

PLEASE RETURN TO BRANSTON HISTORY GROUP
(Janet Hardings talk April 2012)

Village Life in Branston from 1924 - by Richard Arthur Baker 1914 - 1994

We left Waddington for Branston in May 1924. It was just after the trial scholarship examination and we came immediately into the orbit of dad's father. Moving from one home to another meant that all the family possessions, not great in those days, were loaded on to a horse-drawn wagon. I imagine dad would cycle, maybe mother too, and we kids were perched anywhere on the load where we would fit. It was about four and a half miles, a long slow journey and one had time to reflect on one's lot. I hated it and continued to do for some time.

Grandfather was farm foreman for G T Branston – gentleman farmer at Springfield Farm, Branston.

G T Branston had no connection with the village name of Branston. Grandfather was coming up for retirement and dad was engaged as waggoner for a few years and was foreman designate until his father's retirement.

Whilst I hated Branston initially, I really began to live, maybe for the first time. It took me about three months to settle. New house, new school, new village, under the orbit of grandfather, who was a Wesleyan and disciplinarian who had forgotten what it was like to be young. I soon developed a thick skin as far as he was concerned and was never close to him. Further, I was slow to make friends but ultimately made some and settled down.

Branston was a totally different village from Waddington and seemed, I may be wrong, to have more history and whilst there were very poor families in the village, they were in a minority. A much richer village, in that it had landed gentry and I suppose minor aristocracy.

I seemed to get a little into the feudal system. There was, until not long before we moved there, a squire of the village and he was second only to God. Branston Hall was their domain – the Lesley Melvilles.

Grandfather had worked for them as a young man and dad's early years were spent at the Hall.

As was good practice in those days, the eldest son got the plum jobs. William, Dad's eldest brother, was apprenticed to a joiner and in due course became a good one himself with his own business. The other boys took what came.

When dad left school he worked at the Hall in various capacities, responsible to the bailiff. As he became older he left to work on the land, usually as a waggoner or second waggoner until I was born and from then on he was more in a foreman's capacity.

Dad had a chip on his shoulder. Whilst he seemed to get on well with grandfather – maybe because in those days respect for your elders and betters was inborn in people – nevertheless, he never really forgave grandfather for not letting him have a joiner apprenticeship too. It's a pity really because he would have made a good one.

Alfred, the youngest son, was luckier. He started his working life as a baker's rounds man and, whether through the office of grandfather or his employer, I don't know, he became apprenticed to the bakery and became a very good master baker.

The girls of a family went into service when they left school unless they were needed to help at home. If the latter, it was near tragedy in some cases because they never got the chance to leave home and were often left as spinsters looking after ageing and infirm parents.

I never related well to the feudal system where everybody had his place and never did you rise above it. I always had respect but not to the point of servility. Never at any time was I rude or disrespectful to my elders and betters but I could never see why age or position gave undisputed sway over lesser mortals. Lots of rows, disputes and the like occurred at home due to this. There was no real humanity or flexibility in their philosophy. The Wesleyan angle did not help either, particularly as I got older and began to see flaws in the elders.

The G T Branstons were a super couple. I was expected to give them the allegiance dad gave to them. I was always polite and in the end I rated them as good friends. They accepted the fact that I was a separate entity with a mind and will of my own. I think I was well in my twenties before dad finally accepted it and then grudgingly.

After ten years of 'children should be seen and not heard' I was beginning to rebel. Looking back, I suppose I wasn't satisfied with my lot. As I said earlier, I was maybe a bit of a social climber. Making friends was not easy – without being too snobbish, the village lads bored me – they didn't read and seemed perfectly happy running round in a mob and standing for hours on street corners just watching the world go by.

I made three friends, one at Lincoln Grammar School, one at the Lincoln Municipal Technical School, which became the City School, and one who was going to join them with me a year or so later. They all read avidly and played football. School was good and I was doing well which did not endear me or my pals to the general run of pupils.

The head at Branston School was Dicky Sharp, of very long service – he had in fact taught my dad. A strict disciplinarian but fair, as was another teacher, Miss Greenwood. There were some big hulking school leavers but Dicky handled them with no problem at all. Sharp retired at the end of my first school year, about two months after I started. He was followed by Parry Williams, much younger with a young family. Nevertheless he was also a strict disciplinarian but had a more enlightened modern approach to teaching.

I continued to do well and in April or May passed the scholarship examination giving me a place in September 1925 at the Lincoln Technical College.

In the meantime, I was enjoying life on the farm. The house was much bigger and from the word go I seemed to be in the run of the farm – something I hadn't had at Waddington. The house was part of an L-shaped block. We lived in one half, while grandfather and my step-grandmother lived in the other. We had a large living room, pantry, cellars, three bedrooms plus an attic large enough to take two double beds. As far as I remember we share a large kitchen with my grandparents.

The house had piped fresh water and a hand operated pump connected to a large underground cistern for soft rain water. Still the usual out offices. Bathing was still a galvanised tub in front of the fire – water to be carried in and carried out.

