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Tatworth Village

1890 – 1940

Setting the Scene

My mother's family hailed from the rural village of Tatworth..., a sub manor of Chard - which nestles at the bottom of Somerset... not far from the borders of the neighbouring counties of Dorset, and Devon. The Collins were from sensible and reliable stock... considered by all who knew them as thoroughly decent people, although painted with a streak of Celtic eccentricity. My mother had seven sisters – two who did not survive a year and one that was adopted... and six brothers - four of whom died within four years of their birth. [These figures for stillborn and infant deaths are not unusual, especially amongst the poor. The chief curse being poor sanitary conditions causing a number of diarrhoeal diseases]

This account begins in 1891 when Phillip Collins married Rosa Bevis... starting out married life in Rosalie Cottage, a three bedroomed, end of terrace cottage, opposite the village school. In almost as many years, the newly wed couple had produced sixteen children, the eleventh being my mother born in 1908. Eventually, it was assumed, the Collins girls would be unlikely to marry although in fact all who reached working age did.

Tatworth offered a wealth of expeditions - walks, and places for picnics. The village contained at least one shop of every persuasion, numerous places to worship and most importantly a lace mill as its main employer... Fortunately, it was also linked to the railway having a station and goods yard at Chard Junction. Tatworth was one of three hamlets that were interlinked, the other two being South Card and Perry Street... [Now Forton expands this trio].

It was an annual event for us two boys to spend our summer holidays in Somerset with our grandparents engaging in village life prior to the Second World War

My brother and I shared the daily task to feed, and collect the eggs of the Rode Island Reds at the bottom of the garden. It was a duty we took very seriously marching off down the garden path to the chicken run at the bottom of the kitchen garden careful not to spill the kitchen leftovers going down and the beautiful brown eggs on the way up.

Nothing can be more beautiful in our old-world villages than the ancient bridges that span the onetime ford, and as we stand and stare over the parapet, we love to look upon one of the fairest scenes of England, the tall and graceful trees, and the little path that runs to the gate through which we pass to collect mushroom. This is the stream my brother and I played in, damming and bombing the result - to let out the water, held back... to stream out... to continue its path to the waters beyond. For centuries, the stream has been flowing down from its source to the millpond... being let out, through the sluice gate to drive the mill.

However, its time to pass on our pilgrimage and leave the old bridge and its fate... our story unfolds, as the farmers begin amilking...

A cottage at the turn of the nineteenth century was neither the most convenient place to be ill in nor fitting for such a large family. It is a marvel that Rosa managed so well. She never stood on ceremony nor suffered fools gladly but spoke directly, never fearing that what she said was not right or questioned. The family never asked for neither help nor charity but stood foursquare relying upon Harry to defend the home. As there were only three bedrooms in times of birth Harry had to bed down on the floor for his wife had to have one room to herself and her attendant sister.

Looking back life was hard for the Collins. Tatworth was a good place to live for its offers of work to weave the net, churn the butter or farm the field. It was a close-knit society, especially for folk who were neighbours for generations and had gone to school together.

The woodland glade and the shaded lane gave shelter, harvest and play to all the inhabitants. The young corn the well-laid hedge and the clear

stream along the field were all part of the pastel coloured picture. The showers of the late April rain drenched the drilled ground, the summer sun baked the fields of ripening corn, inviting the reaper to begin its clattering work and the autumn flocks manured the stubble as winter winds cast the icy rain against the folded turf... another year to start the cycle again as each generation finds out for itself the glory that is England.

CHAPTER I.

Country Life, 1900.

Turn of the Century – Enclosure – Depression - WWI - Farming traditions – The Four Seasons – Horse and Wagon – The packhorse - Door-to-door- delivery - The village exodus – Crossways – Market days – Jumble sales - Ox and plough – Hedge and ditch – Farming life – The milking parlour – The chestnut trees in bloom .

