flow of customers would come throughout the morning for Mr Brown to cut their hair at a tanner a time, (six pence on old money or 2.5 pence new money). The widely held belief that a basin was used is hereby denied because I sat in that large chair in many occasions and no such utensil crowned my head.

Almost opposite the Browns' shed and on the other side of the Sandy Road, and adjacent to the garden the garden of Terry and Jill's cottage stood another of the village shops. The Bull family ran the house and shop combined. A 4-foot high brick wall retained the 2ft high front lawn; the entrance to the path was approach by three steps from an almost non-existent pavement by a gateway in the wall. Many a weekend in the summer cyclist would stop by for refreshing lemonade or an ice cream; they lounged on the lawn or sat on the curved wall coping stones, their cycles propped up – en masse – against the wall blocking the narrow undefined pavement. The Bulls' had a son called Ron, a tubby lad, and it was my guess that he ate most of the sweet profits (his sweet coupons seem to go an awful long way during the war)



MOGGERHANGER CROSSROADS.

After the war the Bull family moved away and Mr and Mrs Buck took over the running of the shop and I believe were the last tenants, it is now a private home. Next door to the shop lived Mr. & Mrs. Ashwell, an elderly couple.

A little way down the Sandy Road from the shop and on the other side, part of Gurneys' meadow was purchased after the war and a house built on it. The Randels' lived in this new house, which Dad helped to build with his carpentry skills after his D-mob from the army. He also helped build other houses in the village.

Our milk in those days we collected from the Halls' farmhouse dairy in a galvanised milk can. The Farm is opposite the Methodist Chapel in St John's Road. We would take turns to fetch the milk, but if it was too dark and scary I would be the one to go – being the eldest. One

dark night, having collected the milk from the farm, I was happily swinging the can of milk round and round, over and over, not spilling a drop. Down the narrow path by the Sandy Road I went, on past the Flints' house, which is opposite the Randels' house. Nearing the end of the Flints' garden and slap bang in the middle of the path stood one of the telegraph poles. I continued to swing the milk can – I really had the knack of it now – I knew the pole was there but I misjudged it and on the next upwards swing the can collided with the pole. The lid went flying and so did about half the milk; the can was dented but luckily didn't leak. It took me some time to find the lid in the dark then reluctantly I went home with the remainder of the milk and my lame excuse that I didn't see the telegraph pole in the dark. I don't think I had hot cocoa for supper that night.

There was quite a large piece of ground between the Flints' house and Dynes Lane; the largest plot belonged to the Flint household. The other part of the ground was tended by the tenants that lived at the far end of Dynes Lane. The Wagstaffs' and the Bunches' were two of the families that resided in that small yard. The Wagstaffs' orchard and chicken run ran alongside the lane. There is now a short service road built on their gardens and several houses and the telegraph poles have also disappeared and the lane and service road has been renamed Dynes Place. Home for us in those early days was at No. 1 Dynes Lane with its long kitchen garden running parallel to the Sandy Road and the equally long hedge, which Dad would clip with hand shears. We had moved to Moggerhanger from Station Road, Blunham when I was 7 years old in 1935 and had four years there before the start of the war.

During those early years in Moggerhanger, my sister Merle was taken seriously ill with meningitis; she had knocked her head on the corner of our sideboard and this seemed to start off the illness. Merle lay in a coma on a camp bed downstairs in the front room close to the fireside. The Doctor ordered a subdued light and so the curtains were drawn shut to cut out the afternoon sunlight. Daily he called round to look for signs of improvement and each time he would offer Merle a sixpence, then one day Merle took it from him. From then on she made daily progress towards a full recovery. In the early period of Merle's illness Mum and Dad took turns in a round-the-clock vigil and were both very weary and relieved when they found that she was on the mend.

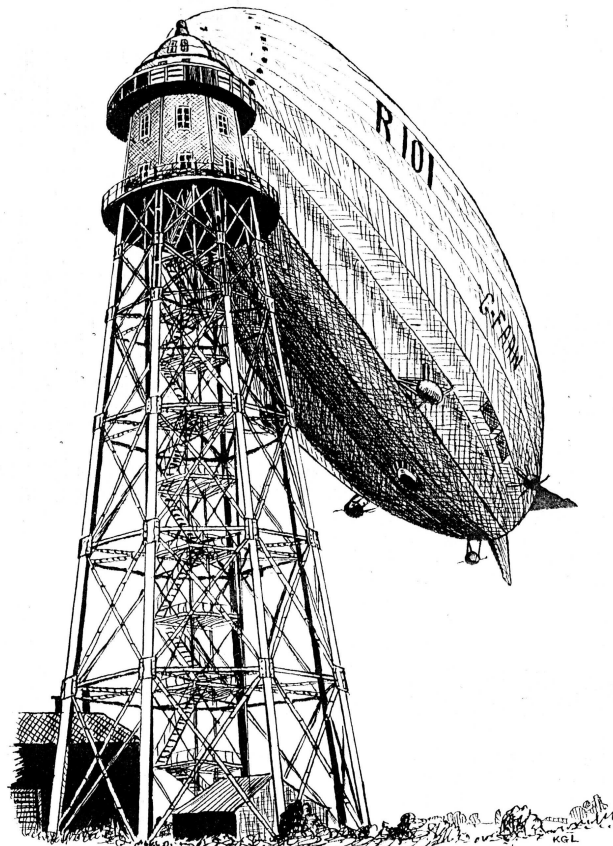
On Guy Fawkes night Dad would have a pile of garden rubbish and hedge cuttings to add to our collection of bits and pieces for the bonfire. We were allowed the usual sparklers whilst Dad saw to the main show. Next door to us lived the Beddalls', the twin brothers Dennis and Frank (Bim and Bom were their nicknames) and their sister Joan mostly watched the display from their window. One bonfire night they were feeling really venturesome and they came out into the yard for a closer look – I don't know from where or from whom that jumper firecracker came – but come it did. We all thought it hilarious because it was as though it was attached to Bim and Bom's tails, everywhere they went it appeared to follow. Eventually, its energy spent and it petered out. Bim and Bom dashed back indoors, crying as they went and we didn't see them again until the next day - not even at the window.

When the Beddalls' moved up to a council house in Bedford Road our next-door neighbours were a Mr and Mrs Craft and their son Peter. During the war Mr Craft was taken prisoner in the Far East by the Japanese and had to endure the horrendous conditions of the building of the Burma railway. Thankfully he returned after the war and he finished his days as a Chelsea Pensioner.

The Littles' lived in the next house along Dynes Lane and Ken - their son – was a year or two older than I and he helped us build our igloo. Ken owned an air gun and would often shoot in the back garden when he could get the slugs for it. He was warned against pointing the gun at people; however, one day he cheekily took aim at his Mum, forgetting the warning. It was loaded and cocked and he pulled the trigger and the slug grazed his mother's cheek close to her eye. Luckily no damage was done but I never saw him with that gun again.

When the war broke out Dad was employed by Mitchels – Civil Engineers – on the construction of the many large petrol and oil storage tanks at Deepdale, Sandy. These served the many airfields that ringed this area during the war years. Dad had served his apprenticeship as a carpenter with J.P. Whites of Bedford. In 1928/30 he was employed on the construction of the R101 airship at Cardington and one task he had was to paint in the R101 identification letters and numbers after the sign writer had outlined them. He was also one of the last workers to leave the airship before its fatal crash on its maiden flight to India. He had been helping to complete the fitting of the cabin and lounge carpets. He was deeply saddened at the news of the tragic loss so soon after he had worked on it.

Dad was 22 to 24 years old when he worked on the R101, the largest British airship, built by the Royal Airship Works at Cardington and which first flew on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1929 (I was 1 year 5 months old at the time). The airship was 777ft long (236.8m) and had a capacity of 5,508,800 cubic feet (155,995 cubic metres) of hydrogen. She crashed near Beauvais in France and burst into flames on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1930; of the 54 souls on board only 6 survived. No 1 Hangar in which the airship was built is 820ft long by 250ft wide and stands 174ft high. The inside floor space is 205,00sq.ft. The hangar still stands today alongside the sister hangar which housed the R100.



THE R101 AIRSHIP ON THE MOORING MAST AT CARDINGTON

Mum learned her dressmaking skills at Madam Fitzpatrick's in St Peters, Bedford (near what was the Granada cinema) and her employer lived at Roxon. This dressmaking craft was to stand her in good stead; especially during the wartime shortages when old coats and dresses were transformed into Sunday best or Easter Parade fashions, or just to keep pace with all of us youngsters growing up. Hand-me-downs were unrecognisable after Mum's nimble fingers and her treadle Singer sewing machine were finished with them.

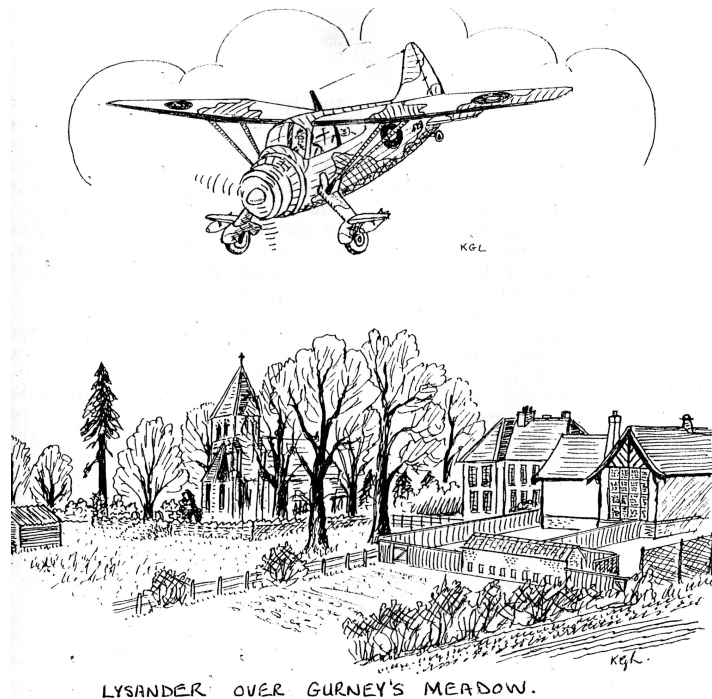
Living at Barford when Mum learned her craft meant that she had to cycle to Bedford daily. Each time her journey took her through the wooded area round Cuckoo Brook – between Barford and Renhold turn – and during the dark mornings and evenings she would pedal as hard as she could, praying at the same time, ‘Lord let me get through Cuckoo Brook safely’. On one journey home Mum had the fright of her life when she believed that a man had shot at her wheel, she pedalled home as hard as she could bumping along on her flat back wheel. It was only when she got home that her Dad Ebenezer, ‘Ebby’, Little told her in a reassuring manner that it wasn’t a man with a gun but only the fact that her back tyre was punctured and had burst! Mum loved her bicycle, much more than Church on Sundays, and would often sneak out for a ride. One of those furtive rides took her over Barford River Bridge, where, if she stood up on her pedals she could see over the bridge parapets up and down the river as she sped across. This time her foot slipped off her pedal and she fell off her bike, she grazed her knee and arm and tore her dress. Back home there was no sympathy, only ‘The Lord pays back those that cheat on him’.