For several years we had a succession of live-in waggoners and seconds – mostly we had two. They had a spartan life. They were only in the house to eat and sleep. Off duty time was spent where they would find some comfort – the stables and the pub mostly.

This was a hard life for mother. The waggoners got up at 4.30 to 5.00 a.m., fed and groomed the horses and came in for a cooked breakfast about 6.20 a.m. Their lunch was packed up for them - doorsteps of bread with fat streaky bacon filling for sandwiches and a large jam paste and a bottle of cold tea. This they had in the fields about 9.30 a.m. At 2.00 p.m. they would unyoke the horses and return to the farm, throw in a feed for the horses and come in to their midday meal at 2.30 p.m. After that they would feed and groom the horses and have their evening meal at 6.30 p.m.

In between, Mother had to prepare meals for the rest of the family – breakfast at 7.30 a.m., lunch at 1.00 p.m. and tea at 5.00 p.m. So it was a daily marathon of meals, cooking and baking and all the other labours of a farm house in between. What a life it must have been! Dad did practically nothing in the house but we children had plenty to do – washing up, getting firewood and coal in and filling back or side boilers on the coal-fired range.

Sundays were much the same as at Waddington but whether Mother's influence or not, it was a more relaxed day than before. I don't remember restrictions on reading and playing as there had been at Waddington. Surprising in a way, since grandfather was such a staunch, strict Wesleyan. I still believe it was my mother's influence – she determined that grandfather wasn't going to rule the roost – which he never did however hard he tried.

The farm, with numerous outbuildings, barns, stables, granaries and two hundred and fifty acres of mixed farming, was heaven to me. From the start, as I said, I seemed to have the free run of it providing I behaved in a responsible manner. That made up for a lot of things. Hidings were a thing of the past – plenty of telling off and I suppose dad and I became as near friends as we ever were despite his disapproval of my sometimes 'bolshy' ideas – 'bolshy' to him that is.

There were three gardens, all very productive. One was attached to the house and the other two, a little way apart but very handy. Until I was about eighteen I did a lot of work in the various plots and developed a love of gardening with a bias towards vegetable gardening although I regularly grew sweet peas in the home garden. I presume I had regular tasks but it was no hardship. However when I was seventeen or eighteen I was given the task of winter digging in a plot about six yards by ten yards in one of the remote gardens. This plot had quite a sizeable hollow in the middle which had always been evident. Liking a level garden, I set to work to level out the hollow, throwing spadefuls back then forward as I progressed. When I had finished, the hollow was no more and the plot of land was as level as a billiard table, except that the corner I had finished on was fractionally lower. I was in the process of taking a spadeful from here and there and levelling this corner. Before I had completed it, dad and grandfather came – never said a word about the disappearance of the hollow but played hell about it being low in one corner. I threw the spade into where the hollow had been, told them what they could do with the garden and stormed off. Such gardening as I did after that was minimal and largely confined to sweet peas.

The gardens supplied all our vegetable needs. There were apples, pears, red and black currants. Swedes and potatoes were available from the farm as needed.

Mother did various jams, pickles, piccalilli and the like, so we were fairly self-supporting.

A sum was withheld from dad's wages and for this up to two pigs a year were provided from the farm. The size was thirty stones plus. Pig killing was quite an event. The local pig killer came in the early morning; a copper of water was available. The pig was killed by cutting its throat and every effort was made to ensure that all the blood was expelled. The hot water was then used to scald the skin and all the hair was scraped off. The carcass was then hauled up on a tripod and split down the middle and the offal removed. Then it was cut into its various components, hams, shoulders, flitches, chine, hocks etc.

Blocks of salt about 1' x 1' x 3' were available and it was my job to reduce these blocks to fine grains. Saltpetre was another component. With these, the various portions were salted and put in shallow wooden trays or bacon boxes to cure.

Mother's domain was a hive of activity – she usually had a lady used to the business to help her. The fat was rendered down to produce lard, the residue tasty scraps. Pig's fries were

produced, sausage meat made and pork pies raised. The pig's intestines were scraped and cleaned and cured in a brine solution. A length of intestine was fixed to the outlet nozzle of the mincing machine and the sausage meat pumped into the skin.

Boiled home-made sausages were really delicious for breakfast on a Sunday morning – a special treat.

When the curing was complete, hams, shoulders and flitches were hung from the ceiling and living room walls. A selected piece was cut as required.

Grandfather retired after a few years and went to a cottage he owned in Hall Lane. A little later my step-grandmother died. Not the cause of her death, but she had mumps when she was eighty.

In this, dad became farm foreman and we moved into the other, much more pleasant part of the L-shaped pair. It must have been easier for mother in some ways as she had sole use of the kitchen and the house was much more convenient. A large dining room, a lounge about the same size, a better larder, three good bedrooms and an attic. The incidence of live-in waggoners was coming to an end.

