

## OLD SWANNINGTON. IN ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

P E Shipman

*The bulk of the magazine this time is taken up by one long but very welcome article by Mrs. P.E. Shipman. As Peggy Stacey, Mrs. Shipman will be very well remembered by older Swannington members. Though now living in Dorset, she retains her interest in and contacts within the village and her continuing support of the Chapel is greatly valued.*

*When she agreed to write for us, Mrs. Shipman asked how long her article should be and we replied that something in the order of 1500 words would be welcome, but not to worry if it ran somewhat longer than that. She took us at our word, and here is the result - 7797 words. It is marvellously evocative, capturing with great skill the essential simplicity and innocence of the thirties. How long ago it seems, how long ago it is! Because the article does not lend itself to line drawings within the text, we have changed our format to include a double page of photographs for this issue only.*

I used to think they were singing about our village as well they might, surely one of the nicest, safest places to live. Old houses (we lived in one from 1939), new ones in between. The people took pride in their gardens, lots of lovely flowers. Where else could you go for a stamp or to post a letter, and, opening the gate, see one of the prettiest gardens ever. That was always worth a visit. The pump in the middle of the village, always an attraction for children. The farms, with the cows being allowed to walk from one field to another through the street and lanes. The characters that were ordinary people and yet I remember them well. Jimmy Hall, the sweep, everyone knew him, he swept most of the chimneys throughout the village. Not always on the day requested mind you, could be the next day or even the one after that. Irritating yes, but he was so deaf he couldn't hear if someone was cross, he was so eager to please once he did arrive.

The old tramp with a beard like Father Christmas came round every year begging coppers and clothes. Mamma always found him something to wear, an old overcoat or a warm scarf, coppers for a cuppa. Dad used to say he was much better off than we were and he was proved right. Years later he died and left over £100,000.

The insurance man who, when signing the book, drew a pen out of his waistcoat pocket with an ordinary nib and yet it had ink on it. We were convinced it was magic since he never had to unscrew the top from an ink bottle. Years later we realised it was a non-spill ink bottle.

Memories, too, of the man with the goldfish, we pestered our mothers for woolly items and in return the jam jar with the goldfish. We kept one of ours for years.

I also have vivid memories of having to go to the butcher's once a week with a jug for tripe. I disliked the look and the smell, but our neighbour loved it and this was her weekly treat. Thank goodness none of our family liked it.

Another character I remember so well was our local Policeman, P.C. Grant: tall, imposing, even more so with his helmet on as he sat tall in the saddle (cycle), friendly, direct, always ready for a word. When he came to the house to check the dog licence, it was a formality, he enjoyed looking at the garden and the livestock. I couldn't imagine a child being afraid of him, he inspired confidence.

The threshing machine visiting each of the farms, best of all for me the men who came to tar the roads. I loved the smell of tar, more than once stood too close and went home with it on my legs and dress. Everyone knew everyone else and a cry for help was never ignored. If someone was ill, many were the callers asking for news. We'd no street lights, no type of entertainment laid on, only through the Chapel or in one's own home, yet the days were always full. I was lucky being the youngest in the family and my cousins were all older but they always had time for a word with me.

I was never bored or lonely as a child, so much to do and see. Books played a big part in my life and still do. I could lose myself in a book for hours and if it was sad e.g. Uncle Tom's Cabin, a Tale of Two Cities, The Count of Monte Cristo amongst others, then I finished up under the table and cried quietly. Mother's family were big readers, and grandfather, an avid reader of the classics, would quote from them at the drop of a hat. Gordon and I presumably inherited our love of books from him. Mamma read to us by the hour until we in turn, when older returned the compliment. Fairy Stories, Nursery Rhymes, Books for Boys or Girls, then on to the Bible, Canterbury Tales, poetry. The Bible was the only book we were allowed to read on Sundays. Books were my friends before I ever went to school. Gordon said I lived in my own fantasy world, only coming back out of it to eat and sleep. Dolls I had no time for at all!