During the war years the Home Guard would practise their manoeuvres in Gurneys’ meadow and us lads would watch their – Dad’s Army – efforts, especially when the local commander, the rotund farmer Vic Davison of Willow Hill Farm did his stuff. One manoeuvre consisted of seeking out and rounding up the enemy – who were suitably camouflaged. This turned out to be a big flop because us interested spectators kept pointing out where ‘Adolf’ was hiding and saying ‘There he is Mister!’ This was much to Vic’s annoyance.

At first the Home Guard were called the L.D.V. I thought it was the L.V.D., the Local Vic Davison group when in fact it was an abbreviation for the ‘Local Defence Volunteers’. The early days for them were somewhat of a farce, they meant well but lacked basic organization. Uniforms were in some cases ill fitting or non-existent and an odd assortment of arms from an old shotgun to a pickaxe handle was all they could muster. The very thought that they could protect us, or delay a crack well-armed enemy was looked upon as a laugh and so it was light-heartedly said that if ever they met up with the enemy it would be a case of L.D.V. – Look Duck and Vanish. However, when you consider that these volunteers took turns in keeping watch on bridges and other key points as a protection against sabotage, thereby relieving the army and allowing them to concentrate on the guarding of major installations, then they did a worthwhile task, even after a full day’s work on the land or in the factories.

In built-up areas people were encouraged to construct bomb blast shelters – the Anderson Shelter was one of these. During an air raid people could safely shelter from bomb blast in its confined half underground room. This set us lads thinking that we needed one too, so in the bank on the waste ground opposite Dynes Lane we excavated a shelter of our own. Poles from the spinney down Sandy Road were used to support a piece of old corrugated iron sheeting for the roof, which we covered with about a foot of earth. We were very proud of our achievement and one day as we were going to school we heard the undulating wailing sound of the air raid warning siren, we ran back to our shelter and sat excitedly inside until we heard the all clear. Needless to say when we arrived late for school and we told the teacher where we had been we were severely chastised; it rather took the shine off our shelter after that.

Practice for the regular army in the build-up to ‘D Day’ entailed extensive countryside manoeuvres and I recall the time when the army set up a gun emplacement on the piece of waste ground opposite Dynes Lane. Whilst they were there they were taken completely by surprise by an air attack, a Lysander flew low over the school then on over Gurneys’ meadow, between the tall elm trees and dropped a flour bag bomb on the gun site before they had time to swing into action. They were effectively knocked out of that part of the manoeuvres, however, they were compensated by Mum who let them have a loaf of bread and made them a chocolate tart and boiled them some hot tinned spam, coupons allowing of course – so for us it was a nice change.



The Lysander was a single engine 890 h.p. Bristol Mercury radial engine, high wing monoplane with a fixed undercarriage. Its maximum speed was 219 mph flat out, although it was happier cruising at 165 mph. Some Lysanders were based at Tempsford aerodrome and this was a dispatch point for wartime secret agents. The Lysander was the ideal tool for this job because of its ability to land and take off from short, grass fields. With extra fuel tanks attached to the wheel flaps it then had a range of 1,150 miles. It was only after the war that we learned of these, fraught with danger, moonlit clandestine flights, to set down and pick up these espionage agents. Tempsford was not only used as a base for this activity but was also used as a bomber base and was home to 161 and 138 Squadrons R.A.F. Moggerhanger being West of Tempsford was on the take-off flight path for those heavily bomb laden, four engine Lancasters as they set off for their missions into enemy held territory – at times just clearing the tall elm trees bordering the east side of Gurneys' meadow.

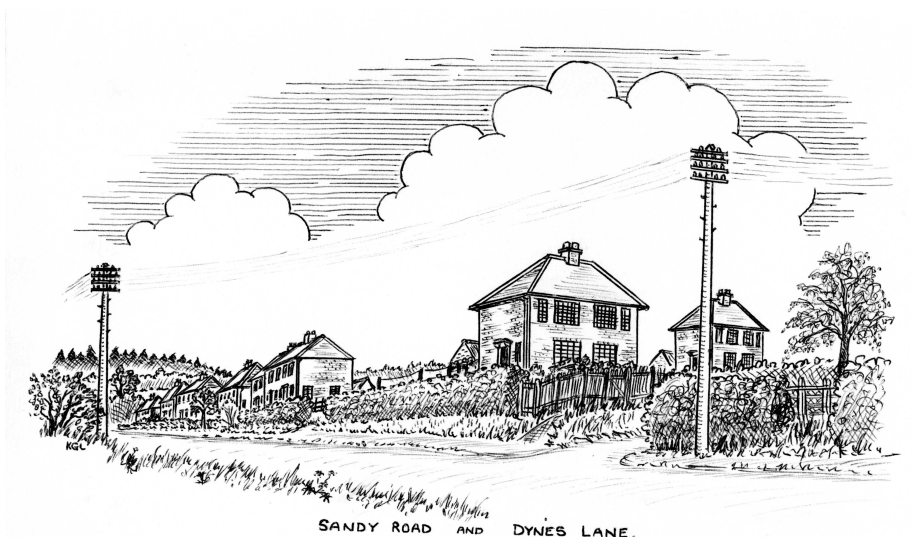
The Army gun team stayed one more night on the waste ground. That night there was a moonlit sky and when I went to bed I looked out of our bedroom window towards Bedford. It was then I noticed a shadowy figure moving around in Wagstaffs' orchard on the other side of Dynes Lane. I then made out another uniformed figure up in one of the fruit trees, he was picking some of the fruit and then dropping it down to the one below who was filling up his open tunic. When they'd gathered their fill they crept back along the privet hedge to a spot near the telegraph pole where the hedge was thin, they squeezed through and disappeared across the road. It was said that a couple of chickens from Wagstaffs' hen house disappeared that night. In the morning the gun, the lorry and the soldiers had decamped.

Another time when looking out towards Bedford on a dark but clear night I could hear plenty of movement in the sky overhead, it was the distinctive undulating throb of German aircraft engines that filled the air that night. I could see a faint glow on the horizon beyond Bedford; I'd seen this glow many times in the London direction but where was the air raid taking pace this time? The next day a brief news bulletin stated that Coventry had been their target that night, but how badly we didn't know. It was only when we heard the Prime Minister Mr Churchill (Winny) himself speak of retaliatory raids on other German cities that we knew how bad it must have been in Coventry that night.

In fact for three nights in a row Coventry took a pounding, between November 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> in 1940 over 500 German bombers dropped over 500 tons of high explosive bombs and over 30,000 incendiary canisters devastated and burned the city and its industry. There were over 1,000 civilian casualties during those three nights. This was also the result of retaliatory action on the part of the Germans for us bombing Munich. The nearest bombs to fall in the Moggerhanger area were a 'stick' of bombs that fell in a line from Blunham station towards the Barley Mow pub in Hatch. The first one fell alongside the end house that faced the station on the road leading to Blunham mill and Ridgeway Road. The second bomb dropped near the observation post halfway along Ridgeway. Two other bombs came down alongside the Hatch road; one falling in the dip of the land in a hedgerow and the last and biggest hole was blasted right in the middle of a farm track on the ridge. Needless to say their effect on our war effort was nil, but for us lads it was a highlight as we searched the area for shrapnel. The only piece I recall finding was at the site of the bomb that dropped on the railway line at Girtford.

The only 'doodle bug' (flying bomb) that I recall hearing was one evening in the latter part of the war. I was upstairs at the time looking out of the back bedroom window when I heard what I thought was a lorry labouring up the hill with a blown exhaust pipe. I ran through to the front bedroom window and when I looked out there wasn't a vehicle in sight, the road was empty. I then realized that the sound had passed overhead so I ran to the back bedroom again – nothing to be seen, I could only hear the receding sound of the pulse jet motor of the doodle bug as it skimmed low over the countryside; I listened intently as I realised what it was. I was also aware that some of the later models doubled back on themselves when the motor cut out; when it did I waited anxiously for the dull distant thud. It was reported next day that it had fallen in the open countryside.

Dad was amongst the oldest age group to be called up to serve in His Majesty's Armed Forces during the war. He was assigned to the Royal Artillery and his training took him to mid Wales to the artillery firing ranges in the Brecon Beacons where he came face to face with the army's heavy field guns. After his training and an all too brief leave, his unit left for the Far East. Their convoy of ships had to head out into the Atlantic Ocean before finally heading south. This was done to confuse the ever-diligent enemy U boats. Being a gunner he spent many a watchful hour in readiness on the ship's anti-aircraft guns and this continued from England all the way to India via the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. More training ensued in India before he joined the British forces under Lt General 'Bill' Slim, Commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army in Burma (Supreme Commander was Lord Louis Mountbatten). They pushed the Japanese from the border of India and out of Burma. It was four days after the infantry had captured Rangoon that Dad's unit of heavy artillery entered the capital and found that the struggle was all but over and his return home was just round the corner.



## **THE FAMILY AT HOME AND OTHER NEIGHBOURS**

No 1 Dynes Lane was getting too small for Mum and us rapidly growing youngsters.

(Sandy Rd and Dynes Lane)

I was about 16 by then and out at work assisting the pipe fitters on the same fuel dump at Deepdale where Dad had also worked. The council approved our need and so we were allocated the house further down the road at No 23. This had been vacated by Roy (Whistle) Wagstaff's Mum and Dad; Roy then went to live with his granny in St John's Road. With Dad away in Burma I was quite pleased that we had moved house because it meant that I would not have to clip the long hedge that was such a chore at Dynes Lane. The hedge at No 23 Sandy Road was a bush in comparison. However, there was still the task to perform of emptying the toilet bucket, (no indoor flush units in those days), the contents of which had to be buried in a suitable hole dug in the back garden. This was no mean task in winter when the ground was frozen hard, extreme care was required not to slip on the icy ground. It was also considered more discreet for that job to be done under cover of darkness. That was a further hazard especially one pitch-black night in the wartime blackout when one was not allowed to show a light. I made many a request for the others to use less paper – ever hopeful for the task to be spaced out – but like us the entire job was regular.

With only a small copper and a fire range to boil the water on, bath night for the eight of us was a lengthy drawn out process. The smaller ones of our family would take their baths in pairs and the following pair would have an extra large saucepan of hot water added to the previous measure. This gave time for the re-filled copper to boil up again so that a fresh change of bath water could take place and the next on the list could take the plunge.

Arguments ensued as to whose turn it was to use the clean water first. Mum kept us all to a strict rota and it must be said that the war-time limit of 4 – 5 inches per bath was rarely, if ever, exceeded – the copper couldn't cope with more than that and Mum's army pay wouldn't allow the cost. So we saved on water and fuel, which was our contribution to the war effort.