At the turn of the nineteenth century, as in all farming communities, rural life revolved around the seasons. The work of the farmer began at first light and finished with the setting of the sun – cows have to be milked and fed. The workers needed to be flexible to accommodate the changes in light and weather; they were days of endless hard work with little to show for the effort. What was happening in Somerset was little different from elsewhere. The completely rural society operated in accordance with tradition typical of downland farming methods. Summers saw the fresh Alfalfa also known as Lucerne, being similar to clover with a small purple flower but growing to about three feet, swaying in the breeze ready to be cut for fodder. The cattle also

relied upon maize and hay either in the field or in their shed. The majority of cattle were Devon's – the prevailing breed in the southern counties, related to the Somersetshire variety being larger than the North Devon's. Their coats are usually straight haired and red in colour bearing middle sized horns. Although their milk is rich in quality, they are not considered great producers, being rather small. Farmers love the breed for their compactness and countenance.

Much of the work done on farms before and during the war was piecework. These gangs of men or women worked planting, hoeing, pricking out and singling with sacks around their waists and slung round their backs – packing and stacking the boxes of picked produce...

At the end of the season, after the harvest - the fields of stubble and wastage burnt... then lime spread before ploughing as a general part of the system, making the fields ready for the wind, rain and frost to do their work. Later, manure spread... ploughed in... before grass and clover sown.

Arable farms worked a rotation of crop system... working a number of fields, usually four, to ensure a cycle. This rotation included the action of sheep cropping, grazing and enriching the soil. It was the production of sheep, which had made the area a centre for wool and its products... As the year unfolded and the early morning frosts arrived, the birds would quieten their calls, puddles started to form as the winter rain 'set in'. The whole scene became cold and bleak until the fast moving clouds were pushed away to allow the sun to come peeping through. A patch of blue appeared in the sky and a rainbow forms.

The hedges glistened with their covering of raindrops and the leaves shimmered in the drying wind. The fields were often banked six-foot high with hedge atop. These hedge banks could over five hundred years old and dated when the original farmland created. It is believed that many of these high hedges were for

shelter for the animals as well as windbreaks. It was not always that they were heaped up. Some of them were the result of much cart traffic that cut a roadway in the earth making a depression assisted by winter rains washing the soil down hill. Hedges are a prominent feature, a reminder of the remnants of the woodland before the land was cultivated. The enclosure of land into fields began in the mid 1700s – by acts of parliament; previously the land would have been common land. This fencing in of land continued for about a hundred years.

The older the hedge the more species of tree and shrub within... they provide shelter for wild life, and food for both animal and man. Throughout the seasons the hedge is a place of much activity as much for plant growth as for the passage of animal – providing a safe passage from field to field. There were hard times, when there was no work for the villager. To give some wages to the poor these hedges, ditches and banks provided all year work - which was never wasted. The English countryside has been the result of hundreds of years of labour contributing towards providing an honest living and food...

The hedges towards Perry Street were always full of yellow hammers. [Perry Street is a hamlet on the Fosse Way just along the road from Tatworth]. Further on, closer to South Chard, another hamlet, contains St Margaret's c15th Chapel... populated by nightingales, and the fields on either side inhabited by pewits who fed there in the winter when the field were being ploughed, and nested on the ground in the spring... they were an aggressive lot trying to swoop down and bomb us as we hurried along. The rooks, did not find the farmers at all happy at their presence - preferring corn instead of grubs. The corncrake, partridge and pheasants scuttled across the road... disappearing in a flash into the undergrowth... Along the Water Lake, down stream, could be seen the kingfishers and heron... and up in the woods, the woodpecker taps and the cuckoo calls.

It was not always the local lads who trapped the wild animals. Many out of work farm labourers trapped rabbits. Unfortunately, it was not always a rabbit that caught itself... foxes too who were out after the rabbits became ensnared. The gamekeepers set traps, although they mostly shot the vermin after the game birds eggs. They had their special fence [the keeper's pantry] to hang their catch on displaying: magpies, jays, foxes, weasels, stoats, rats and sometimes moles. The gamekeeper had not sentimentality about dispatching their kill.