The Chapel has always played a very big part in my life too. So many exciting things happened there. The highlight of the year being Whit Sunday and the Anniversary. First the rehearsals; the patience of the conductor Wilf Beniston; my cousin Rene who played the piano, over and over again, as we struggled to master the words and tunes. When I was four I sang, 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam'. A lady on the front row came, pressed a half crown in my hand and whispered "that was lovely". This was wealth indeed. I'm ashamed to confess all thoughts 'Holy' fled from my mind. I was too busy trying to work out how many visits to Jinny Preston's shop spending 1/4d each time that would be. I noticed Dad wiping his eyes too but Mamma came and whispered he'd something in his eye. In those days I loved sweets. Dad and I had a special arrangement with money. They were called odd h'pennies. I thought it was a special coin only he had. Twice a week I would ask if he had any odd h'pennies. Sometimes he would give me one but if he hadn't any I would offer to get change! It worked occasionally too. My nose would be pressed to the shop window deciding what to buy. I would need a lot for my money as the family all dipped in. Dolly mixtures - my aunt loved the jellies, ju-ju she called them and would shake the



bag trying to pick them all out. It hurt me just to watch, so having been given a pair of child's scissors, quite blunt, I cut them all in half, felt a lot better then. I did that for years too.

Each year the Sermons were bigger and better with each succeeding collection a little more than the year before. On Whit Monday we were taken out for the day, could be Skegness or Rhyl or Wicksteed Park. Each year a different place. Free for the Sunday School children and usually 10/- for the parents. One year an elderly lady recently come to live in the village, came with us; the look of wonder on her face when she saw the sea for the first time, followed by tears. She was so overcome.

Another year a special train had been reserved for us from Coalville calling at Swannington. In those days Dad went to a barber's near to Coalville Station to be shaved. I went with him on a Saturday sometimes fascinated to see the shaving soap go on with such skill and speed and off in seconds with the whiskers using the cut throat razors. He was to meet us on Swannington Station, Mamma, Gordon and I and many of my cousins. We were all getting worried when he didn't arrive; I was in tears and Gordon was biting his lip. Mamma said we couldn't go without Dad. Then we could hear the train, 'What could be done?' Then the cry went up from some of my cousins, 'Here's Uncle Harry'. There he was on the train. He'd fainted whilst being shaved and realised afterwards he hadn't time to walk back to Swannington so had the presence of mind to walk across the road to Coalville Station and get on there. The sheer relief we all felt. The Staceys took up most of one coach, good job it was a corridor as Dad had to relate to one and all why he was so late!

So many highlights in the village during any one year. My cousin Ida coming to collect for 'the March Effort'. Mamma always baked small cakes for it and I was allowed to go on the day and help. This usually consisted of putting the crockery on the long trestle tables. The blue and white as far as they would go and then my favourites, mauve and white. The helpers all had a cup of tea before the start, but as I've never drunk tea I had milk out of a mauve and white cup. This was all in the school room. Then there was Easter and those lovely hymns. We'd the Harvest Festival to look forward to in September carrying a basket of fruit purchased in Coalville and Dad buying it back on the Monday, and the vegetables and flowers all scrubbed clean and sent to be sold on the Monday.

Dad and I used to roam the fields in all weathers, other than rain, walking miles and he would explain the different leaves on the trees and talk about the birds

flying about. I knew where the elusive violet grew, the first honeysuckle and many birds' nests - to look not to touch. Farm Town was a favourite walk. Limby Hall, Coleorton, Ashby, Thringstone, Gracedieu etc. Saturdays it was usually Dad and I but the whole family in the evening and on Sundays. I was only six when we were walking through Thringstone one such evening and as a treat I was allowed to carry Dad's bowler hat, very fashionable in those days. After a time I put this bowler on my head where it promptly fell over my eyes. Gordon and I were walking behind the others and although he tried to stifle his giggles he couldn't. Dad turned around and caught me floundering around under this hat. They were both so cross with me and I was told I would never be allowed to carry the wretched thing again! I did but never wore it again.

We spent some delightful Saturday afternoons at Spring Hill Farm picking bilberries, taking a picnic tea. We walked, straight after lunch. Sometimes Auntie Polly came and Ida and Rene. Dad, Gordon and I picked our baskets full and afterwards we fetched a tray of tea from the farm, milk for me, and enjoyed our picnic, knowing the fruits of our labour would be in a pie the next day.

Haymaking time was great fun especially for the boys who were allowed to ride home on the top of the last load of hay. October was another exciting time. The fair came to the village in the field we called the reccy next to the school. The carousel was my favourite, the cake walk and the stalls. Someone always managed a coconut for me. One never to be forgotten year we were invited into Dinah's caravan. She was one of the older fair people. It was spotless with a white bed cover, pretty tray cloths, a coal burning stove and a very friendly horse to draw it. I felt this must be a wonderful life and it probably was in the summer but what about the winter months? Dad also took us to the blacksmith's to have chisels etc. sharpened. We enjoyed that and if a horse was being reshod that was a bonus even though we cringed when the red hot shoe was being fitted but were assured he didn't feel any pain!

Donington Races were exciting too. I was allowed to sit on the step and watch the motor cycles go past, more traffic than we saw in a year.