Over the hedge at the bottom of our back garden there was a large meadow and when this had been cut for hay we would have a real frolic in the sweet smelling forage. In this meadow there was a large area of mounds and hollows in a square shaped pattern. These were the moats. These hollows would sometimes flood in winter and would provide us with a venue for sliding on when frozen over. I know of no known archaeological record for the construction but they were recorded on the OS map published in 1935.

Beyond the meadow was Lady Wood; a few primroses grew in here but the best wood of all where they bloomed in their thousands was in College Wood near Northhill. We would set off to pick bunches of them; we would take packets of crisps and a bottle of Tizer to sustain us on our long trek. This took us through Lady Wood, across the wood with the square wood in the middle, along the rise overlooking Pooles Farm and Moggerhanger sanatorium on the other side of St John's Road. On through Budna Farm and another long meadow with a clump of Scots Pines at the far end, across one more field and there was 'Our Beautiful Primrose Wood', just a stones throw away from the Scots Pine trees.

Living next to us was old Mr (Grumpy) Craft and his housekeeper Nancy Tasker, a well-liked Londoner who was very partial to a cigarette that would hang from the corner of her mouth; its blue smoke idly curling up as it slowly smouldered away. At that point we were blessed with a second-hand piano that stood against the front room wall that backed onto Mr Craft's living room. All my sisters were eager to learn to play it and lessons given by Lillian Matthews at the farm were at first enthusiastically practised. Mr Craft, sadly, did not appreciate this, who would after a very short while knock on the wall with his walking stick. My sisters, angry at being disturbed would knock back with the poker on our wall. Mum had to intervene and restrictions were severely limited on playing time. so much so that interest in playing the piano soon waned when the knock on the wall signalled that Mr Craft had had enough (hence their name for him - Grumpy). One thing couldn't be said of old Mr Craft and



that was “He’s as deaf as a post?” We never had trouble in that quarter with Nancy, mainly because she liked reading and smoking her fags so she spent much of her time in the kitchen well away from the tinkling discordant notes of the piano.

Mr Craft owned a tricycle, which I believe, was the only one in the village. It was a sensible steed for an old man to ride, who could only totter along with his walking stick. He would hand his stick carefully over the handlebars of his tricycle. How it never slipped into his front wheel I’ll never know. Then he would stand at the back between the two rear wheels and reaching forward for the handlebars he would place one foot on the rear wheel crossbar and scoot along with his other foot. When the required speed was attained he would shakily hop forwards onto the saddle and would be away, much to the amusement of us watching kids.

It would be hard to imagine what Mr Craft would have said had he known what was to follow after he had passed on, because Mr & Mrs Gambol were the next tenants to live in the house. They had a son and a daughter. The son, Bernard was quite handy at the keyboard and produced many a melodious tune on their piano. We didn’t find it offensive and we didn’t have to knock on the wall once! Later Bernard acquired a much grander instrument in the form of an organ. It was too large to go into their front room. I believe it came from the village chapel when they got a new organ. Anyway with a lot of huffing and puffing it was installed in their barn at the back of the house. Not a lot else could be fitted in that barn when Bernard was seated at the console surrounded by his admiring audience. It sounded to us kids just great, especially as it was now playing popular music instead of dreary ole hymns. Eventually Bernard purchased an electronic organ and this did have pride of place in their front room. Sadly his attentive audience could no longer surround him. However, we were privileged by living next door and somehow the practice sessions did not upset us as much as it would have done Mr Craft. We found no need to knock on the wall with our poker.

One of the evacuee girls, named Beryl would come quite frequently to our house and we would all sit round the pine wood kitchen table – well away from ‘Grumpy’ – chatting and playing cards and listening to the latest songs or programmes on the radio, plus the latest gossip. Beryl was quite a card and we would all laugh and joke. One saying in our local country dialect Beryl had off to a tee and that was “Eh corffed, eh spewed ‘is ‘ole ‘at blew orf. Ooh ‘er wor bad. That would have us all roaring with laughter. How Mum would put up with us all I’ll never know. Possibly it took her mind of the fact that Dad was the other side of the world fighting the Japs in the Burma campaign.

The range in the kitchen on those chill drab winter nights kept us all cosy, - even in bed, because Mum would put some old house bricks in the oven and at bedtime would wrap them up in brown paper. These hot bricks would then be placed in our beds. What a noise they made with fidgety feet rustling the brown paper. If one accidentally knocked one out of bed the whole house knew it. We had to make sure that the Gazunder was not in the line of fire or we would have had to venture outback on a cold wet night to relieve ourselves and we didn’t want that, especially in the blackout!

Ration books for us lot enabled Mum to make a wider choice of food when it was available. Even so, her Army allowance even restricted that choice. The free concentrated orange juice and black current puree that some of us youngsters qualified for, gave us a bit of a change and we would spread the puree on our bread and marge. Several things were rather bland in the food line and Mum had pet names for them. Egg Muck was egg powder. Crippy Cracks described cornflakes and Sawdust Cake was the plain yellow Madera cake. I only fancied that if I was able to spread some jam on it. Even the jam was mostly marrow by bulk,

flavoured and coloured a plumy red. Jams all seemed to taste the same whatever the colour, unless or course Mum made some wild blackberry and apple jam that was very special indeed, - and when the availability of sugar permitted. We were lucky in that we didn't have 'Pom' as it was called. This was dehydrated powdered potato. I first encountered that in the Army. It almost stuck one's jaws together.

## Potatoes to save flour

(up to  $\frac{1}{3}$  potatoes,  $\frac{2}{3}$  flour)



Perhaps you're already familiar with the idea of using potatoes to save flour? One housewife was so keen on this that she wrote to us suggesting it should be included in the Potato Plan.

So here it is, Part 5 of the Potato Plan: *Use potatoes to save flour, when making pastry, puddings and cakes. You can use up to one-third potatoes and two-thirds flour.*

The potatoes can be either boiled, or baked in their jackets. (In some recipes you can even use them grated raw.) The cooked potatoes should be as dry and floury as possible. Simply mash them down with a fork till they're like flour. The potatoes can be cooked the day before. It's very easy to boil some extra and set them aside, or to bake some when you're using the oven anyhow . . .

Don't be afraid to experiment and watch out for the recipes in this series.

### *Don't forget the other four points of the Plan*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> Serve potatoes for breakfast on three days a week.</p> <p><b>2</b> Make your main dish a potato dish one day a week.</p> | <p><b>3</b> Refuse second helpings of other food. Have more potatoes instead.</p> <p><b>4</b> Serve potatoes in other ways than "plain boiled."</p> |
|--|---|

There was another cake that was sometime possible to purchase, although rather rarely. It did have some fruit in it with artificial cherry pieces as well. It was rather on the heavy side and left a bit of a tang in one's mouth after you had eaten it. The cheese, well that was like soap, but was improved if it was cooked on toast with a dash of Daddies Sauce. At one time I loved pepper in the yolk of my boiled egg but the horrible wartime pepper put paid to that love.

With rationing biting hard any additional rations, from whatever source were welcome, - whether it be the odd pigeon or rabbit that failed to live out its full life span. Even the barter system, although frowned on, was nevertheless practiced by many.

MINISTRY OF FOOD

# RATION BOOK

## 1942-43 CLOTHING BOOK

This book may not be used until the holder's name, full postal address and National Registration (Identity card) Number, have been plainly written below IN INK.

NAME KEITH GEOFFREY LAWRENCE

RES. 1 DYNE'S LANE

MOGHERRANGER (COUNTY) BEDFORD

N.R.O. 91

REGISTRATION OF BOYS AND GIRLS OF 16 YEARS

1. Full Name (Surname in BLOCK letters)

Surname LAWRENCE

Other Names Keith G

2. National Registration Identity Card No.

DQGB 81:3

3. Home Address (in full)

1 Dyne's Lane  
Mogheranger Bedford

4. Nationality: \*British/Alien

K. Lawrence Signature

**BEDFORD 6 - MAY '44** Official Stamp and Date

(i) Identity Card produced and surrendered.

(ii) Identity Card produced and returned to holder.

**E.D. 431C**

\*Delete whichever is inapplicable

years. His wife died about seven years ago. He four sons

MINISTRY OF LABOUR & NATIONAL SERVICE

THIS CARD is an acknowledgment that you have

(1) Registered under the Registration of Boys and Girls Order, 1941; and

(2) ~~Produced~~/Surrendered your National Registration Identity Card on attaining the age of 16 years.


If your new Blue Identity Card is not issued to you at the time of registration you should apply for it as soon as possible at the local National Registration Office for the address opposite, producing this acknowledgment.

If you are asked to produce your Identity Card before you obtain the new Card, you should produce this acknowledgment.

YOU SHOULD KEEP THIS CARD CAREFULLY.

For N.R.O.

(iii) Blue Identity Card Issued



My sister Merle recalls when she was playing up at Matthews Farm; she was invited on several occasions, to accompany Mrs Matthews and her youngest daughters on her weekly shopping trip to Bedford. Mrs Matthews always had large shopping bags with her on those trips and Merle wondered why one was always full on their way to town. One their arrival in Bedford a beeline would be made for a certain bakers and confectionary shop where Mrs Matthews would pass a few moments in conversation and would then leave the full shopping bag round the side of the counter. They would then all troop out and set about the rest of their shopping spree. When this expedition was finished they would call in at the bakers again where she would pick up her still full shopping bag. She would say her goodbyes and they would set off for the bus and home. Back at the farm Mrs Matthews would then take a bag of sweets from the 'never empty bag' and offer them around. Off went the girls to play in the barns. With sweets rationed Merle assumed that Mrs Matthews had left the necessary coupons in the shopping bag for the shopkeeper. Merle was unaware that the whole contents of that bag had been exchanged whilst they had been doing the rest of their shopping. Maybe eggs for flour, cream for dry fruit or even barter with fresh farm meat. Who knows what other goodies had changed hands. This was minor in comparison with other sharp practices that went on elsewhere.

There were very few private cars due to petrol rationing and busses only passed through at peak times. That being the case the children could 'whip and top' up the main road in

complete safety. You could mark off for Hopscotch, could roller-skate, if you were lucky to own some, or you could trundle your hoop to your heart's content. The traffic was very light indeed – unlike today! Mind you the petrol rationing at that time helped to keep traffic to a minimum and was strictly enforced. At that time petrol was even colour coded. Civilian fuel was red, - one grade only; forces vehicles used blue fuel. Then there was green 100 octane for the bomber aircraft. Finally there was a pale pink with a potent smell that was used for high performance engines such as in the Spitfire fighters. It was, woe betide any civilian caught with the wrong colour in his tank.

In those austere days Shank's Pony (walking) was not unknown and paths were properly maintained right up until the start of the war. Their neglect continued after the war and where at one time you could safely walk to Sandy and back, no paths now exist. The continued encroachment of heavier and wider vehicles along road, that were adequate in their day, has seen the demise of those once frequently used paths. Indeed, most of the wide verges have also disappeared, those being attacked from all sides, the farmer, the developer and the traffic.