Not far way the Tatworth woodman worked all year round building up his stocks, looking out for likely timber and logs, taking note where a tree had died and needed felling. Most of the copse was made of oak with beech and hazel as underwood. Crowns of willow, chestnut and alder along the riverbank, cut and shaped from ages past, were regularly cropped for stave and stick. Coppicing and pollarding had gone on for ages and the crowns were properly looked after. The woodman had to work out his diary in accordance with season and call. He had to look after his customers.

His task in the autumn was to set out his pitch – a little shelter of hurdle and thatch it's back directed to the north leaving the front open to the sun. He knew his stacks of wood would also shield... he had to work there all day and have all his tools and wooden devises, for shaping and holding, positioned perfectly. The chopping block, pole gauges, horse, and sail- block set up away from the ever-lit fire.

Most of his work consisted of making up his stack of fire logs for delivery, which was done one day a week to make up at least two rounds. His customers demanded a regular supply not just to use on the day but also to put by for the winter. His other main task was to make hurdles. He tried to keep all his items if not ready made with the wood ready for instant action. There would be a line of neat pens for willow wands, walking sticks,

split canes, posts, spars, and palings. Although he could make special tools and handles – ladders, clothes horses, spade handles, baskets, brooms, farm implements and kitchen chairs, as well as providing a fence making business he tried to maintain a steady income from routine affairs. The specialist items needed a different set-up with tools and benches more fitting for such work. At times, his labour was called on to repair or laid a hedge, builds a fence or mend a gate. On his rounds he was made aware of jobs that needed doing where a particular type of wood, shape and length needed. Nothing in the wood and copse went for waste except the bark, shavings, and chips, which found a place on the woodman's fire.

Just after the First World War horse, drawn vehicles carried all heavy goods. Even massive boilers for steam production were moved from the makers to the boiler-house by a drag team of ten pairs of heavy horses. These low, heavy chassied, multi, iron-rimmed wheeled wagons, were chained to the team of horses. The shire horses were bedecked with brass medallions having their manes and tails braided and ribboned – a magnificent sight. Behind, followed the trace pair, that helped hold the load going downhill or were taken to the front to help climb...

Road surfaces were poor and the lanes no more than muddy tracks. Tarmac was to come much later. The banks and hedge high and untrimmed. Most lanes showed their age by being sunken by continual traffic throwing the mud up onto the banks making the lanes even narrower. It was not unusual for oxen to be used for heavy carting work. Horse was kept for more detailed work being far more valuable. There were allsorts from Shetland ponies for light carts to heavy shires for wagons. Dapple greys and chestnut geldings many of them winning cups at the fairs. The carters took a delight in making their charges better than anyone else's makes. Their coats were groomed to

perfection their white socks washed and brushed, manes plaited and braided with ribbon. Their ears enclosed in caps decorated with bobbles and their hooves varnished. The leather gleamed and their brasses shone. All this to pull a dray or deliver the coal. Horses were prized possessions that paid their way, and what is more, they were friends too.

Those farmers who ran large estates, had brightly painted, shallow sided wagons, in house colours, with a seat at the front - for the driver. These wagons needed one or two strong horses and were used to gather hay and corn from the field... to take to the rick yards, and later, after thrashing, the corn in bags to the mill or chandlers. Another common sight was the two-wheeled muck-carts taking the manure from the cattle sheds and yard... to be spread on the fields, lying fallow.

Horses of all types needed to be shod – from Shires to Shetlands. Hunters that were turned out for the summer had their shoes removed and the farrier then pared their feet periodically. Blacksmiths always wore leather aprons with a slit down the middle so that the horse's foot could be out between his legs – to rest on the farrier's knee. During the 'Depression' – a period that began with the General Strike and finally ended in about 1933 when a European war looked a possibility, the number of horses declined. When things began to pick up farmers began to think about replacing their horses with tractors. Ten years later the use of tractors became a reality and the sudden demise of the workhorse came into being...