There were additional duties, butter making and grading, sorting and packing eggs. Skimmed milk was sold at the door morning and evening. The cream was separated from the milk by a hand-driven centrifuge – this was the duty of the gentlemen. Butter making was done by dad, mother or me if at home, by a hand propelled butter churn. Hard and boring work – sometimes seemingly endless in summertime or when a fresh cow had come into milk after calving.

Mother processed the butter, weighing it and wrapping it in greaseproof paper. Most was for home consumption i.e. ourselves and the Branstons. The remainder was sold.

Churning was done once a week. The cream from twice daily separations was kept covered in large earthenware puncheons in a deep and airy cellar – the fridge of those days.

Washday must have been a terrible chore. A coal-fired copper to light to provide hot water – hand filled and emptied. Tools of the trade were a dolly tub and dolly pegs, wash tub, scrub board and hand wringer – sheer hard work. The drying ground was the paddock – plenty of room and air. Ironing was done with a folded sheet or blanket as base on the table and flat irons heated on a rack in front of a coal fire. This coal fire was in existence even in summer since all cooking in a side oven and domestic hot water, side or back boiler, was achieved by this means. Adequate iron holders were required since the handle got as hot as the soleplate.

On wet days, drying was done on clothes horses in front of the said fire and airing done by similar means and also from racks suspended on roped pulleys from the ceiling.

Life on a farm was a life of drudgery for a wife, though mother, as other wives in similar circumstances, seemed to accept it. Mother had had a taste of the better life and I often wondered whether she ever thought back to those days. As all girls, she went out to service at fourteen but in her latter days she had been companion and nanny to a well-off family and had travelled extensively in this country with them. I wonder, did she ever regret it?

I don't remember her ever resting for the sake of it, although she surely must have done so. She read a lot, but never, as far as I remember, without some knitting on the go. Life must have been just bed and work.

Sundays were probably a little easier, in that lodgers had their meals with us. We children went to Sunday school and morning service, Sunday school again in the afternoon and then evening service as a family. We sat in pew number five. Each family had its own pew, paid for annually.

Grandfather was a pillar of the Chapel, one of the Elders. Step-grandmother too. She was a character, a stern forbidding face with a roman nose, dressed in late Victorian manner and sat in church bolt upright, as straight as a ramrod. I never knew her otherwise, except on one occasion when I burst into her dining room unannounced and caught her with her feet up on a chair, flannel petticoats, red flannel bloomers and all! The domestic help used to claim that grandmother's bloomers were as much as she could lift out of the wash tub. They were below knee length with a buttoned flap at the back.

I can't remember much about spare time activities. I had a fretwork set and made various pipe racks, trinket boxes, photo frames and the like. At the time, I bought Hobbies magazine when I could afford it and it carries plans, drawings and suggestions that I found useful. At the time Malcolm Campbell broke the speed record. I made a model of Bluebird carved out of solid wood. Similarly I made models of the Schneider Trophy seaplanes.

We had a darts board as I mentioned earlier. I played a lot of draughts with dad. As I became fourteen or fifteen I was able to give him a fairly competitive game but very rarely beat him until much later. This was such good training, that in the army some eighteen years later, I played six games simultaneously and won them and all!

Somewhere about fifteen or sixteen years of age, I bought lots of pieces and built a radio with acid accumulators and dry cell. It had an external speaker. The whole thing cost me fifteen shillings. Nobody was ever interested until I got it working and then dad and Nell, my sister, took over. The only time I could use it was after the rest had gone to bed. I'd listen to late night dance music, Harry Roy, Roy Fox, Jack Payne, Carrol Gibbons, Geraldo, Bert Ambrose, Jack Jackson, Charlie Kunz and others.

Where did I get fifteen shillings from? My main, in fact my only, source of income was from rabbit and hare skins. I'd take them to Newbolds in St Benedict's Square in Lincoln. For good skins, winter was best. I'd get sixpence to nine pence for a rabbit skin and one shilling to one shilling and sixpence for a hare skin. Shortly after I was twelve I bought, new, a single barrel .410 shot gun. It was a real poacher's gun and would separate into two parts to be carried easily under a coat or mackintosh.

Buying the cartridges was a chore but eventually I got a quota from the farm, particularly for rat shooting. I used to use No4 shot. It had a longer carrying capacity and less shot, so one had to be fairly accurate since there was very little spread.

So now, instead of being a passenger, I took my share in the shooting. I was never as good as dad, but didn't miss much. A shot gun to dad was an extension of his arm. Whilst I had to aim and consequently had some long shots, dad could fire instinctively, without really aiming. Hence, my choice of No 4 shot – it had a bit more range than the No 5 shot that dad normally used. As I progressed, I was allowed to take dad's double barrelled twelve bore.

G T Branston had a matched pair of shot guns and occasionally when he came with dad, he let me use one of these. It was a beautiful gun and with practice I could have matched dad. G T was a poor shot and, one day, asked me why I could shoot and he couldn't. I told him and dad was really enraged. It was not in my place to tell him! Where is one's place?