On the other side of No 25 lived the Halls'. Mr Hall was a market gardener and cultivated his own ground as a wartime reserve occupation. He didn't have to serve in the forces. Allan, their son, was the same age as myself and passed a scholarship and went to Bedford Modern School. His sister Joyce now lives next door to my sister Jill in the crescent. Next to the Halls' at No 27 lived the Jackson's. Mr Jackson cultivated the small plot of land that was between his house and the back gardens of the houses in Dynes Lane. Council houses now stand on that plot. During the war Louise, their daughter worked at the RAF station at Cardington. It was there they produced many of the barrage balloons (blimps) that encircled London and many other cities and vulnerable places, from low flying air attack, thus forcing enemy aircraft higher. They could then be caught in the concentrated beams of searchlights and shot down by Ack-Ack guns. Here brother Billy worked up at Matthews Farm.

The Longhurst's lived on the other side of Mr Craft at No 19. Scot, the father of the family, in his hey-day, used to keep goal for the Sandy Albion football team. Later on, his services were used by the Moggerhanger United team.

Next door to them, the Dawson's used to live and the two sisters went to live with their Gran and Granddad up the Bedford Road. They were called Avril and Noreen. Wink, as Noreen was known was my sister Jill's best friend. After they had moved the Harvey's came to live there. On Sunday mornings while The Billy Cotton Band Show was entertaining on the radio, the Harvey girls would come round and they would all play in the back yard with my sisters. Then out would come the drinks of lemon or orangeade, - or even rhubarb juice, when in season. Piccaninny, as we used to call the youngest of the Harvey girls would always be offered the fancily decorated glass tumbler with a clown on it.

At No 15, in the next pair of council houses lived the Dean family. Doug, the drummer in the village band lived here and Sonny, the father was always in friendly rivalry with Dad as to whose crops were the earliest and best vegetables. The eldest son Ron did his wartime service as a Bevin Boy in the mines. I believe that he was the only one in the village to be so directed.

### **THE JOKE**

Next-door to the Dean's lived the Stacey sisters. They were always prim and proper and kept themselves mostly to one another. However, I did hear a tale in later years concerning them both. It was during the time when they worked up at Moggerhanger Sanatorium – as it was called at the time. The sisters had a houseplant that was badly in need of re-potting so they sought the advice of the gardeners at the Sanatorium. Harry Watts (Dad's neighbour allotment holder) and a Frank Midgley from Sandy were the gardeners there and they told the sisters how it should be potted. A bit bemused by Frank and Harry's detailed instructions, the

sisters asked if they would be kind enough to do it for them if they brought the plant to work the next day. So it was agreed. The next day the Stacey sisters took the plant round to the potting shed and left it there for Frank and Harry. Mischievously, they set to work; they potted the plant in the larger, correct sized pot. It was then that they sat about their deceptive hanky panky. They sorted out the largest pot they could find and half filled the two-foot diameter pot with straw. On the top of this they filled with compost then embedding the re-potted houseplant so that its pot could not be seen. All was ready and duly at knocking off time the sisters wheeled their bikes round to the potting shed to pick up their plant. Harry saw them coming and pretended to be busy, meantime Frank listened discreetly out of sight. "Did you manage to re-pot our plant?" voiced the sisters. "Yes, all done" said Harry. "It's out there in the yard." So, out to the yard they trooped. "There you are" said Harry. "What do you think?" The sisters were dumb struck when they saw the huge pot filled to the brim with their plant sitting daintily in the middle. "But don't you think the pot is too big?" said one of the sisters. "Oh no," said Harry. Just then Frank came round the corner, straight faced, suppressing his pent up laughter. Looking at Frank, Harry said, "They think the pot's too big – what do you think, Frank?" "That," said Frank, "Is the right size. What you have to remember is that your plant has been restricted for a long time in your old pot and to give of its best it needs to be in large pot this size." Harry gave Frank a wink. "Goodness knows where we are going to put it now – and how we are going to get it home," said one sister to the other. "Fetch the van," said Harry. So off went Frank and soon returned with the van. The two of them huffed and puffed as they struggled to load the potted plant into the back of the van. "Off you go and get the place ready for us to put it in. We'll bring it round in half an hour." said Frank. So off went the Stacey sisters with worried looks on their faces.

When they disappeared around the corner and were out of earshot, Harry and Frank just burst their side with laughter. But it was not over yet as there was their coup de grace – they had yet to deliver the plant so they set about composing themselves for the finale.

The Staceys arrived home and frantically arranged a spot in which to place the huge pot. That done, they watched out of the window for the van to arrive. When it did they rushed outside to tell Harry and Frank that it was OK to take it in straight away. Frank opened the van door and got inside. Ten taking the real pot out of the large one he brushed off the loose compost and handed it to the Stacey sisters. "We won't take it in – you take it," said Frank and Harry together. At that they all burst out laughing. Frank told me that they got on really well with the sisters after that.

### **BACK TO THE VILLAGE AND GAMES**

On to No 11 where Archie Hall lived with his mother. Archie although vocally forceful would always greet people in no uncertain way, his local accent always to the fore, like all the tenants in that row. He maintained his garden to compete with the rest. Next to the Halls lived the Dunhams and their father. Fred was a mate of Dad's and they got on well together at work and socially. The Dunhams has a daughter called Sheila. The Prentices lived a couple of doors further down from the Dunhams. Cynthia, one of the girls and I crossed paths one day. It was in my early years in Moggerhanger and as lads are apt to do – until taught otherwise - stone throwing was a practiced art. At times one's skill and accuracy is considered perfect. This particular time Cynthia was coming up the road and I was in the old part of Gurneys' meadow. With one or two stones in my hand I decided to give her a fright. My aim was sure, so why not - with intent to miss by the nearest fraction I let fly. The stone hit Cynthia on the head and gave her a nasty gash. Someone saw me throw the stone I was severely punished. It was lucky that Cynthia wasn't seriously hurt or goodness knows what they would have done to me. Later on I was on the receiving end of a misaimed stone thrown by Alan Hall. We were throwing stones at old cans in a skittle alley we had set up on waste ground. We had agreed that when one of us wanted more ammunition we could put up a hand and go forward to pick up the stones. This worked reasonably well until I went forward with my hand raised. I felt a clout on the head behind my left ear. The others said Alan had done

it. I felt the place where I had been cut. When I took my hand away there was blood on it so I went home crying to Mum. It was just a minor cut and Mum remembered the incident with Cynthia so there was no sympathy, only a good hiding and a “Serves you right”. From then on stone throwing was out for me.

The youngest of the Prentice boys used to play with my brother Ian. I was the eldest and Ian the youngest. I was out at work before he was born. Ian was the only one outside the Prentice family who was able to comprehend what the youngster uttered and knew what he wanted. I believe that his pal and family round him understanding what he was asking made him ‘speech lazy’. In any event as his horizons broadened he soon caught up with the rest of them. It did seem strange on reflection that Ian could so readily understand his every uttered sound and its meaning.

In the very end house at No 1 lived the Watts family. This is where Cliff, the pianist in the village band lived. Mr Watts was a signalman on the railway and it wasn’t hard to understand why he spent most of his spare time in the greenhouses growing Geraniums and Tomatoes. I didn’t see the signal box that he worked in but it was my guess that he had a window box or two of geraniums to brighten it up. It was a case of signal box or greenhouse. In whichever, he felt at home.

Beyond the council houses was the spinney, the one in which Stibby and I had built the hut with the concrete floor. Bluebells grew in the Spinney and on its south side there were quite a few Dewberries growing. I used to gather these for Mum to stew. I would look forward to those because they were always ready before the first Blackberries. We would play many an evening down there and enjoy climbing up the slender tree saplings. We would sway precariously to and fro – Tarzan fashion, as we thought.

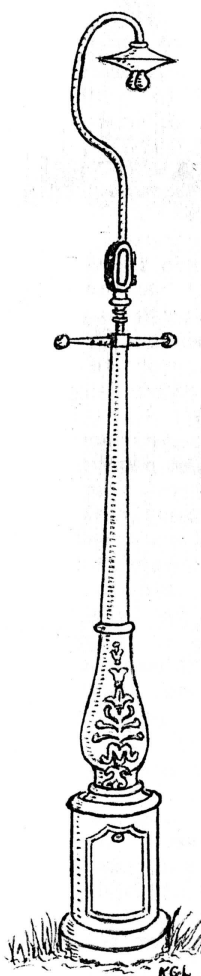
At the end of the first part of the Spinney a farm track led to the field to the south. Vic Davison farmed the ground at that time and he regularly grew corn in that field. The corn was cut by a horse drawn cutter and binder, until the advent of the tractor. The tied sheaves were thrown out at the side, the sheaves were then picked up and stacked in stooks of six or more and then left to dry. When dry they would be tossed up onto a cart by men using pitchforks. They were then taken to be stacked to await the arrival of the threshing machine. We would watch when the steam traction engine was set up in line with the large threshing machine. In line with that was the escalator and all was driven by belts from the steam engine. We eagerly watched as the threshed straw tumbled off the escalator and was spread out to form the base of the new stack. We watched as it grew higher and higher knowing that we would be back there when all the grain, machinery and workers had gone.

A day or two later we would go down to enjoy another of the thrills of village life. Back to the straw stack we would go and we would climb to the top of the stack and slide down the sweet smelling slippery slope to disappear into the loose straw at the bottom. This was not always appreciated by the owner and one always had to be watchful. Most stacks built in the village had one thing in common and that was the fact that as the straw settled they tended to become lop-sided and would threaten to spill out. This error had to be checked by using a wooden prop as a buttress to prevent it spilling out all together. These props were known locally as Moggerhanger Men. They would be likened to the natural posture of the local lads, which was typical of them whenever a convenient wall or support was handy. It was said that no one in the village could build a proper haystack, but I wonder. Did the moonlit frolics of a few gremlins have anything to do with it?

### **LANDMARKS**

Back to the Moggerhanger crossroads and opposite Blunham Road, unseen now by Mrs Atkinson, is St John’s Road – Budna Road (leading to the treacle pits) we called it – where,

on the right at the corner of Baxter's front garden and lighting up the bus stop to Bedford, stood the only village street light. This same lamppost is still there today.



“Does this lamp-post get bronchitis in winter  
As he stands at the corner of the street?  
When it's wet and windy and he starts to cough  
Do his little light bulbs at the top fall off?  
He hasn't got an overcoat or nightie  
To cover up his cold bare feet  
Does the lamppost get bronchitis in the winter?  
As he stands at the corner of the street.”