Then came November 5th, my birthday, the excitement with a large bonfire and lots of fireworks with 'Bonfire toffee', tray after tray for everyone there, made of course by Mamma. One year Mrs. Johnson who lived next door gave us a tailor's dummy no longer needed. Dad stuffed it with straw soaked in paraffin and dressed in an old suit of his from the mine already impregnated with oil grease.



He was the best guy ever and sat in splendour on top of the bonfire. My uncle and some of my older cousins took the younger boys to the top of the garden with all the 'Bangers'. Gordon and his pals loved that part whilst we enjoyed the pretty ones. Then came the preparations for Christmas, the stirring of the puddings, the mincemeat with me turning the handle of the mincer and then the cake later to have the almond paste, icing and decorations. The excitement was building up all the time. Christmas then and now my favourite time of the year. As Dickens said, 'There is magic in the very name of Christmas', how true that is. Christmas Eve and before bed two mincepies and a half pint of milk left for Santa Claus. To our great delight everything had gone in the morning. We rushed downstairs searching for the pillow cases crammed with gifts. No dolls thank goodness but plenty of books. I spent all Christmas reading mine and then started on Gordon's. Sheer magic.

My friend Margaret lived in Burton on Trent. We were the same age and our mothers had been friends from school. She loved coming to Swannington and we always went to my very favourite place. Just inside Adcock's field was the most marvellous place to play. A mound like an upside down pie-dish and another resembling a basin. We played for hours there and when Margaret was not there I went alone. Reading, acting from a play, learning the Anniversary hymns, my only audience the sheep. When I was seven it was decided I could travel to Burton on the train alone, in the care of the guard. My parents took me to the Station and when the train came the guard locked me in until we reached Burton. The carriage handle was tried many times as we stopped at the various stations, but the guard refused to let anyone in. Sometimes he would come and speak to me, but usually just look in. I was too busy reading so didn't always notice him. The same thing happened at night coming home with Dad waiting at the Station to lift me down. This went on for about two years and then I was old enough to travel alone without the protection of the guard although they still checked up on me. I once went for a week's holiday and had to stay a month, I caught the mumps and couldn't come home in case Gordon caught them. I was well looked after but remember being so homesick.

I was about eight or nine when playing on a seesaw at Dalbys I fell off and in great pain staggered home. Dr. Parker was away and the relief doctor said my arm wasn't broken but badly sprained. It was still very painful, but it wasn't until Dr. Parker returned that he declared it to be broken and I was to go to the Leicester Royal Infirmary. They confirmed it was a break but, owing to the delay in confirmation, gristle had grown between the bones and the only thing to do

was to have it broken at the Hospital and re-set. Dad wouldn't sanction that so I'm left with a slightly peculiar elbow on the right arm. The reason for mentioning this was that each Wednesday for around six weeks we had to attend the Royal. I was also able to visit Father Christmas, it was November-December and Rowbothams in Belvoir Street was the best in town. Each week I was promised that, if I didn't cry, then a visit to Father Christmas was assured. With my arm in a sling I had a lot of sympathy from the old gentleman and a promise of more books. I also asked if Gordon could have more parts for his Meccano. He got them too.

Then there were the missionary cards; I collected all over the village for my cousin Ida. My stock phrase was, 'Please could you spare a penny for the starving children of Africa'. I was a menace and must have caused irritation calling on people in an evening but everyone was very kind and I always did quite well. I have a scroll to prove it.

Gordon contracted rheumatic fever when he was seven and was very ill. I stayed with him constantly and, as he was getting better, read to him, played Snakes and Ladders, Ludo etc. and when it was time for our morning milk and biscuits we would poke bits of biscuit into the mouth of the one doll I had and then shake it to hear it rattle. It was the only time she got any attention. Dad taught us to play dominoes and cards before I went to school. A way of teaching me to count and I so enjoyed it. I loved being at home with my mother but I also wanted to go to school. I used to watch through the garden hedge when they were in the recy, and peered through the school gates when it was their playtime. They promised I could go when I was 4½ years of age, but first I must be able to tie my laces on winter shoes and fasten buttons on my coat, also to tell the time. It took a lot of coaching with the laces and even more with the time. Gordon got quite exasperated when I repeatedly said the little hand is on --- and the big hand on ---!! We sorted it out eventually, and off to school I went. I so wanted milk out of a bottle! I didn't cry but Mamma did, she confessed later. I enjoyed school, especially reading, history, English, spelling - arithmetic came a poor second. Tuesdays, we had singing. We belted out 'Bay of Biscay', and 'Oh no John' but 'Who is Sylvia' was most uninteresting. The headmaster, Mr. Page, left to go to Bridge Road School and we had a temporary head called Mr. Perry or Mr. Perrin. One day whilst in Miss Robinson's class, he came in and asked her to excuse him for a few minutes. He then told us to lean back, close our eyes, and he would read us a story. Actually it was a poem and the first line went 'There are fairies at the bottom of my garden'. I was entranced, this beat lessons



hands down. He was certainly my pin-up if we'd had that sort of thing. He also for the first time brought in a head girl and boy and prefects, something we'd never had.