G T was 6ft 3ins or maybe 6ft 4ins. The gun, of a pair, he lent me was as if tailor made for me. I was maybe 5ft 4ins. When I brought it up on target, it sat snugly into my shoulder. I pointed this out to him and that he was cramped. He required a stock that was about seven

inches longer. I suggested that he take the gun to Wallis's, a gunsmith, and have them measure him and build an addition on to the stock, with a balance weight on the end of the barrel. He did this and could shoot reasonably well afterwards. Alas, he had both guns modified so my spare gun was lost.

All aspects of farm life took my interest and, though small, I usually had a try at most things and ultimately became quite adept at many of them. One I completely failed at was milking a cow. They just would not give for me.

Harvest time was probably the happiest time, coming when it did, in the school holidays. The corn was cut with the sail binder and the sheaves stoked to dry before being taken in for stacking in the farmyard.

From almost first light, unless there was heavy dew, until dark I spent in the fields. In the majority of the fields there were plenty of rabbits and some hares. They usually left the standing corn at one particular end and dad and I would be stationed there with our shot guns. For long periods I'd be on my own, since dad had to sharpen reaper blades which needed changing periodically.

Farm hands used to go for lunch in relays. The reaper, after a change of horses, was continually operating. Tea was different and generally was my chore. I'd cycle home and bring back packed teas including enamel cans of hot tea.

As the corn got less, guns would be discarded and everyone would patrol the edge of the corn. Any remaining rabbits would squat just inside the standing corn and were killed with sticks. If one was quick, they could be picked up and then killed. Rabbits were a useful addition to the family larder.

At harvest time the Chapel used to hold 'Harvest Suppers'. The supper was cold rabbit pie, a really delicious dish. Another fund raiser they used was 'Pork Pie Teas'. All the pies were homemade by wives belonging to the Chapel.

The Chapel and Church then, as now, held the annual Harvest Festival and, the Chapel in particular, was laden with a huge quantity and variety of farm and garden produce. These were auctioned afterwards for Chapel funds.

When the corn was dry it was carted to the farmyard and stacked. Stacking was a very skilful art and dad was particularly good at it. Even twelve months afterwards his stacks never leaned or altered shape and were dry. On completion of the stacking the stacks were thatched, another skill dad was good at. His stacks were always dry. The thatching straw was straw from the previous year's harvest.

In due course, thrashing took place, another high spot for me since, particularly in wheat stacks, there was usually a fair number of rats and mice. Mice were killed as much as possible, but very few rats were allowed to escape. If there were signs of a large presence of rats, the whole area, including the thrashing set, was ringed with either wire netting or, more usually, sheep feeding troughs. The rats were, therefore, confined to the local area and killed at leisure. The dogs, of course, had a field day.

On one occasion, before thrashing was due, there was evidence of a large number of rats in a large wheat stack. Yankee Gilliat, of Waddington, claimed he could destroy the rats using black ferrets. The stack was ringed with wire netting. Yankee arrived, distributed .22 rifles and put his ferrets, three or four of them, into the stack. A few rats came out at first and then none; neither did the ferrets. They were never seen again. Whether they lived on the rats and later returned to the wild, or whether the rats killed them, no-one ever knew. It did

nothing to reduce the rat population. Just before dusk, one could see them playing outside the ridge of the thatching and each evening I would sit there with my 410 and did more to reduce the rats than Yankee's ferrets did.

Whilst fun for me, thrashing was another chore for mother. It meant an additional two men for breakfast and lunch.

The thrashing set consisted of a steam traction engine belt driving a threshing drum, which in turn belt-drove a straw elevator. The sheaves were fed into the top of the drum. At one end, the grain came out through hoppers into sacks and, at the other end, pulse came out and above that, straw, into an elevator which carried it to the straw stack.

The corn was then put on a mechanical elevator and thence carried, up to twenty stones per sack, into a barn or granary. If the latter, the sacks were carried up planks to the granary, which was usually the first floor of a building, most likely over the stables.

Probably the dirtiest, most unpleasant task on a farm was in the pulse hole'. The pulse was all dust, corn husks, weeds and general debris. This had to be kept clear and was generally used as bedding for crew yards and pig sties. If the corn was barley, it was even more unpleasant, since the barley awns clung to the body and clothing and were a real irritant.

The rabbit population on the west side of the farm was always large, since it bordered on to woods and copses. The extreme south was similarly infested for the same reason. During the winter, most Saturdays were taken up with ferreting. Rabbit burrows were mostly under or adjacent to hedgerows or on the edges of a wood. Most of our ferreting was done in the hedgerows.

After an early breakfast, we'd set off walking or on push bikes. Jack Gilbert usually supplied the ferrets and he came along with his double barrelled gun, lines, bolting nets and a terrier. All carried spades, leather gloves and kneepads and, needless to say, guns. We usually had our dog too.

Having decided on a set of burrows, the first job was to locate the 'bolt holes'. These were small holes, generally up to twenty yards out into the field, away from the main burrow. These appeared to be prepared for emergency escapes and were very rarely used, unlike the main burrows, and were not immediately visible. They had to be looked for.