The Baxter's lived in the house behind their shop, which fronted St John's Road and here the local kids would buy their penny mystery bags, chocolate cigarettes, sherbert dabs and gob stoppers or the liquorice skipping ropes and pipes with hundreds and thousands sprinkled on the bowl. Mr Baxter's back garden was a long tapering strip walled in by Matthew's wall on one side and their wall on the Bedford Road side. It was boxed in by their house at the wide end and their brick red pan-tiled out-house adjacent to the bus stop. Beyond Baxter's garden in the Bedford Road there was a small meadow. This is where Pippa Dawson kept his cow and donkey. He and his family lived in the bungalow next to the meadow. Violet Dawson, their daughter, used a basic flat-topped cart pulled by the donkey to deliver milk to her customers. Violet would sit on the edge of the cart with her legs dangling down as she coaxed the donkey along the rounds. To subsidise the meagre grazing in the meadow the Dawson's would often be seen up the Budna Road grazing their stock on the wide roadside

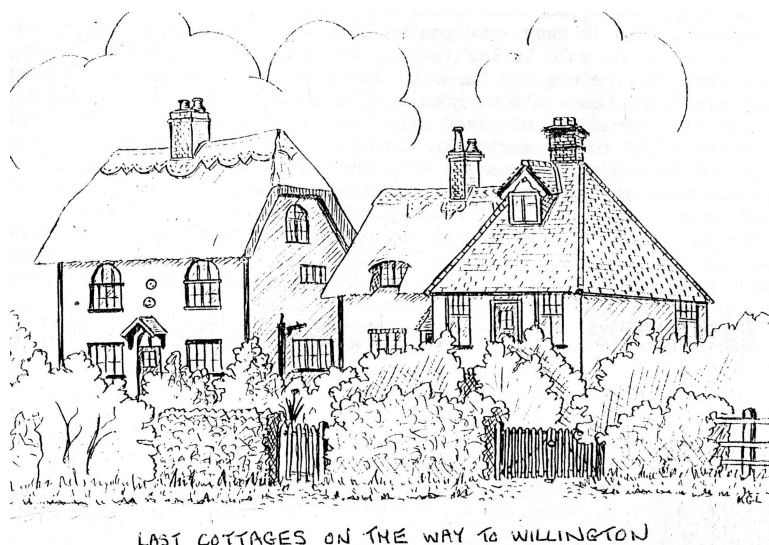
verges. Avril and Noreen Dawson moved in with their grandparents when their Mum and Dad left the village.

Beyond the Dawson's lived the Buckles who were small market gardeners. On the other side of the road is another row of council houses similar to the ones in which we lived. The Beddalls – our neighbours in Dynes Lane – had moved into one of these houses. Harry Watts was another of the tenants and in the end house lived the Craft family. Mr Craft worked on the Matthew's Farm. When the children, playing up the farm, found out that he had been a sailor in his early years, gave him the name 'Popeye' – an appropriate name for a jovial Jack Tar. He was very keen on the local lads football team and was for some years, their trainer until after the war Dad took over the task. This was also where Mick Craft 'Worm or Sixpence' lived with his brother John and his sister Batty.

Back on the other side of the road and nearer the Park Road (Round Town) corner in a large distinctive old house lived the Harding's. This is where Mup Harding lived. Mup was a tough guy character and very active in village affairs, especially village fetes where he would parade round in an old bowler hat. He stood out in whatever stall he was attending and his voice and his bowler hat brought the cash pouring in.



In the same group of houses as the Hardings' lived the Hills' in their bungalow. It was sad to recall that their young daughter was taken seriously ill. All her teachers and friend at school were deeply shocked when she passed away. Madeline was only about 11 years old. Madeline Ullalea Goodyear Hill (her full name) and Betty Craft were school friends. Betty was very upset when Madeline died. How proud Madeline would have been when her friend, after many years of dedicated service to our local community (now Mrs E Barrance) was awarded the M.B.E. by the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Indeed we all were.





The fields opposite the Hill's bungalow by the lime trees my sister Jill has found numerous flint stones with fossil shells embedded in them – a long link with the past. Round the corner in Park Road beyond the orchard on the left-hand side stands Browns Farm and its outbuildings is where they kept their pigs in wooden sties. They also had quite a few ancient apple trees in the vicinity of the farm and I would imagine that the pigs had their fair share of the apples. My sister Carol's husband Tony Stokes of Warren Farm Willington and Tom Brown were friends. They would often be seen in their Pony and Traps trotting round the country lanes taking in the view and the country air.

On the other side of the road is a spinney that borders the whole length of the road. Opposite Browns a narrow strip of woodland extends out across the fields from the spinney. A winding path leads through it to the house in the middle. The 1835 ordinance survey map shows this house to be on the route of the old drive to Moggerhanger Park House. The house could have been the old gatehouse. This has now gone and the drive too.

Beyond the Brown's Farm on the same side is a cottage in which lived the Sanderson family with their distinctive North Country accent. Tom, their son went to Bedford Modern School, Jean, his youngest sister was at the village school with us.

### **CHARACTERS ~ A LITTLE DIVERSION**

To be seen touring the village on his rounds was an ex-soldier of the First World War. Serving in the trenches left him in poor health. He was the rag and bone man from Sandy called Bumsey Johnson. He toured the district in his tatty old cart drawn by an equally scrawny old pony. He would call out at the top of his voice "Rag a' Bones". His call was for people's cast-off clothing, their old stewed bones. Bones were used in those days to make delicious meaty stock or gravy. He would also take away any type of scrap metal. You would receive a penny or two for them. Today the council will take it away – if you're lucky – but they keep the coppers! The scrap metal he sold to Larkinson's the Biggleswade, Hitchin St scrap merchant. The rag and bones he would sell to Beestons at Blunham Mill where the bones would be ground up to make bone meal fertiliser. The rags were shredded and mixed with shoddy received from the wool and cotton mills in the north. In those days there were very few man-made fibres and so scrap material from the mills made an ideal water retaining compost for the light sandy soil in the Sandy area. Being of animal or vegetable origin it readily rotted down in the ground.

Out of the ordinary local characters always acquire more lasting notoriety than the rest of us. Geoff Fuller when 9 years old, who lived at Girtford Bridge, perpetuated Bumsey's memory in verse.

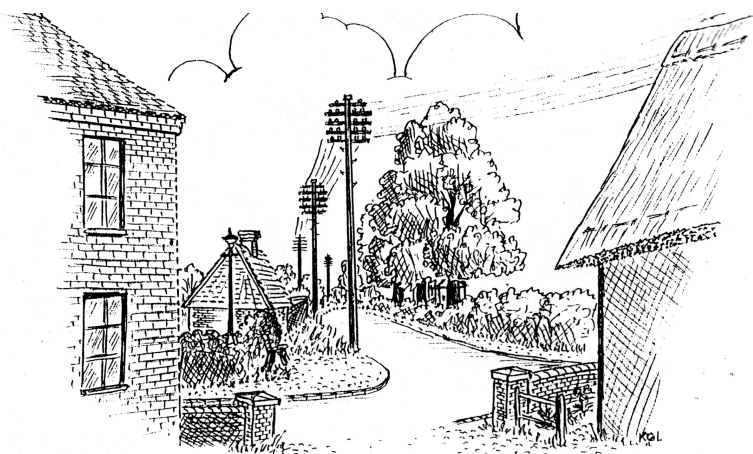
I'm going for a nice long hike  
Said Bumsey, getting on his bike.  
On he rode o're field and fence  
For he had but little sense.  
Then the back tyre went off bang  
Bumsey left his bike and ran  
On he ran down field and lane  
Until he ran back home again.  
He ran inside and shut the door  
And said "I'll not see that no more"

Bumsey stood outside Billy Sutton's  
Doing up his waistcoat buttons  
When up came Bummit from where he dwelt  
A carving knife stuck in his belt  
He charged that old warrior without fear  
And struck old Bumsey in the rear

Billy Sutton owned the newsagent and store near the far end of Sandy High Street and Bummit was Bumsey's old mate and sparring partner.

### HOME AGAIN

Back at the crossroads Pat and I drove into St John's Road past where Baxter's old shop used to be on the opposite side of the road. The memories took over again. There stood Wagstaffs' thatched cottage with the black-tarred wooden barns behind. Young Roy (Whistle) lived here with his granny when Mum and Dad moved from the village. As Roy's nickname implies, wherever he went he always whistled the popular songs of the time.



ST JOHN'S ROAD TO THE LEFT. BEDFORD ROAD STRAIGHT AHEAD

In the long meadow between the Wagstaffs' cottage and the Halls' Farm was another of the many roads that were dotted about the village and this one held many happy memories for us as youngsters. Two sides of the pond had a steep bank on which grew small blackberry bushes. At the far end an old tree trunk had fallen across the water. There was a gentle slope from the meadow into the pond at the other end. When the frost had done its job we would revel in the glorious delights and thrills of sliding under a clear crisp moonlit sky till our breath came out in puffs of mist, - our cheeks and fingers tingling. One after the other we ran, slipped and slid on that sheet of shiny ice ending up in a heap of arms, legs and bodies on the ice against the old tree trunk. All of us tried to scramble up first and be ready for another Cresta Run to shrieks of delight and laughter.

On the other side of the road opposite the meadow and between Baxter's shop and Matthew's farmhouse there was a very high brick wall. Behind it was Matthew's kitchen garden.



PART OF MATTHEWS FARMYARD.

The farmhouse stands at a right angle to the road. The farm was a favourite haunt of my young sisters, when they used to play with Florence Matthews. Edna and Lillian were her

elder sisters. The farm, sad to say, is but a mere shadow of its former self, the numerous old barns and out buildings are now in a state of disrepair and once they rang with the busy hustle and bustle of farm life. This is where Popeye worked driving the John Deere Tractor.

A quaint old chap came to the village. We called him Spider, - not his real name of course. It seems he hailed from the fens from round the March Wisbech area. Why he chose to continue his lay-about life style in Moggerhanger always evaded me. His home was an old bakers box type horse drawn van with pictures painted in the wooden panels. Its somewhat run down appearance went hand in hand with Spider's cloth-capped dishevelled looks. Mr Matthews allowed him to park his van behind the barns in the farmyard. Maybe it was Mr Matthew's kindhearted gesture that encouraged him not to move on. How Spider used to pay for his keep and what arrangement he had with Mr Matthews was known only to them, however, Spider did cook the potato peelings and mix up the mash for the chickens in the outhouse at the end of the farmhouse. He was also allowed to have his meals in there. Spider always seemed to have enough 'readies' to take himself to Bedford at the weekends where he undoubtedly consumed enough of the hard stuff with which to have a merry time. He would then stagger to the Bus Station at St Peters to catch the last bus home. His overfriendliness on those occasions was not always appreciated and his overpowering alcoholic breath was, to say the least, off-putting. His broad Fenland voice was rather harsh and on many occasions the bus conductor threatened to throw him off if he didn't quieten down. Yes, there were bus conductors in those days! I recall one time on the last bus when Spider was in a particularly obstreperous mood, which was more than the conductor, could stand. The warning went unheeded by Spider so the conductor stopped the bus even though he knew he hadn't reached his destination. Convincingly he got Spider to disembark then rang the bell and left poor old Spider a two or three mile walk home, much to the amusement of the other passengers.