There was a hedge between the school and the cottages then, no path. I have fond memories of the huge fires we had at school too. In Miss Robinson's class we had the open fire and a stove. I missed it when I left.

I'm not able to give the exact date, but think it was about 1930-31. Great excitement in the village around 8.30am when a plane crashed in the field opposite Station Hill houses. I believe some of the boys dashed up there immediately risking the prospect of being late for school. The rest were all there at lunch time and Gordon proudly displayed a small piece of wood as a souvenir. Dad took me up after school. It was then guarded by the police and we understood the pilot was not badly injured. Whilst we were looking at this frail object, the closest most of us had been to a plane, we had a most violent thunderstorm, torrential rain and lightning. I was terrified, have been ever since.

Miss Robinson each year took the pupils who had passed the scholarship away for a day paying all expenses. Gordon had gone to Rhyl four years earlier, and in my year we were to be taken to London. The sheer excitement, I'd never been to London and we had a marvellous day. Refreshments on the train, taxi to the Palace, Madame Tussauds, lunch and more sightseeing. It was fantastic. I absorbed it like a sponge. The thing I remembered most was my first glimpse of a lady with green hair! We didn't have that sort of thing in the village. It was also Miss Robinson who organised the annual collections for Alexander Rose Day. Hannah Walker and I collected from the top of the Common to the Post Office and two more girls the rest of the village. We met up taking the money to Miss Robinson at the Fountain Inn. We enjoyed a lemonade and a chocolate wafer biscuit whilst the money was being counted. Everyone was very generous and we all did well and enjoyed ourselves.

Gordon, now at the Grammar School, brought home raffle tickets to sell and I was roped in to help and was detailed to go to Lady Beaumont's. He went with me but stayed out of sight. I rang the bell very nervously but when the door was opened and I explained my visit, Lady Beaumont called me in. She wanted to know about Gordon being at the Grammar School. Remembered who Dad was and asked after Mamma. I answered and hope it made sense but was too busy looking at what appeared to be a hollow tree trunk full of water with lilies

floating on top. I'd never seen anything like it and never forgot it. It was beautiful.

After leaving the village school I should have gone to Ashby Grammar School for Girls but as no-one else was going I decided to join my friends and go to Broom Leys. Beautiful building and surroundings. Unfortunately we were put into different classes but soon made friends. I enjoyed my time there, even made the 1st XI hockey team. Only one of the teachers was not to our liking. He seemed to take a dislike to 1A on the first day. He asked for the obliterator. We all looked at each other in confusion and he yelled at one of the boys on the front and pointed, we realised he wished to clean the blackboard, but it was called a duster in Junior School. I'm pleased I sat at the back. It seemed to be a case of Dr. Fell and was mutual with several of us. But after the first two years we moved on and all felt much happier. The biggest shock was not going home at lunch time, they seemed long days. I enjoyed the French lessons and the little I absorbed has been useful since.

All the time we were surrounded by some of the most beautiful countryside and each changing season brought its own reward.

Spring with the trees and bushes bursting forth and the lovely green grass.

Summer with the long hot days spending most of the daylight hours outside.

Autumn or the Fall as Mamma called it brings back memories of special places where the best mushrooms were to be found and the prime blackberries needed for delicious pies and vinegar, such a soothing drink in the winter and so good on Yorkshire pudding.

The Winter which often brought snow to the delight of the children. Oh to be the first to step on to clean snow. Gordon had a sledge and spent all his time with that with his pals.

Until 1939 we'd lived in the cottage, the middle one of the row of three next to the school field, no bathroom but such a cosy house. Saturday nights were taken up with a bath in front of the fire, hair washing, dried, clean vest and nightie, and a dose of syrup of figs. Never varied. No inside toilet, that was way up the garden. We had to go by candle when it was dark. No electricity inside either, oil lamps downstairs, candles upstairs. We had a brass lamp in the kitchen standing



on top of a corner cupboard, in the front room a very nice brass one hanging with three chains. About 1930-31 Dad paid £20, a lot of money in those days for electricity to be brought over from the farm. Gordon and I were entranced, a touch of a switch and instant light. No more running to the Co-op for a glass for the lamp or paraffin. Looking back, those lamps were lovely but Mamma gave them to the electricians, pleased to be rid of them. Having gone full circle they have become fashionable in recent years.