The farm labourers wore flannel shirts in the winter under waistcoat and jackets, and a coloured handkerchief tied round their neck instead of a collar. If they were available some wore old army greatcoats – a left over from the war, others tied sacks round their shoulders to keep off the rain. Many wore corduroy trousers supported by bracers and the legs tied with string below the knees making it easier to bend down – it also kept the turnips

from trailing in the mud. A few, particularly shepherds, still wore a smock but this was slowly dying out. A cloth cap was almost obligatory often worn backwards to keep the rain falling down the back of the neck, this also kept the sun off. All wore boots generally old army boots.

The coalman drove up in his four wheeled, flat cart with a high seat at the front. On his way past, he would call in to customers on his route to see if they needed any wood or coal. He sold coal in sacks, which were weighed on scales carried on his cart. You could order any amount for it was sold by weight not by the bag. He also sold faggots, chopped wood and logs. In the summer, the coalman used to put a straw hat on his horse to keep the sun off. It was a very patient; docile horse for it had to stand around for a long time as the coalman delivered his load. Along the road and over the bridge there might be coming horses working on the farms and in the woods. Occasionally the brewery cart pulled by two shires clomped past with their brasses tinkling.

In the late eighteen hundreds, through the war years... into the early thirties, steam driven vehicle proceeded petrol motors, especially for farm and timberwork. Many were Foden wagons, which trundled past Rosalie Cottage stopping at the stream to take on water for the boiler. These slow moving and noisy machines were hired to drive the thrasher, chaff cutter and drag plough. Quite often, they pulled either a drivers hut or trailer with spare tools and servicing equipment. If the job meant the driver stayed away from home he used the hut to sleep in. It also saved time to keep the boiler alight to save working-up steam-levels in the morning.

All major road repairs required the presence of a steam road roller. This machine did noble service right on past the sixties and still going strong.

There were outlying parts to the village, which demanded that children had some way to walk to reach school. Some of these cottages had only a grass footpath running to the front door. The children's way was by stile, hedgerow and wooded path, using as many short cuts as possible without getting their shoes wet or muddy. Those who lived upon the main road felt superior – that they lived in the thick of events. There was in the mid-thirties a general move towards couples buying their own homes. Before then to rent, a house or cottage was the accepted means of providing a roof over one's head. The breaking up of estates brought more land on to the market for builders to put up new affordable homes.

CHAPTER II

Farming pursuits

The garden gate – Perry Street - The old ford under the stone bridge – The Crossways – The Village School – Chard Junction – Chard Market – Sheep on the Downs – Village fetes – The two-horse plough – The pack-horse route – Oxen ploughing – Muck spreading – Self sufficiency – The mole catcher – Drilling & Rolling – Riverbank.

The Collins' cottage stood next to the old ford, now bridged over. On a summer's day, the parapet afforded a convenient leaning place for members of the community to gossip over – discussing questions of the day and those things that concern the village. It is quite narrow, only allowing the easy access of hay cart, and driven flock or herd. It was originally built

to save wet feet in times of flood and allow the passage of packhorse and drovers cart... It is like many others - picturesque, with a single arch; the swift flowing water opens out downstream - where the depth lessens, allowing the rounded pebbles to make the water chuckle and gurgle on its way to the reed bed lower down.