Fred Matthews would preach in the Methodist Chapel on Sundays and his daughter Lillian would play the organ. The Chapel is on the same side of the road as the farm and just beyond the barns and the meadow. My sisters were regular attendees at this chapel. When visiting gospel preachers came to the village it was in Mr Matthew's meadow that they were welcome to pitch their marquee and sing praises to the Lord. We all enjoyed those evenings whatever our calling and of course, a cup of orange cordial and an iced bun helped to swell the throng. One of the songs we sang at those Band-of-Hope meetings was:

Jesus loves all the children  
All the children of the World  
Red and Yellow and Black and White  
All are precious in his sight  
Jesus loves all the Children of the World

We would sing this with gusto – at least twice during the evening.



## THE OUTING

A day out at the seaside was really something special to look forward to. It was the main event on the Chapel calendar as far as us kids were concerned. In preparation for that great day my sister Celia and I would go peasing. We would pick as many bags as we could to build up our seaside spending money. In the early part of the peasing season one could get up to three shillings and sixpence a bag. It seemed ages picking one of those sacks full and only for 17.5 new pence. It seemed to me that everyone in the villages would be going for this special seaside trip.

I recall the earlier outings when we would be taken on the back of a lorry with the heavy iron and wooden seats from the chapel set out in rows for us all to sit on. No standing was strictly enforced. Nowadays that mode of transport would be forbidden. Our assembly point was on the Guinea forecourt. It was strange that we were allowed to board there considering the Chapel strong teachings on abstinence. We were taken from there to Sandy Station and there we eagerly waited on the platform for the train to take us to Skeggy, as we called it. Boarding the steam powered train the youngsters would rush to secure a window seat and on the way there the usual bags goodies would be handed round to the children – apple, orange and a few sweets were the usual contents. We knew when we passed Boston Stump that we would soon be there. The Stump, as it was called, could be seen for miles around the flat Lincolnshire countryside. The Stump was the Boston Church tower said to be built on faggots laid down prior to the building of the foundations to stop it sinking into the peaty Fen countryside.

On reaching Skeggy we had a long road to walk through the town to the beach, passed rows and rows of souvenir shops and fish and chip shops. One shop in particular, I liked to linger in was a shop where they made the lettered seaside rock. They would make it in one big lump moulding in the letters at the same time. They then rolled it and finally drew it to the usual rock sized sticks and cropped it to length. This always intrigued me. When we got to the beach we hoped the tide would be in – at least Mum and Dad did – because it sure seemed to go out a long way. On our return journey there were the usual singsongs before reaching Sandy Station. Our luxury mode of transport would be waiting there to take us on the last leg of our journey home.

Later on when coaches took over from the trains we were deposited right in front of the seafront. Most of these trips seemed to favour Yarmouth. There was the usual singing of wary but happy refrains on the coaches and they were sung with no less gusto. One in particular was ‘Daisy Daisy’ to which we would sing these words:

Daisy, Daisy the coppers are after you,  
If they catch you, they’ll give you a month or two  
They’ll tie you up with wire  
Behind a Black Maria  
So ring your bell and pedal like hell  
On your bicycle made for two.

That version was very popular with the teenagers and was repeated more than once; the miles seemed to fly by. Those teenagers favoured the back seats. Mid-way stops were made at the roadside cafes (or caffs as we used to call them). Trips to the loo and refreshments were the order of the day and of course the inevitable few games on the pin ball and fruit machines, then it was on our way again. Many a small head was nodding off before we reached home safe and sound.

Hall’s farmhouse stands opposite the chapel and is also at right angles to the road with the farmyard in front of the house. This is surrounded on the other sides by barns and a milking parlour. It was here we that we came to collect our milk from the dairy at the end of the

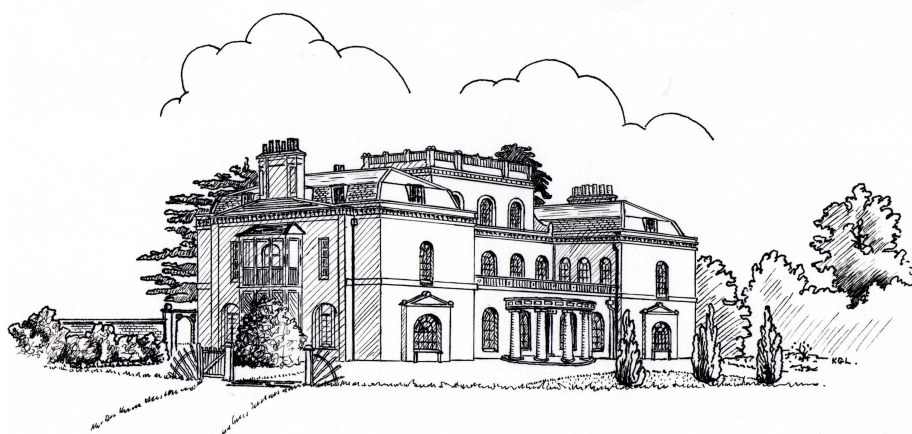
farmhouse. This is still an active farm today and where Daphne, my school day dancing partner still lives.

During the spring and summer in the meadow next to Hall's farm buildings there is a large patch of nettles, (at least there was), this spot was often a source of 'Free Range Eggs'. You see, the chickens used to venture into the meadow and to them the patch of nettles was an ideal nesting site. Although not a constant egg supply, it was the occasional bonus proving you did not mind getting stung in the process. Hall's orchard, further up St John's Road, has a high fence round it and several of the apple trees had large clumps of mistletoe growing on them. Even today mistletoe is still growing there and the clumps are now huge. One clump would be enough to supply the whole village at Christmas.



Beyond the orchard is a field and next to that is a short farm track that leads into the large meadow that fronts the eastern and south side of what was General Thornton's house. This is now the Sue Ryder Home. Alongside the road and end on to the farm track there was a long low brick shed with a pan-tiled roof. Most times when passing, one could hear the steady throb of a large engine emanating from inside. It was, I believe working to power a generator that supplied electricity to the Thornton household. Its steady beat is to be heard no more. The house that backed on to this generator shed must have been a rather noisy residence when the engine was working. It seems likely that the Thornton's had this unit installed before electricity came to the village and it is possible that its voltage was different from that supplied by the grid, hence its extended use before alterations were made in the house. Beyond this house was another group of thatched cottages before the drive to Thornton's was reached.

Opposite the generator shed was Brown's meadow. Mostly houses are built on there now and praise be, there was, and still is, another pond. This pond also froze over during the winter. It was open on three sides and at the back were hawthorn and blackberry bushes with a tall ash tree amongst them. A relic of that ash is still there. It was usual for this pond to provide us with the first slides of winter. I was one of the tots of the gang, so well it befell my lot to test out the ice. I would say to myself, as I gingerly edged my way across the ice, "If it bends it bears, if it cracks it breaks". This didn't help much especially when it bent and cracked at the same time. However, it was usually safe across the end where we would slide because the water was shallow there.



MOGGERHANGER HOUSE.

At the T-junction at the end of Browns' meadow, Park Road goes off to the right and meets the other section at the Park gates. A spinney runs halfway along the south side. Midway along the north side there is a block of houses and in the front house lived the Ashwells' and their daughter Jill. Mrs Ashwell (nee Little) was my Mum's cousin Emma and we used to call her Aunt Emm. Her elder sister Aunt Nancy spent her last days being looked after by my Aunt Emm and she was 101 years old when she passed away.

Miss Chapman, the infant school teacher, lived in one of those houses and another family, of Indian origin, the Rhodes lived in another. There were two daughters, Rosemary and Patsy; Patsy went to Bedford High School.

At the end of the south side of this section of Park Road there used to be an old large house and for a time Arthur Hall and his wife lived there. My sister Celia and I, when doing our rounds singing Christmas carols would be invited inside to sing; we stood in a large hall with an impressive staircase, it had an aura of past and better times. That old house has now disappeared and its history has gone too.

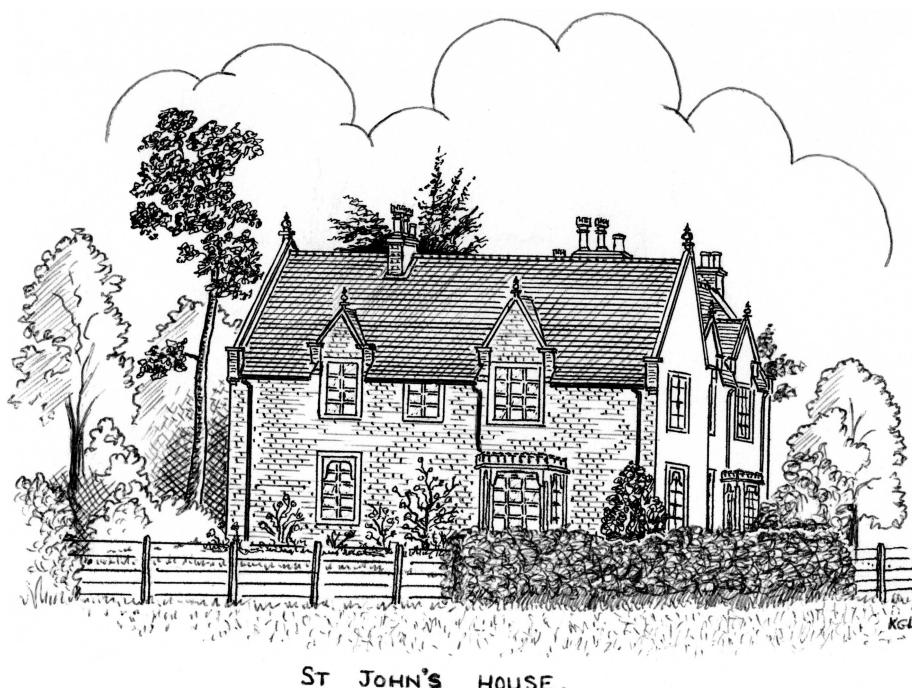
On the corner of the entrance to the Park on the opposite side of the road stands a cottage where the Collis family lived, across the road in the wall pillar is an old Victorian letterbox – still in use today. The Park gateway leads up the drive to the grand building of 'Moggerhanger House'

In 1777 the estate became the possession of Robert Thornton who sold it to Godfrey Thornton, who was at that time Director of the Bank of England. In 1790 Godfrey employed architect Sir John Soane to modify the house to make it more comfortable (carried out 1792 – 1793, and cost £3,287). Godfrey died in 1805 and the estate passed to Stephen his son, who was also Director of the Bank of England. Stephen had further extensions added and it is now noted for its Doric-columned curved portico. In 1795 Humphrey Repton, the landscape gardener came to Moggerhanger House and prepared plans for improving the estate. His Red Book which he presented them with described the house: - It is too large and much too ornamental for a farm house, while it is too small and too humble for a family country seat and its distance from the capital is too great to permit its being called a villa. I shall therefore consider it as an occasional sporting seat.