Although our kitchen was small there were very often ten or more people in there Auntie Annie and some of the family, Auntie Polly and some of her family and I loved it when the aunts and Dad talked of "the old days". If we were alone we played 'I Spy'. Everything was fine until it was my turn and then I cheated and although the others laughed Gordon was furious. I was only three and when I said something beginning with H they all guessed like mad. I'd asked them to give up many times but 'No' until out of sheer exhaustion they did. I said 'kettle'. You can see I hadn't mastered the finer points of the game. It had to be explained gently that one didn't change letters half way.

In the long winter evenings, we, like so many others in the village, made rugs. A potato sack washed, carrier bags full of scraps of serge or woolly material cut into pieces about 1/2" wide 3/4" long. No-one measured, the cutters were too used to it. Armed with a wooden clothes peg, one side cut off and the other sandpapered to a fine point we were off. My peg was smaller than the others, I still have it and have used it in the not so distant past. The idea with us was a dark blue or black border 3" or 4" wide and then a galaxy of colour with the other scraps. That was the general idea but I didn't like that so, when I was given a corner to fill, it was all red, or yellow, or green. When it was finished and down and relatives came and admired it, they said, 'Oh we can see which is Peggy's piece'. My fame had spread!

Tuesday afternoon at the cottage was the time to take everything out of the small kitchen cupboard and tidy it. Most of it was the every day crockery but the top shelf was full of the most exciting boxes with marvellous smells, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, caraway powder and seeds, but then came the ones I wasn't allowed to smell. Later I realised they were curry powder, ginger, turmeric, all for the chutneys Mamma made each autumn. When I asked what was in these other boxes I was told 'Leo's for meddlers'. I thought this was something special and was determined to have some for myself when I was old enough. Later on I realised 'Leo's for meddlers' was a polite way of saying 'Mind your own

business'. This phrase stuck, and birthdays and Christmas were full of people coming in with 'Leo's for meddlers' and no questions were asked. It later became 'Leo's' and was used by us all and still is by Roy and me.

Yet I loved that little cottage. The move to Centre Farm with its thirteen rooms and huge garden was a shock in more ways than one. High rooms, draughty, three storey, pleasant in the summer, but not so in the winter.

The men, obviously expecting war to be declared, bought plasterboard and wood and made shutters for the main windows and thick curtains for the rest. It was a full time job each night and morning. The day after War was declared Gordon volunteered for the Air Force and left on Friday of the same week. Dad refused to lock the door, he couldn't bear to think of Gordon being locked out of his own home. Fortunately Gordon had a 48 hour leave in November and he persuaded Dad to lock the door again. The following year he had 72 hours embarkation leave having to leave at 5pm Whit Sunday and he came to the afternoon service. He explained that he wanted to keep in his mind's eye the picture of the children on the platform, me included, and the congregation he knew so well. He told me after the War was over that picture came to the fore many times especially when events were not going our way. He was attached to the 8th Army and they suffered badly at times. We were advised to sleep in the pantry if the air raid sirens sounded as it was three storey. Mamma brought a mattress down and we did but my aunt listened closely to each plane going over. I had the problem of trying to stop our ginger cat from purring, he was so pleased to have company in the middle of the night. Auntie said he sounded just like a German bomber.

In 1940 I was bridesmaid to cousin Eileen and Eric, at the Chapel of course. That was exciting, my first time as a bridesmaid. It was spoilt somewhat by the Manager of the shop at which I then worked, insisting that I go back straight after the service. I was very upset as he'd promised me the day off. Dad came and had a word in his ear the following week and I left soon after.

In 1941 I moved to work in Leicester and two weeks later met Roy who was to become my husband. In November of that year Mamma was rushed into the Leicester Royal Infirmary with a bad case of septicaemia. She underwent two major ops, but with God's help came through. She showed great courage. By Christmas she had been sent to the convalescent home. There was no transport at Christmas of course but, without asking, Bert Adcock took Dad and me to have tea with her and a two hour stay. He was so good. He wrote to me years later to



say he had seen Mamma waiting at the bus stop as he was driving the other way and remarked that when my mother was born God had run short of mothers so he sent one of his angels because she was the nearest thing to an angel he would ever see on this earth! I like to think they have met up again now. So much kindness was shown to us at this time. We had an emergency dash to Leicester when Mamma had her second op. Bill Knight, who was living in rooms at Dalbys, Willow Farm, fetched his car out and Dad, Auntie and I went. We ran into thick fog at Groby and Dad had to walk with a white hanky in front of the car until we reached Glenfield. What a journey. But as with Bert all done without fuss. We could never have repaid them. Mamma came home in January and it took a year with Dad massaging her poor wasted arm with olive oil each day before she could even comb her hair.