The bolt holes were then covered with purse nets on a draw string and fastened to an iron stake or rod which was driven into the ground. As the rabbit made its hasty exit, they hit the net, the draw string tightened up and effectively cocooned the rabbit.

Immediately one was caught, the rabbit was dispatched and the net put back into place. Quite often, one of the bolt holes was left uncovered to give one or other of us a chance of a shot. Under these circumstances one had to be quick since the rabbit was at full speed as it cleared the hole.

One hole was left for the dogs to have their fun.

Two methods were used with ferrets. Almost always, we started off with line free muzzled ferrets. They would search the burrows and invariably a number of rabbits would bolt. Many of the others would end up 'tucked'. In trying to escape, they would rush into end holes, or nursery holes, and would be tucked tight, one behind the other, sometimes three or four.

As the muzzled ferrets couldn't do the rabbits harm and when most rabbits had either bolted or tucked, the ferrets would surface and be caught and put back in their boxes. The 'liners',

sometimes the same ferrets, were then put into the burrows. They were muzzle free, with collars and lines attached. The lines had a code of knots so that, at any time, the distance the ferret was away could be determined.

Once the ferret went down the burrow, the line was held lightly. A sudden run on the line meant the ferret was after a rabbit. If it slipped, it meant the rabbit had been killed and the ferret would stay with the rabbit for a short while.

Then came the hard work. The distance the ferret had travelled was known. Pushing a rod or stick arm's length into the hole, gave an indication of direction and whether the hole turned. Spades were brought into action and a hole 'crowned' down on the direction and distance given. If an old 'dig' was struck, it was easy going. If not, hard work through limestone and hedgerow roots up to three feet deep.

As the burrows were broken into, a gloved hand was put down to retrieve the line. A further direction and distance were given and another hole dug. Speed was essential for two reasons. Firstly, the ferret would not stay too long with the killed rabbit and would move on to another quarry. Secondly, if the rabbits were tucked, the ferret would not get at the rabbit's neck to kill it and would soon leave them.

On reaching the rabbit with ferret attached, they were separated and the ferret re-introduced into the hole. The process of digging etc was carried on until it was thought the burrow was cleared. Then we moved on to a fresh burrow. This continued until dark. Some days we'd get seven or eight couples. On a good day we'd get fourteen or fifteen couples.

On occasion a ferret would slip its muzzle; very seldom but it did happen. The ferret would go on a killing spree and then, sated with blood, would curl up and go to sleep. When this happened, the particular burrow was abandoned. Towards evening and, quite often into the night, one of us would wait at the site with a saucer and some milk. Generally the ferret ultimately appeared, desperately thirsty. Whilst it was slaking its thirst, a gloved hand would grab it with a great, thankful sigh of relief and put it safely in its carrying box.

Rabbits were always welcome to us and other member of the farm staff as a tasty addition to the menu. If not ferreting on a Saturday, dad and I, sometimes together, sometimes solo, would have a walk round the fields and generally come back with anywhere from one to four rabbits, with the occasional hare. Favourite places for hares were in fields vacated by sugar beet crops.

Dad always had a gun and game licence, paid for by the farm. During twenty years of shooting on the farm and other farms too, I only ever had a gun licence once. A new policeman took up residence in the village and was acting like a 'new broom' and decided, rightly, that I hadn't got a licence and gave me a week to get one. On the farm, it was no problem, but I had to cross or travel along public roads and that was a problem. For ten shillings, I got a licence, but that as the only occasion I possessed one.

New policemen were a nuisance; they had to be educated in the law of the countryside. If they played ball, they had plenty of perks – rabbits, hares, fresh eggs, vegetables etc.

One new policeman was more than the usual nuisance. When he was on the prowl, we usually spotted him before he saw us. On one occasion, we were coming home from an afternoons' shoot through a field of swedes, lugging a sack of four or five rabbits and two or three hares. When we got to the gate to leave the field for the roadway, the copper appeared and, with a lot of officious dignity, he demanded to see the contents of the sack. With equal dignity, we tipped the contents of swedes at his feet. He was staggered and so cross, that he

stalked off without another word completely missing the fact that the sack was heavily blood-stained.

After dark, I had to go back to retrieve our game. Later in the evening, dad left a hare on the policeman's doorstep. We had no more trouble with that one, until the next change, when it all started over again.

Another aspect of farm life I was involved in to quite some extent was the lambing season.

The tups, or rams, were introduced to the ewes in September and lambs produced from late January through February. There were usually sixty to eighty ewes.

The ewes were kept in a meadow fairly adjacent to the farm, the most distant point being maybe three hundred and fifty yards from the farmyard. During daytime, regular patrols of the field were done. As lambs were born, the ewe was caught and thrown on to its haunches, the udder cleared of wool and the lamb given its first suckling. The ewe and lamb(s) were then led by carrying a lamb by its front legs. The ewe would follow into the farmyard and was lodged under cover in an individual cell made of straw lined hurdles. They were kept until it was certain that the lambs were suckled correctly and then returned to the fields.