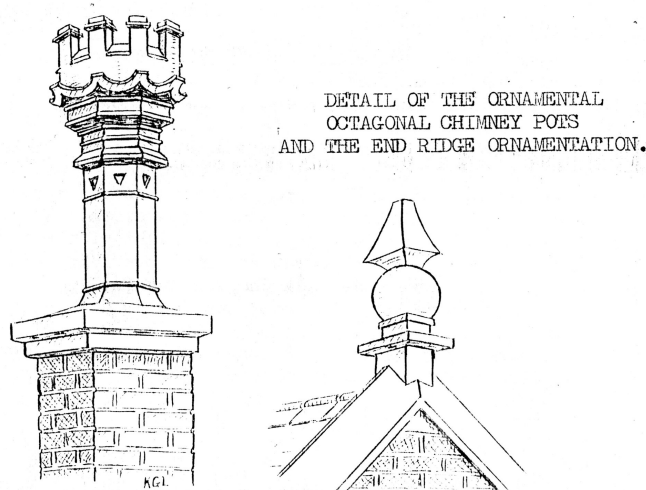
Stephen Thornton died in 1850 and Colonel Godfrey Thornton, Stephen's eldest son, inherited the estate. Then in 1857 he died and it passed to Colonel William Thornton, second



son of Godfrey. William sold it on to the Dawkins family and he and his family moved to St John's House in St John's Road.



By 1919 the estate had passed through several hands and was acquired by Bedfordshire County Council. It was used as a sanatorium then later as Park Hospital as an orthopaedic centre; this closed on Christmas Eve 1987. Its future looked suspect until taken over in 1995 by a Christian trust called Harvest Vision. They took over the main house and 15 acres of the grounds for the grand sum of £1, on condition that they paid for renovations and restoration of the house. Restorations went ahead and, working closely with English Heritage it is now a 'listed Grade 1 building' and a grant from the Lottery of £3,000,000 has secured its future.



I'm sure that Sir John Soane (1753 – 1837) would be well pleased to know that one of his country houses is now on its way to complete restoration. Soane, a neo-classicist, was also responsible for designing the Bank of England, Dulwich College and the Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields London.

Park Hospital was where the Stacey sisters worked and at one time Mum worked there part time as a seamstress maintaining the hospital linen. Near to the big house in the park grounds

there was a beautiful wood alongside the walled Victorian style garden. This wood in spring is covered in parts with a carpet of snowdrops, a sight to behold. (I don't recall seeing Spider exert to extreme physical effort for his livelihood, but it's my guess that this is where he picked his bunches of snowdrops that he sold on Bedford market to support his meagre needs.) In recent years the wood has been dominated by Dutch elm disease. Behind the north wall of the Victorian garden there was an icehouse, this was in keeping with all the large country houses of the Victorian era.

During the war the army set up a camp site in the park grounds under the avenue of trees that led from the big house out to the Bedford Road (opposite the drive that led to Vic Davison's Willow Hill Farm. The Peacock family lived in a house halfway along this drive, it sure must have been a long lonely walk for young Snip (Philip) to get to school). When my mate and I heard of the army's presence in the park we were off like a shot so off we rode on our bikes to investigate. Whilst we were there we saw a group of soldiers looking up into the trees so we moved over to have a look. The soldiers had seen a pigeon fly up into the top of a tree and when we pointed out to him where it was, he took aim with his .303 rifle and fired, we blinked from the loud report and when we looked again all we saw was a few pigeon feathers fluttering down. I don't think they got their pigeon pie and I doubt if that pigeon came anywhere near that spot again – at least, not whilst the soldiers were there.

#### A PARTING SHOT.

(1) He said, 'Do not point your gun  
At the dove in the Judas tree:  
It might go off, you see.'

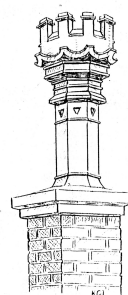
(2) So I fired, and the tree came down  
Limed leaf, branch and stock,  
And the fantail swerving flew  
Up like a shuttlecock  
Released into the blue.

And he said, 'I told you so.'

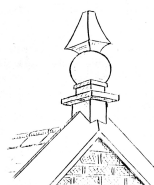
C. Day Lewis.



ST JOHN'S HOUSE.



DETAIL OF THE ORNAMENTAL  
OCTAGONAL CHIMNEY POTS  
AND THE END RIDGE ORNAMENTATION.



Near the avenue of trees there was a long narrow copse and the long straight hazel saplings provided us with ready-made arrow shafts. In the autumn we would go there and shake the



hazel branches then pick up the hazel nuts when they fell to the ground. On our way back home through the park we would head for the walnut trees and seek out the fallen nuts from amongst the long grass; those we added to our collection.

Back to the t-junction in St John's Road we head for Budna. On our immediate left tall lime trees border the drive that lead to Colonel William Thornton's house (St John's House) – entry in the General Post Office Directory 1854. Among the highest branches of these limes grow many a clump of mistletoe, way beyond our reach.

For many years at Moggerhanger village school, General (as we affectionately called him) Thornton – retired – donated a large Christmas tree for the children's party and for each child there was a present from him and his good lady. What a moment that was, waiting for each gift to be cut down from the beautiful tree. We listened eagerly for our names to be called then we almost ran to collect our gifts, not forgetting to bow or curtsy to our benefactor – it was the highlight of our evening. An evening that had started with a sit down tea, to be followed by a magician, a magic lantern show or some other entertainment. We were then called upon to sing carols round the Christmas tree accompanied at the piano by Miss Chapman. These carols were our thanks to General Thornton and all the willing helpers at the party, then after the call for 'Three Cheers' and a 'Happy Christmas to All', the National Anthem was sung, we all made our way home glowing with happiness.

During the summer there were garden fetes; these were held on the big lawn in front of the General's house and were in aid of charities. One of the highlights of these fetes was of course 'Bowling for the Pig'. This was usually donated by Mr Vic Davison. It was always suspected that the No 6 hole was too small for the ball to pass through and until it was demonstrated that it would indeed go through, then all were eager to try their luck. After six balls had been bowled and a record was kept and at the end of the day if there was a tie, there was a playoff. Sometimes the winner was unable to keep the pig, in which case a deal was struck, with Mr Davison buying back the pig. Fetes are still held here and are now in aid of the Sue Ryder Foundation – a worthy cause.

When the Sue Ryder Foundation took over the house additional buildings were constructed and it became a home for the terminally ill patients. Dad always admired the ornate chimney pots on this old house and when he died his remembrance collection – instead of flowers – was sent here.

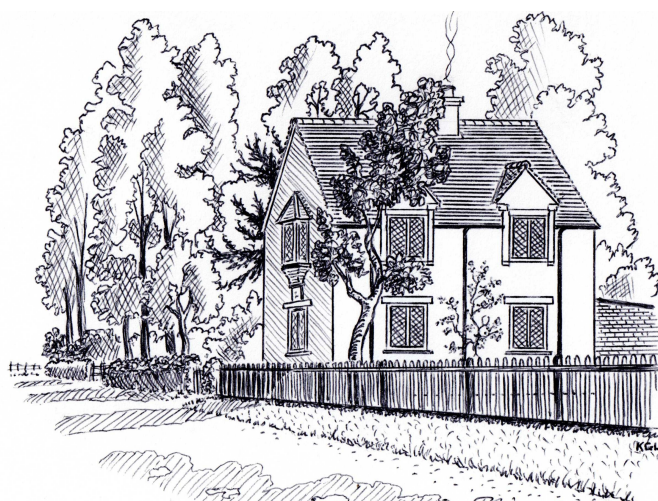
By the roadside beyond the driveway to St John's House and on the same side lived the Thornton estate manager in St John's Lodge. The Philips lived here. Every year above the road-facing window, bees built their hive between the roof and the ceiling of this bay window. Usually after the lime trees had flowered the honey would drip through the ceiling (so I was told by Dick Philips, their son). From the road you could watch the bees flying to and fro from under the eaves of the window.

Continuing along this stretch of the Budna Road the branches of the trees in the spinneys on both sides used to touch in a canopy above the road, but since the Dutch elm disease the trees have been drastically thinned out and now most of the tall trees have disappeared leaving an open sky above. Now only spindly saplings border the roadsides. There are two ponds, one on the far side of each spinney, out of sight of the road. Neither was good for sliding on, there was too much overhang and undergrowth round the edges and the reeds made the ice unsafe.

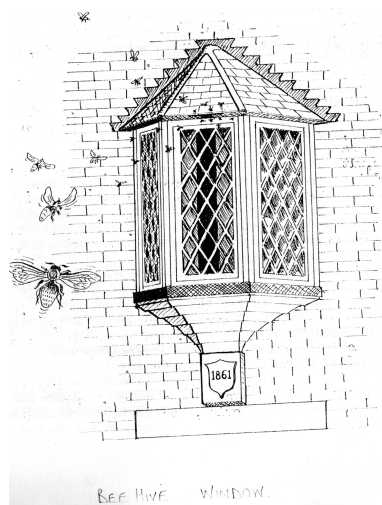
The pond on Thornton's side of the road was fed by a stream that flowed from the roadside ditch at the bottom of the slight incline. This pond was difficult for direct access but could be approached from Thornton's meadow. The pond was usually home to a family of moorhens who built their nests way out of reach of light fingered hands. There were many an ivy

covered trunk along the side of this spinney which had quite a range of nesting birds, but the one I liked to find was the nest of the wren, such an elaborate nest for such a tiny bird and built with a roof and beautifully lined with down. At the end of the spinneys you could look up ahead to Sherehatch Wood. The meadow that flanked General Thornton's house ended at a hedgerow at right angles to the road, it was interspersed by a line of trees; the clump at the end of this line were larch. The land on the south side of the hedgerow was cultivated and along the headland a foot-worn track led towards the east across a style into another meadow that stretched right up to the Budna and Thorncote Green road. Poole's Farm backed onto this meadow in the vale ahead, with Budna Farm over the hill to the left.

(77)



ST JOHN'S LODGE.



BEE HIVE WINDOW.

The meadow was full of all sorts of wildlife and a crystal clear brook flowed along the lower eastern side into a pond midway along the brook. This was an ideal spot to watch frogs, newts and tiddlers swimming and a jam jar came in handy in which to take home some tadpoles. Watercress was also there for the taking. There were plenty of rabbits that grazed this meadow, hares too. Quite a flock of plovers with their distinctive cry used to soar over this area and partridge and skylarks would nest in the long grass.

Milkmaids abounded in the wetter areas of the meadow and in the spring the meadow was a sea of cowslips; we would pluck the flower heads and fill a paper carrier bag, then take them to Miss Chapman who would make wine with them. Dandelions and coltsfoot grew there too and we gathered them in a like fashion. Patches of dog-daisies nodded their heads amongst the yellow buttercups and daisies; a few wild orchids bloomed there as well.

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower.