The garden gate opened onto St. Margaret's Lane, a road linking The Crossway's corner to the distant watermill... past school and shop... to Chard Junction - the nearest railway station. The name 'street' has a Roman origin, for paved way, this one linked all the main features of the village making it a frequent meeting place for passers by. In the twenties... on to the thirties, cars were a rarity - if a car went by children rushed to see it disappear up the road. Other than these rare moments, there was no traffic noise. Villages similar to Tatworth were self-sufficient; there was no necessity to travel afar. Many workers had bicycles and the carrier ran his delivery. There were very few changes to the village structure... for the same families existed - from generations past; everyone knew everyone else... there was no need to write the full address on an envelope for the persons name and village was sufficient. The exodus from the village final began after the war, in the 1950s, when young folk leaving school looked beyond the village. The change was remarkable for not only its completeness but also its speed. Still, I must not hurry the time along the change was fast enough. Back, we must return, into the thirties and forties as the robin's bright eyes peered over the nest - his head swivelled, registering neighbouring birds calling to each other... the chattering swallows, heard in the eaves.

Occasionally a clatter of hooves announced a herd of cattle or sheep being driven by, off to Chard market... The accurate passage of time was not recognised, for very few people had wristwatches and only the older men wore a fob watch. On

Sundays, the church bells rang for each service. The churchgoers filed past the gate. When the single bell stopped ringing the late comers ran... Past summer memories return... the chirping of the crickets, the buzz of the bees... and the cock's crows, to the cackle of laying hens.

In outlying districts, oxen would provide the main pulling power, horses in areas with lighter soil. Women and men would follow along to break up the clods. The only relaxation from the grind of every-day work is a trip to market for the family. The wives and daughters would be in their best dresses their husbands in cord, cap and tweed.

The rat and rabbit catcher was still an occupation each dead animal paid by the tail. Hunting was a fashionable sport. Sheep grazed on light arable land like the Dorset Downs. The shepherd and his dog could still be seen standing guard over the flock. Repairing his pens, erecting hurdles, setting up his troughs and hayracks whilst living in his movable corrugated hut on wheels where he sleeps in a bunk warmed by a small cooking stove during lambing time Hand shearing, sometimes done by a single shearer and at other times a gang... began in early spring.

Chard market, which opened each week, was one of the main cattle and sheep sales for the area and covered a large site with hundreds of pens. The auctioneer could be heard calling out the prices whilst the sheep gave voice and the cattle bellowed. This weekly market was what the rural community looked forward to each week. It gave the chance to sell their produce, hear the latest news and to keep up with prices. Streets would be sealed off, completely flocks, and herds driven in to be placed into their stalls and pens. The occasions were take for the wives to visit the shops and buy the produce that could not be purchased at the village shop.

There were many customs and festivals all eagerly looked forward to and if possible attended. Mumming plays, May Days

with a carnival procession - following the hobbyhorse, raising the Maypole, Morris-dancing, the harvest customs, bonfire nights and wakes... wassailing, on twelfth night and the local hunt 'meet'.

Every year there were flower shows, fairs, fetes and feasts. Showmen's vans and carts displaying garish and colourful posters; merry-go-rounds, stalls, roll a half-penny, coconut shies, gingerbread and lolly-pops. The showman's drum would beat and calls made to gather in the customer; bells would ring and the one-man-band starts up.

The jumble sale gave the villagers the chance to acquire cast offs and the unfitting given a new lease of life. Chipped plates a-plenty and broken children's toys; all were queued for long before the opening hour. The stall, which held the greatest attention, was the children's clothes. There was little 'bye-your-leave' but an undignified scramble... jumpers and blouses held up to the child to assess the correct size. The Rector circled the heaving mass never ceasing to be amazed by the aggressive tactics of the mothers. He was still due his tithes - one tenth of the annual produce from each parish. Even though this was reduced in 1836, many refused to pay it. There was much unrest and many court orders were issued. Even at the turn of the century through to the end of the First World War, and shortly after, tithes were paid. His control and standing soon began to fall-off never to assume its previous privileged position.

The farm-worker who looked after the horses was on many farms also the ploughman. He rose early to tend his horses that had to be fed two hours before they started work. During this time of cleaning, feeding and watering the ploughman had his own breakfast. When all was ready, the horses were led out to the field previously marked out for ploughing and an aiming stick planted to give a guide for the first 'up' furrow. The second 'down' furrow leaned against the first, making a ridge - a centre-

furrow. The ploughman only worked for one continuous hour giving the horses a rest before starting again.