At night, the ewes still in lamb, were brought into a covered yard. Dad used to sit up at night and make numerous trips to the fold to suckle and enclose any lamb born since his last visit. Ewes regularly chose night time to give birth.

At the weekend, Friday or Saturday, I would sit up in dad's stead to give him a night in bed.

One Saturday night, I'd done an early patrol and things were quiet. On the next visit several ewes seemed restless, so I went back in about half an hour. As I went out, I found it had started snowing. When I got to the fold, there was already a lamb born and as I was attending to it, several other ewes started to give birth.

This was about 2.00 a.m., so I went back to the house to wake dad. When we reached the fold, four more ewes had given birth and others were in labour. We laboured too, until 9.00 a.m. Lambs all over the place; they needed sorting out to individual ewes. The bleating was incredible until we got them all sorted out. We ran short of hurdles and prepared additional ones, all by the light of a couple of paraffin hurricane lamps.

Most lambs would have survived without our attention, but it was practice to clean the udder and give the lamb an initial suckle. From then on, they were self-sustaining. The cleaning of the udder was important since, occasionally, a lamb died and a post mortem showed a knot of wool in its intestines.

Lambs were lost, still-born and the occasional ewe died giving birth. An orphan lamb was palmed off on a ewe that had lost a lamb. We used to skin the dead lamb as soon as possible and drape its skin over the orphan lamb like a jacket and tied with string. The ewe would then generally accept the lamb as its own and after a few days the jacket was removed.

Most seasons we had an orphan lamb for which a mother couldn't be found. This was bottle reared. Cade lambs, even when quite mature, would always remember the hand or hands that fed them. You could always be sure of a greeting when walking into a field where there was a cade lamb of the previous season. It would come close to have its ears scratched and its head stroked.

Another activity that interested and intrigued me was hedge plashing and laying. The farm was mixed, arable, sheep, cattle and, in rotation, any field almost could become a meadow or feeding for sheep on turnips, swedes etc. Therefore, hedges had to be animal proof.

As a hedge became old, it became tall and straggly and less cattle proof. It was the laid. Taller growths had their stems cut half to three quarters through at the base and were then laid almost horizontal along the axis of the hedge. Old and dead wood were cut out and the hedge given a new shape. Stakes and barbed wire were inserted to fill gaps and give general support until new growth appeared. The resultant hedge was proof against any animal larger than a hare.

Hedges were trimmed every year in the autumn and the trimmings burned on the spot. The result was hedges four feet tall and two to three feet thick. Apart from keeping animals in their fields they were ideal conditions for birds and small animals in the ground at the base of the hedge.

No field on the farm was larger than twenty four acres, the majority being between fifteen and twenty acres, with one of five acres. All of these fields were enclosed by hedges described above. This was norm for farms in the district. It was only later, when cooperatives and intensive farming took over, that hedges were grubbed up and fields of forty to fifty acres created.

On the leisure side, bird nesting was a favourite pursuit. Hedgerows were thick and tall, trees and thickets in abundance. By the time I was sixteen, I had an extensive egg collection – reprehensible today of course. However, I never took an egg once I had an example in my collection and never for swaps. All the eggs in my collection were taken personally. If I found nests and eggs were surplus to my collection, none were taken and the site was kept secret.

The foregoing activities took place before I was sixteen and at still at school. Holidays were spent around the farm. No other holidays, for example by the sea, were thought of. We couldn't afford it anyway. Occasional day trips to the sea with the Sunday School were all that were available. Once the homework was done, summer evenings were spent walking, shooting rabbits and rats, sawing and chopping kindling, helping dad to sharpen axes, hedge knives and other farm implements.

After sixteen, I was at work and two or three evenings at night school. Soccer began to be part of my life and a little later, tennis. The farm took second place and only occasional evening walks, visits to the harvest fields in season and occasional Sunday afternoon ferreting. At that time, work was from 7.10 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday and 7.30 a.m. to 12 noon on a Saturday.

Back to school. It has been said that one's schooldays are the happiest days. I cannot altogether subscribe to that. I had happy days but have had much happier ones since.

Whilst I did not really know what a Grammar School was, from nine years old I had set my heart on going to a Grammar School. Mother was very keen that I should do so. Dad was lukewarm despite the fact that he resented not having been given an apprenticeship as a youngster. What better apprenticeship in those days than a Grammar School?

There were two Grammar Schools or I think they were more generally known as Secondary Grammar Schools. One was the Lincoln Grammar School, which concentrated on the Arts, and the other, the Municipal Technical School, which focused on the Sciences. The 'Tech' was the one I wanted, but how the choice between the Grammar School and the 'Tech' was made, I never knew.

My scholarship examination came and went. My immediate friend and I gained places at the 'Tech' to start in September 1925.

How my parents were to afford it, I didn't know, but a big help was available. For Branston, Heighington and Washingborough, a foundation, called Garrett's Charity, was in existence and annual allowances towards clothing, travelling fares and midday meals were made to all Grammar School children from the villages.