William Blake

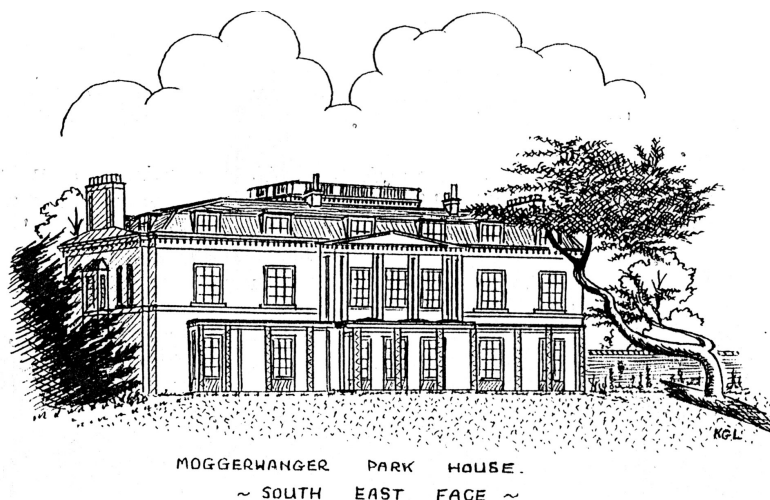
That meadow has disappeared under the plough and with it its beauty.

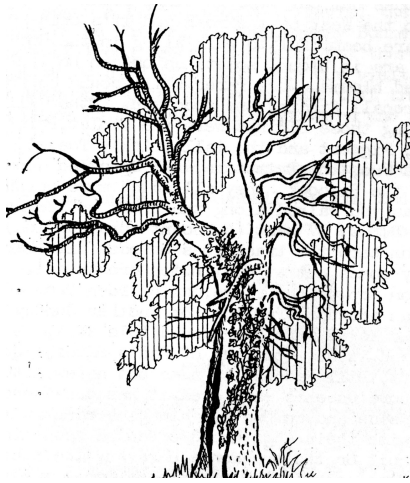
Across the brook at the northern end of the meadow and through a five-barred gate there was another meadow. This was flanked on its north side by Lady Wood and on its west and south sides by high hawthorn hedges. In the middle of this east-west sloping meadow there was a square-shaped wood and its sparse trees allowed blackberries to grow between them, although the hedges around the meadow supplied the best fruit for those yummy blackberry and apple puddings. The eastern side of this meadow was mostly fenced in, with a line of Lombardy poplars along it. Their tall tops proved fatal one night during the war. It was on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1941 when a low-flying Lockheed Hudson of Coastal Command clipped the top of a couple of poplars and it crashed into the meadow between the square wood and the southern hedge. Sadly the crew perished. I picked up a few pieces of Perspex from the windows of the plane and fashioned them into rings and crosses. Where they eventually went to, I do not know. Even that meadow and wood have disappeared under the plough.

In wartime, with the need for homegrown food there wasn't as much widespread and intensive farming as there is today. Indeed, where there was open farmland which was considered a possible landing site for enemy troop-carrying gliders, upright poles were erected criss-crossing these fields, with wires stretched taut between them. These were designed to cause the gliders to crash on landing, in the hope that it would immobilise most of the enemy troops they carried.

Back to the Budna road – on the right hand side beyond the old water filter beds you get a grand view of Moggerhanger House in the park with the snowdrop wood sweeping behind it and round to the left. On the lawn to the left of the house stood a large cedar of Lebanon, a grand tree emphasising the importance of the house. When the house was used as a sanatorium they held summer fetes on its closely cut turf and they were usually opened by one of the local dignitaries.

We move on up the road to where an old crab apple tree used to flourish, its tempting but tart fruits attracted the unwary. Beyond the crab apple in the field, nearer to the sanatorium, there was another overgrown pond.





THE OLD OAK TREE  
STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

A little further up the road from the crab apple and on the other side of the road there still stands the old oak tree. One day this was struck by lightning, the scar on its trunk is still visible. From here and on by Sherehatch Wood as far as 'deadman's oak' both sides of the road are bordered by wide verges. It was along these verges that 'Papa' and Violet Dawson would graze their stock. That was how things were until the farmers grubbed up the hedgerows, filled in the ditches then ploughed to within a few feet of the road. Even down the Budna road the verges are but a shadow of their past glory. The various variety of violets, the hips and haws of the wild rose and the hawthorn, the elderberries and other wild hedgerow fruits are now just a memory. When the wildlife invades the farmer's crops, he wonders why. He then proceeds to scare the 'pests' away with guns and noisy bird-scarers. There was peace and a balance in the countryside in those days.

Opposite the Budna-Thorncote Green turn the farm headland meandered at right angles along a spinney and a hedgerow or two before joining the southernmost end of the sanatorium snowdrop wood. This route made for a nice circuitous walk with the winding path through the wood taking you back to Park Road, 'round town' and home. A wonderful Sunday afternoon or evening stroll.

Before we leave this spot I recall that it was said the Budna road led to the 'Budna treacle pits'! I have yet to see those pits and that remains a sticky question, or could it just be the mire in the Budna Farm yard? I wonder. The land to the right of the road after the Budna turn was farmed during the war by a conscientious objector and on this piece of land was another of the village ponds. This pond was surrounded by pussy willows; their silver catkin buds would sparkle in the sun before they burst into a glorious yellow. Bull-rushes also flourished in this pond. Ponds were mostly manmade, sometimes where clay had been extracted for local brick making, or as a watering hole for their stock where no stream or brook existed. That being so there must have been far more cattle in the area than there is today, most land is now arable.

We now draw level with Sherehatch Wood. Just inside the wood there was a house called The Wood House, but only the footings remained when we knew it. Sherehatch Wood is to the west of the road and it is criss-crossed by a lattice of ridings. They are beautiful to walk along in the spring, especially when the bluebells are in bloom. Sometimes one can be lucky and find several white flowered blooms. Much rarer still could be found a butterfly orchid – I only ever recall finding one specimen. Other wild flowers that were numerous along those ridings were the violet, primrose, self-heal, bugle, wood anemone, figwort and the tall prickly teasel.

Butterflies flitted to and fro, the brimstone, the speckled wood, the orange tip, tortoiseshell and the peacock, they all added more colour and movement to the wild flowers as you walked

along the track on the north side of the wood, on past the B.B.C. TV mast (a recent construction) then over the brow of the hill. From here the track goes on past Hill Farm then drops down and eventually comes out at Willington crossroads.

Sherehatch Wood, standing on top of the ridge, can be seen from afar from many directions and was an added attraction for another Sunday afternoon walk from the village. Dad loved strolling round this area, it was his favourite walk, as indeed it was for many of Dad's mates, 'Squibber' Jeeves, Fred Dunham, Jack Craft, Bill Jacobs, to name but a few. Although Dad lived and was born in Bedford, Queen's Park area, it was considered in those days part of the countryside and so Dad was always a country lad at heart. Dad and Jack Danniels, with their dogs, would often be seen alongside the wood ever hopeful of a rabbit or two, or even a bird for the table.

Many a winter's Saturday afternoon I've been to those woods with Dad collecting the fallen logs and braches for firewood. We would drag the timber to the edge of the wood to where we had parked our bikes and when we had enough assembled I would hold Dad's bike, then he would carefully load the poles – some up to 10ft long – across the handlebars and the saddle. Then securely lashed in place and allowing the handlebars to turn enough for steering we set off for the long walk home. It could be said that we were warmed four times with that winter fuel, once gathering the logs, secondly carting them home, thirdly cutting them up and stacking them in the barn and finally, sitting contentedly in front of a nice warm log fire on a wet or icy cold day.

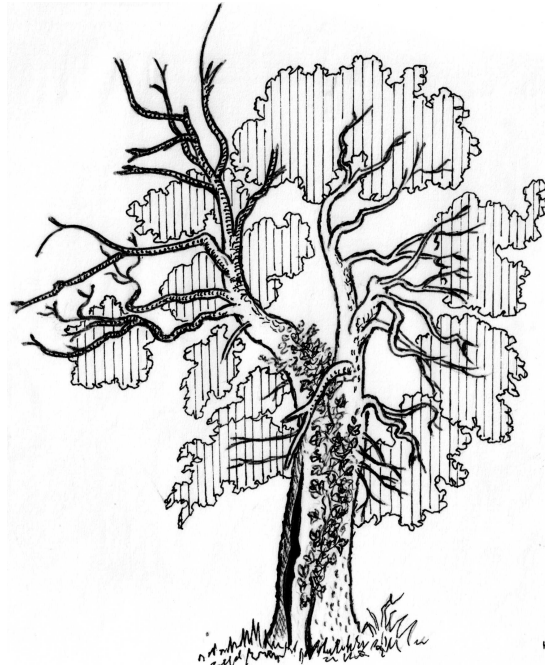
In the middle of Sherehatch Wood at the junction of the main ridings there was a gamekeeper's hut. Near the hut lines were strung between two vertical poles and all the gamekeeper's vermin trophies were hanging on this line – I'm not quite sure if he did this to warn other vermin to keep away, or to impress the estate owner that he was doing his job. Some hanging there were fresh, like the jay and the stoat, when I saw them and others had evidently been there for some time and were just skeletons.

At the southern end of Sherehatch Wood (Mox Hill) the Budna road ends at a t-junction on the Northill to Cople road, and Cardington. This spot is called 'Deadman's Oak' and is marked on the maps of the area. The story goes that a thief or highwayman met his just deserts on the spot where the oak tree now stands. It was said that he was staked out spread-eagle fashion until he was no more and that one of the oak stakes took root; the oak tree that grew still stands on that sharp corner to this day. Sadly the trunk is suffering the ravages of time, from posters being nailed to it to modern-day long vehicles scarring its bark as they try to negotiate the sharp corner.

In Sherehatch Wood near 'Deadman's Oak' along the last east-west riding there is a small clearing round a tall oak tree. Beneath this tree I scattered Dad's ashes. (It was at his request that they should be scattered in the wood and what better place for a carpenter – under an oak tree!) The sun shines down on this spot allowing the woodland plants to thrive once more and to re-establish themselves.

Pat and I visited that spot on that October day and whilst we were there Pat sowed a few *aquilegia vulgaris*, the Colorado State flower the columbine (or as Mum called them, Granny Bonnets). We will have to wait to see if any of those seeds germinate. Not there long enough to observe all the animals and bird life, and like our visit the grey squirrel let himself be seen only briefly. So we left that tranquil spot for the flora and the fauna to flourish, at the southern end of Moggerhanger!

In the 'Book of Remembrance' for Dad we wrote: -  
Resting where the Bluebells bloom, And the Oak leaves fall.  
1906-1977 At Peace.



In 1995 Mum passed away and her ashes were put to rest in  
her Mum and Dad's grave in Blunham Cemetery.  
1906-1995.

Three trees were planted on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1995 in Moggerhanger School grounds, to the  
memory of Mum and Dad. They were donated and planted by Auntie Bubbles and Uncle  
Alec. Mr and Mrs Hyde (Mike and Shirley – cousin).  
The other one was planted by Mr and Mrs Mann (Terry – cousin)

The trees planted were:  
*Acer pseudoplatanus*, 'Brilliantissimum'  
*Robinia pseudoacacia*, 'Frisia'  
*Betula utilis*, 'Jacquemontii'

Reproduced for the Moggerhanger Website by kind permission of Keith Lawrence