Ploughing was an autumn job always a rush to see who could start first after the harvest over and the old ricks broken up to be spread – to be ploughed in, along with stable scrapings and contents of the dung heap.

Even during the Second World War, those working the land continued to follow old customs and attitudes. The ploughman, who worked alone, and his fine team of horses would plough and harrow the field ready for the seed to be sown by drilling. He lurched all day long with one leg down the furrow and the other up turning the fire blackened stubble of the previous year... watching the lifted turf roll off the mouldboard - to compost down the top surface. During their breaks the horses would be given their nosebags contained oats and chaff.

Huge flocks of seagulls that came straight from the sea at Seaton and Lyme Regis always followed the ploughing horses. Most of the fields had their attendant rusting farm implements stored away in odd corners - the sprouting corn, weeds and brambles slowly hid them from sight until they formed part of the hedgerow.

The productive arable land was not so intensively managed in the early thirties. Later on, when Britain tried to be more self sufficient, every spare piece of land was used to produce food. It was known that lime and sulphuric acid wash out of the soil and should be replaced. Lime was the chief dressing, which then began to be used extensively - in the autumn.

When my mother was born, and for some years after, it would not have been strange to see oxen ploughing. Oxen had been used for farm work long before the horse in all corners of the world. Their working ability, after training, was the same although the ox stronger – could deal with land that is more difficult but they were slower. Their keepers took as much time

over their appearance, with the tips of their horns capped in brass and bells beneath their necks.

A farmer would use an ox because they existed on courser food and were fast eaters, withstood worse weather, and after a couple of years could be fattened and sold at market. They were a cheaper option – needed no shoeing; horses were mainly for personal riding and carriage work. When fat beef cattle were preferred for slaughter the life of the ox became less secure... the advent of the tractor finished their working life completely and that of the ox-carter.

After ploughing in the stubble, spread manure and yard waste the field was left for the frost to work at ready for harrowing in spring. The cereal varieties have changed over the years to ripen quicker and have shorter stalks. Although this is good for the farmer it is not so for wildlife. The poor unfortunate field mouse no longer builds its nest at the top of a swaying corn stalk... Some of the field were left in fallow for the next year and others planted with pink clover, vetch, yellow mustard or broad bean. These were used as animal fodder - whilst the livestock fertilized the ground as they fed... Swedes were grown as an animal crop... either dug up or fed to the cattle... or the sheep turned into a fenced section of the field - to graze... the shepherd daily moving the hurdles, until the whole field covered.

Later on, the flock would be moved into shelters, still using the hurdles and bales of straw to enclose an area for the ewes to have their lambs. Coupling up a horse to the shafts of a horse-drawn hut-on-wheels, the shepherd would tow the hut to a convenient spot close to the flock and out of the wind. The hut was necessary, for him to stay with his dog, day and night, to guard the flock and to administer to the needs of the ewes shortly to give birth. The shepherd's hut contained a bed, chair

and small stove to provide some heat and cook his meals... he would stay there until lambing was over.

The shepherd's son was thirteen, coming on fourteen, entrusted with looking after a flock of sheep on the common. He drove the sheep taking number different routes to crop new grass along the way. The path bypassed sown crops and populated hamlets keeping off roads and highways. Taking in the lie of the land, the larks soaring overhead, the growing wheat, and frisking rabbits. Along the path that lead to stream and brook giving water to the hurdle flock as it passed. This was a treat, a change from turnips. In the past, forty years previously – at the turn of the century, there had been a recovery from the imported corn and lamb. Once again, the farmer who had survived the bad years started to receive the benefits of patience and perseverance. Not those things got back to pre 1870 but they were certainly better than the nineties. |In the good old days the farmers planned a succession of crops for the sheep mainly vetches, clover and turnips. With the hurdle fold moved daily the shepherd rationed what food was available.