Struggle though it was for my parents, it was at least alleviated by this means.

Perhaps it would be a good time to bring to notice some of the village people.

The G T Branstons I have already mentioned. Audrey, their daughter, went away to school in her very early teens and apart from occasional meetings at holiday time, I lost touch with her completely. Sometime in the late forties, the Branstons sold the farm and retired to a flat in London near Regents Park. I visited them there once in the early fifties. We had a wonderful evening just talking until very late about Branston and Branston people. Deep down, I think they were homesick for Branston, but as far as I know they never went back. I have regretted I didn't visit them again.

The vicar was the Reverend J J R Pells, a real country parson, for whom I had a lot of respect. He married Jess and I and also christened my first daughter, Janet. He knew and acknowledged all his parishioners, of whatever sect, from the 'lady of the manor' to the snooty nosed kid urinating in the gutter. He had a fresh complexion, pinkish, quickly turning to a red flush if he was excited, embarrassed or at a loss for a word. In the late twenties he acquired a bull-nosed Morris coupe car. He never drove it at much more than ten miles per hour. If he encountered a parishioner, he forgot the car, raised his hat and waved, as was his wont.

When mother died and we were to get married, he was very helpful to Jess and I and paved the way for us to get a special licence since we had unavoidably missed having banns called – 'go and see my friend, Mr Jourdain (Commissioner of Oaths) and he will arrange it for you'. He took the trouble to acquaint the Commissioner with our problem since Jourdain had the licence ready when we called and all he needed was a signature and ten shillings.

Another notability was Abel Smith, living in a huge house at the Longhills. He was very remote and since I was not a church goer I don't think I ever really knew him, only by sight. He was a banker and I've no doubt he did a lot for the village. Named after his family are the Abel Smith Gardens, the old people's bungalows in Branston.

Froggy Marshall lived in the house that that was the nucleus of where the Moor Lodge Hotel was built. He was a Chapel elder and was constantly telling me, as grandfather did too, 'If the Lord meant you to smoke he'd have put a chimney in the top of your head'. In the past he had kept the village post office. One of his daughters, Florence, married my Uncle William, dad's brother. They lived at Nettleham.

This leads to a story about smoking. One Sunday evening, Jess had hurt her leg and was confined to the house. For a change, I carried her round to our house for the evening. We had just settled down when mother and dad, grandfather, aunt Flo and her sister, Maud, came in after the Chapel evening service. Grandfather, immediately he had an audience, attacked me about smoking. He said he wouldn't smoke one of those things if I gave him a pound. I raised him to two pounds, three pounds, four pounds and he was dithering. However, dad stopped me. Then Aunt Flo took a hand – I was going to the devil and knew it and didn't care. The argument became very heated. Grandfather left, then Maud left. Still

Aunt Flo carried on and then quoted, 'Narrow is the Gate and few there be who enter in'. I took one look at her girth and suggested that with her size, she'd have a hell of a job getting in'. Aunt Flo left! Curiously, from that moment on, Aunt Flo and I became the best of friends and remained so until her death.

Other Chapel elders were the Clarricoates – village tailor, small shopkeeper and Sunday School Superintendent; the Pikes – he worked in town but had a cycle repair business in the village; Daddy Hackney; the Lawrences, including their daughter Corinne.

Cyril Clark was choirmaster and did some music teaching. Later Herbert Brown, my eldest sister's father-in-law, was choirmaster.

Josiah and Gertrude Wright, Jess's parents, were Chapel Keepers. Jess played the organ for services for several years. Her sister, Blanche Wright, Edie Kemp and Frank Mills were other organists.

The Youngs kept a general shop and bakery. Teddy Linton was one of the village butchers, Pongy Taylor the other. Linton had two children, Jack who became a doctor and Grace who married one of the Brummitts who was in the undertaking business.

Farmers were Nelstrop; the Co-op with Johnson the farm manager, whose son succeeded him; Peers and the Dean at the Mere; Willey and in a lesser way, Taylor and Bobby Newton. Bobby was a character, mostly inebriated. One day, we had time off school and rather than wait for the train from Lincoln, two of us decided to walk home. Halfway up Canwick Hill, a horse and trap, a vehicle with about six feet diameter wheels, arrived. It stopped – it was Bobby Newton offering us a lift. We got up beside Bobby. He was as drunk as a lord. He whipped up the horse and it galloped flat out towards Branston. Half a mile out Bobby stopped and announced that this was as far as he went. We were a bit puzzled but dismounted. Bobby backed the horse until the trap was at right angles to the road. He whipped up the horse, which went straight into the hedgerow, jumped it, dragging the trap through the hedge behind it, down a three feet drop and then careered across the field – a direct route to Bobby's farm.

Jess Leversedge was one of the village blacksmiths – a good one and did much work for the farm. He made me two spades in 1939 both of which were very worn but still serviceable 60 years later.

The village wheelwright was Herbert Pearson. Opposite him but no relation, was another Pearson, Walt, a blacksmith. As in many villages, the wheelwright and blacksmith had premises opposite each other; sensible arrangements since their two trades were complementary in cart, dray and wagon making.