During the War we had one very bad winter in particular when the buses were not able to come into Swannington for over a week. The snow and icy roads made it impossible for them to climb out of the village so we had to walk up Station Hill and catch the bus at Hoo Ash.

There was a dark cloud over the village the day we heard Bob Morley was reported missing. Prayers were said in homes and chapel and church. Hopes were high at times that he would have been taken prisoner but no and everyone felt so sad.

In 1943 I was directed into work of national importance, the British Thomson Houston Company. We were separate from the machines working on radar for the forces and had men of the R.E.M.E. with us. Eventually my friend and I were on Naval work and many foreign visitors came to see progress. I loved it and never would have left it but for leaving the area. It meant an early start, up at 5.30am to be on the bus by 6.20am, but I didn't mind. Thursday was my half-day and about 5pm I would take 100 eggs down to Mrs. Irons further down the village for re-sale in her shop. The order was for 8 dozen but Dad always put in 4 extra in case I broke any. I never did. The cost was 10/-.

It was in that same year that Dad was very ill and forbidden to even lift a spade. We had the huge garden at Centre Farm and an allotment in Station Hill and the Co-op had delivered as usual several bags of seed potatoes, earlies, main crop, lates, and 1000 union plants and only me to set them all. It seemed an awesome task. That was the end of my social life such as it was in war time and it seemed as though I was digging for victory virtually single handed. I felt I never wanted



Peggy and her mother with family pets



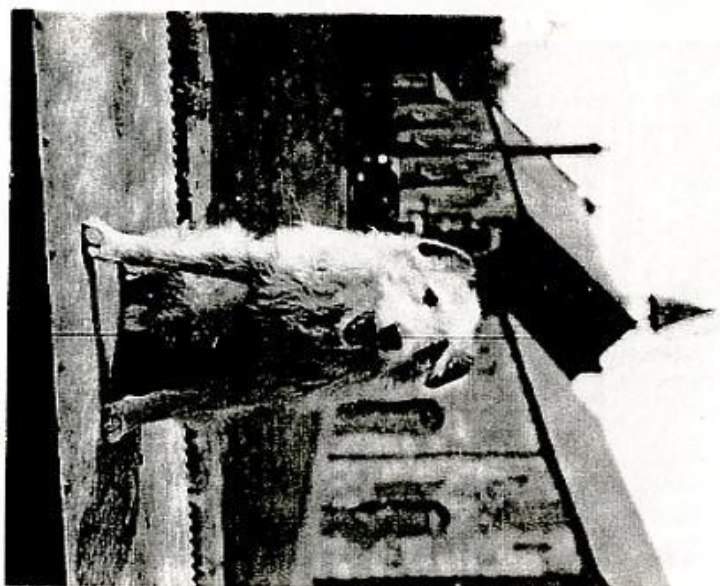
Mr and Mrs Stacey at Chatsworth



Gordon in the RAF



The faithful Rex



to see an onion, a potato, or a cabbage plant ever again. Every spare minute was spent weeding, setting, lifting, bonfires, winter digging. Dad was a Virgo and they are noted for being meticulous in all they do (I know, I'm married to one) and as Dad had so loved his garden I did my best to keep up the tradition. It was very hard work but I did it for two years.

We had lost our terrier puppy in 1940 and were looking for another when our baker, Les Yeomans from Ashby, asked Dad if he would like his dog. His wife complained he chewed things. Off we went one Sunday morning in 1943 and this dog was tied up outside. It was love at first sight and once Dad had paid, it was on with the collar and lead we had taken with us and off we walked home. He never looked back. That love affair lasted until his death in 1952. He and I covered miles walking the fields, we went everywhere. Then to Leicester several times to have his photo taken with me to send to Gordon. He showed his devotion in many ways but none more so than when I was ill in bed with a grumbling appendix. The Doc at the B.T.H. said it meant an op and sent me home by car. Dr Parker came to examine me and pressing a tender spot I moaned. Rex, who was sitting watching this, sprang up with two feet on the bed pushing between the doctor and the bed and growled showing his teeth. Dad had to pick him up and take him out. Dr Parker laughed about it, called him my bodyguard, but from that day we only had to say here's the doctor and his lip curled and he growled. Dr Parker tried over the years to make friends again with Rex but no he never forgot or forgave.