Other joiners were Harry Carter and Harry Ingall. Harry Carter shot himself early one morning. I heard the shot from my bedroom at the farm. Dad pooh-poohed the fact that I had heard a shot but came in later to tell me the news. Harry Ingall made my garden shed in 1939 – made, delivered to Lincoln and erected and given a first coat of creosote – all for £11. Again, it still existed 60 years later.

James Pearson was a bricklayer. Freddy Hackney was a farm labourer and doubled as the local pig killer. He was also the village football team trainer. Massage by him was a painful business; he had hands like tree bark. His wife was the local lady who attended deaths to do the 'laying out'.

Nurse Manning was the district nurse, a gentle character and a very good nurse. She never married and went to live in Stamford. Parker Harrison was the local doctor. Local undertakers were Herbert Pearson, Harry Ingall and Harry Carpenter.

My father-in-law, Josiah Wright, was the local chimney sweep, part time, since his full time job was moulder's labourer at Ruston's.

The local post office was kept by the Applewhites, father, mother and two daughters. Applewhite was also a tailor. Jack and Becky Redford kept a general shop and off-licence. Jack's full time job was driver for thrashing sets. The thrashing set owner was called Forman and he was succeeded by his sons, Harold and Bill. They progressed to be haulage contractors, running one of the first Sentinel steam wagons to appear in the district. They built up a thriving business.

The Martins kept a general shop. Frank, one of the sons, was a school teacher. Maurice worked at Parsons Bros and Sons, coal merchants. Two other boys, Ron and Ted, were my contemporaries. I played a lot of tennis with Frank and Morris for the Branston village team.

Jim Chaloner was the local saddler and cycle stockist. Jim, at one time, owned a Ruston car, one of the only two in the district. The other was owned by Walter Hought, a foreman of my turning days at Ruston and Hornsby. I used to see a lot of him. He did work for the farm and besides that, was a special pal of dad's. The other pal of dad's was Freddy Marriott, who drove fuel lorries and lived with his widowed mother.

Shaw was gardener and general factotum for G T Branston. He lived adjacent to their house. A taciturn individual, but very capable. He also had charge of the petrol paraffin generating set. His wife, a very buxom woman, made a really potent rhubarb wine. A ritual with Shaw was to produce lily-of-the-valley every Whit Sunday. May Roe was cook for the Branstons and Ada Alcock, the live-in maid.

On the farm we had a variety of waggoners and horse men, most living in at one time or another – Walter Smith, Ben Ford, Fred Bagshaw, my uncle Herbert, Sid Carr, Bill Green and others. Charlie Clay was a labourer, Jackson another. Jim Frieston was garthman. His interests were mainly dairy cows. Twice a day, he milked them and operated the milk separator. Jim was deaf but not so deaf he couldn't hear the offer of a pint said in normal conversation behind his back! On Christmas Eve he was invariably 'tiddly' and when afternoon separating came, he combined this chore with chasing mother and the girls for a Christmas kiss.

Many years later, when he was in his middle seventies, I met him again. I was visiting a colleague in hospital and opposite him was Jim, with a broken shoulder after falling off a haystack. He was in a bemused state and no one could make any sense of him. I went over to him. 'Hello, Jim. How are you? Do you know me?' He took one look. 'Yes, you're Bob Baker's lad'. From then on we were reminiscing over events of twenty to thirty years previously.

When pig killing time came, Freddy Hackney did the killing and butchering. Mother variously had Mrs Clarricotes or Mrs Cutts to help 'put away' the pig. Mrs Clarricotes was a staunch member and leader of the local W.I. Jess's mother, Gertrude Wright, was also a keen W.I. member. Mrs Cutts lived at The Bothy near the Water Wheel and she and her bearded husband were somewhat recluses. Mrs Cutts had a slight hare-lip and was deaf. Her deafness, quite unkindly, was a source of amusement, since she invariably misinterpreted, quite amusingly at times, what was said to her.

MEMORIES OF SPRINGFIELD



JANET HARDING (NEE BAKER) AND
CHRISTINE LEIGH OUTSIDE SPRINGFIELD
C. 1945



JANET BAKER AND CHRISTINE LEIGH PLAYING IN CREW YARD
AT SPRINGFIELD C. 1946



ROBERT BAKER WITH PAULINE WILKES
(NEE BROWN) AND CABE LAMB AT
SPRINGFIELD C. 1939



RICHARD BAKER SR.
WITH 'BOB' IN GARDEN AT
SPRINGFIELD C. 1930



JR. RICHARD BAKER DOING HOMEWORK
IN GARDEN AT SPRINGFIELD
C. 1930

THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY



EDITH ANNE
b. 1918 BAKER

ROBERT ARTHUR
BAKER
b. 1886

RICHARD
ARTHUR
BAKER
b. 1914

NEWIE
ELIZABETH
BAKER
b. 1916

ANNIE MARIA
BAKER (NEE HEATH)
b. 1889