We had an incident one summer at Centre Farm. School boys were calling and pointing to the barn. When I went to the top gate, they informed me a tramp had gone into the barn. Dad came with Rex and sure enough there he was on a pile of straw quite naked and smoking a pipe. He was not amused at being moved.

One night after the War we were woken by Rex barking; Dad and Gordon went down and Rex raced to the old wash-house. Dad used the copper for boiling food for the pigs. A rat raced out of the door and up Dad's trousers. Fortunately he'd pulled them on over his pyjamas. He dropped them, out came the rat to be dealt with by Rex. He was dynamite and once killed 75 in one morning at Willow Farm until one of the men got over eager and thinking Rex was missing one struck with a pitchfork hitting Rex on the nose making it bleed. He was then brought home to be washed and a lot of tender loving care.



We were fortunate in the war when so many cities and towns were being bombed and so many people killed and injured. Dad was on nights for some of the war and two frightening happenings stand out. My aunt flung my bedroom door open in the early hours, frantically whispering that the Germans had dropped incendiary bombs outside in the field. We crept downstairs and peered out terrified. Nothing like that, it was the full moon shining in the brook! Another time she woke me to say some-one had broken in. Again we crept downstairs picking up a poker in the kitchen, opened the door to our living room to find an owl had come down the chimney and soot was everywhere. I swear I aged ten years. Dad came home in the morning, cleaned the owl, and kept him a few days until his bruised wing was better and then he was released.

Then a joyful day for us when we had a letter from Gordon to say he was in England and would be home soon. Dad took two weeks off work and at 9.30pm Friday night there he was after five long years, left a boy, back a bronzed man but so very dear. We walked the lanes and fields as before and the peace and quiet and all the familiar things helped to release the tension and the bitterness at the loss of so many of his friends.

Dad had the right idea towards animals, the same as farmers have. When a pig, cow, chicken whatever is ready for market or the table, then so be it no sentiment. We were not able to look at it that way when Bill Knight came to kill the pig. We all went to the top of the house, Gordon included, and sat with our fingers in our ears until the deed was done. Then of course it was all hands on deck. When a pet chicken called Iky-Miky was due for the table we all voted no so Roy's parents ate him. Roy came to us for dinner, he couldn't face eating Iky-Miky.

We didn't need a dog for protection after 1944. We'd a black cat I'd brought from Leicester we called Nimy-Joe. He attacked everything that walked, especially the family and Rex and any visitors coming to the house. He walked behind us and suddenly grabbed our ankles. People coming to see us called out "Is the cat in?", most embarrassing, but he was the best ever for keeping the rats and the mice down. We then had a special cockerel from Cornwall. He hated everyone and jumped on our heads pecking us. Gordon threatened him more than once with a length of lead piping. He wasn't intimidated, he called Gordon's bluff.

Then came two very traumatic incidents. There was an outbreak of fowl pest at Willow Farm and since their chickens came over to us and vice versa all the stock

had to be killed, over 200 laying hens and more than 100 eggs that ten hens were sitting on. Such a sad day. Thank goodness Gordon was there to help. The hen houses had to be fumigated and left for a year, but it had taken all the heart out of Dad and he never took an interest in them again. It was Mamma who missed them the most and years afterwards she mentioned to cousin Bert how she would like six hens again and he soon brought them for her. She was very happy to have them too.

Before that a stoat got into the pen of twelve ducklings and killed every one. I had the thankless task of breaking the news to Dad when I met him at 8am on the Sunday morning, as he came off fire watching at British Timkin. He was shattered. We'd kept canaries, pigeons, rabbits, a goat, poultry, pigs. He loved them all and the wanton destruction of those small ducklings put an end to it. The only animals left were the pigs.

The first Sunday I brought Roy home we went to the 11am service. Mamma had told him he was in for a treat as being in the choir from a small boy he too loved singing, but being high church, in a more restrained fashion. We sing with our hearts and voices and really enjoy every note. That particular Sunday a certain gentleman at the front requested we sing the last verse again. He was wont to do this and no-one took any notice just started to sing the last verse again as he had asked. Roy wasn't used to this and glanced at the doors in confusion. I think he expected the cavalry to ride in in the shape of P.C. Grant on his bike. Then he looked at me and looked at the congregation and realised it was normal practice. My cousin Rene looking in her mirror on the organ saw all this and found it highly amusing, as did the family when we got home.

Cousin Ida worked so hard raising money for the chapel, for years she put on plays each autumn attended by most of the village. We even one year entertained at two other chapels in the area. Rene as usual played the piano, it was great fun. I played a fairy several years complete with wand. Many Saturdays I helped Ida dust the chapel and the first time I was allowed to dust the pulpit made a big impression. The sense of power that seemed to pervade that area. I imagined the preacher delivering God's word to the congregation below trying to impress on everyone the joy and satisfaction gained from believing in God, and yet making it interesting enough to hold their attention. I felt this power each time I dusted there and yet I detest dusting. When I enter the chapel now such a sense of peace comes over me as if I'd come home.



Thinking back, in those early years there was only the Chapel, there was no institute then. The long summer holidays we spent with whip and top, wooden hoops with stick, marbles with those big coloured bossys, snobs. Later on there were yo-yos. The streets were safe, only the Midland Red buses and Shaws. In the winter we played charades, cards, darts. Gordon had metal soldiers and a farm yard of animals. Jigsaw puzzles always a favourite. A bagatelle board. Each Christmas the school gave all pupils a brown paper bag with an apple, orange, nuts and a game. One year mine was called mad-cap and we had hours of fun with that. We, Gordon and I, went to play cards with Bert Adcock and his mother once or twice a week. Mrs. Adcock enjoyed playing Lexicon so that was what we played. She had a habit of finding some weird and wonderful words but in spite of Bert being dubious over the authenticity of some of them, she was always right. One night she produced the word 'whore' to Gordon's amusement. He laughed so much he had the stomach ache. Bert glaring at his mother declaring it was not acceptable and she grinning back knowing it was in the dictionary and therefore was acceptable. Eventually he had to give way of course, but with a bad grace! She was a dear person and we were both very fond of her. Bert came to us too, he enjoyed playing solo whist, sometimes into the early hours. We enjoyed going to Stratford too seeing some of the top actors and getting their autographs. We were fortunate enough to go to see Henry VIII in the evening of the day that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth had been in the afternoon. Anthony Quayle who was brilliant as the King brought on his own baby daughter to show the crowds instead of the doll normally used.

In 1949 Roy and I started to plan our wedding for July 1950. Roy was now in Scunthorpe so I knew I'd have to leave the family and the village and everything I held dear. I went the rounds, with Rex, to say good bye to friends and relatives. A last walk here and there.

It had taken six months to persuade Dad to give me away. He said it was a barbaric custom and wanted no part in it. He gave in at last and we had a truly wonderful day.

It was November 9th when I actually left home for good, all of us in tears. A last hug for Rex at the top gate and into Gordon's van taking me to Coalville. The same time I left if I was going out for the day. Rex knew better. He never left the gate and howled at intervals even though Mamma took his dinner out to him. People rang up to ask what was the matter with Rex and others called but he took no notice of them. This went on all day. He refused all coaxing to go in but at

9pm Gordon said he couldn't stand it any longer and he carried him in. I call that devotion. On the Sunday, Gordon brought Mamma and Rex to see me and when he was assured I was all right he went back satisfied. I couldn't take him with me, he had kidney trouble and was going blind, but it was very hard.

I felt so pleased then that all was well and I could settle down to my new life. I've often wondered if I could have coped as well as my mother did after her marriage to Dad. She was High Church, he was dyed in the wool Methodist, she'd been used to street lights, gas lights in the home, gas to cook, a water toilet. She came to oil lamps, coal to cook with, dark streets. She adapted to it so well, loved the Chapel, so friendly she used to say, took the lighting and cooking in her stride, had a husband who, after being gassed in Coleorton Colliery in 1916-17 rarely if ever worked a winter. He'd only one lung, had pneumonia twice, yet she never grumbled or complained. Happy just to be surrounded by her family. I idolised her.

## EVENTS

- MAR 16th SCOUTS winter and backwood skills weekend one night camp.
- MAR 17th MOTHERING SUNDAY family service at St George's 10.00am.
- MAR 22nd Two TALKS ILLUSTRATED WITH SLIDES,  
Friday at the Village Hall at 7.00pm.  
Denis Baker - 'History and development of Coalville'  
Basil Forgham - 'The regeneration of the environment'  
Admission £1.00 including coffee and biscuits. For Trust funds.
- APR 5th Joint CUBS and SCOUTS Easter weekend four night camp.
- APR 21st Services for St. George's PATRONAL FESTIVAL 10.00am  
and 6.00pm
- APR 27th Informal BONFIRE, BARBECUE and SING ALONG at the top of  
Saturday the Incline (weather permitting) this is the date of one of the  
Trust's regular working parties and we hope to attract people to see  
what is being done while the daffodils are still in flower.