Lambing occurred in February and within the hurdles were bales of hay placed to afford shelter and food. Although it was a bad month for the uncertain weather, it did take regard of the coming spring and the new shoots of grass. The coming summer markets were the goal of the shepherd... his every working moment now directed to achieving the best fattening for the new lambs. Farmers who had the space built lambing pens in the barn but we are more concerned about the shepherd who did not have this luxury. Often you could see, as you passed along the lane, a corner of a field sheltered by high hedges – the lea protected from the prevailing winds. Close to the corner a rick, placed there since time immemorial for the same reason... It was to be the forth side to a pen using the meeting of two corner hedges and a set of hurdles, the third... Perfect for the job. As

the lambs were born more individual coops constructed from bales and hurdles inside the main pen. This was no spur of the moment devise but one handed down through the centuries.

The shepherd's life was an exacting one for about six weeks. His hut-on-wheels emitted smoke from the bent chimney from his tiny round stove. The morning fry-ups always with ample early morning mushrooms smelt fantastic as the sausages spat and sizzled. He tramped his rounds every few hours with his trusty dog, who's post the at the foot of the steps leading to the shepherds hut, remained his domain. The bed, with the colourful crotched cover remained unmade... no need to be worried about being chastised for not being tidy. The small table and rickety chair, the only furniture, softened by a dusty print hanging askew and from projecting wooden pegs an assortment of aprons, straps and topcoats. For this period, he was the key worker receiving due deference from passers by and other farm workers who acknowledge his importance. His boss kept him supplied with bacon, sausage and bread, and topped up his jar of ginger beer.

Within the time allotted for lambing the first green tender points of new grass began to show. It was getting on for late April when it was time to move the ewes and their youngsters down to the meadows. Still the ground was penned to allow the new grass to have a chance to grow. Within two or three weeks, the whole field could be opened up. By May, there was an abundance of clover, vetches, pea old dredge corn, and wild rye to feast upon. Haymaking time was fast approaching...

The ploughman would quickly follow on after lambing with the plough, if not done previously, or with the harrow - to break-up furrows - to prepare the surface ready for sowing. Whereas the harrow only cuts up the top, the plough digs and moves the soil in a certain direction. The ploughman considers how to turn over the soil - to prepare it for the winter's action,

composting the previous year's stubble and root systems whilst allowing air to circulate; all the time giving thought to proper surface drainage making sure ditches were kept clear - without causing erosion or a series of hollows. It was normal working practice to plough furrows along the contours of the land. There were only a few reversible mouldboards and these were not always successful... so ploughing 'up' and 'down' was done a certain distance apart – into 'gathers'. These strips of ploughing kept the field in its original state consciously allowing the ploughshear to skate upon the surface at the turn of each row. Finally the whole field was circled anti or clockwise to set the direction of the soil needed. Ploughing done soon after the stooks removed from the field and the wastage burnt off.

It was almost a race to see which farm started work first... making sure all was ready for the first frosts to break the turf. Old ricks broken down and together with chaff spread - to be ploughed in whilst the work was in progress. The ploughed fields in autumn allowed the winter's weather to break down the clods, which together with the rains exposed the flints and stones. These picked up and removed to the edge of the field to swell the heaps of many generations of labour.

Steam powered engines worked the land operated by contractors using sets of cultivating equipment although these were obsolete just before the war. However, threshing and barn work still carried on with steam power as did road repairs using steamrollers.

At the beginning of the thirties, just after the General Strike ended, the agricultural community was in tatters. Generations of farm workers suddenly found themselves out of work – all their hard won skills unwanted. Many found work in factories, like the butter factory or lace mill. Some turned their hand to building being somewhat allied to farm maintenance work. This increase in building work was to be seen and felt all

over England, particularly along the railways lines, and towns. It was fortunate that the lace factory continued to produce net for curtaining. However, none of this happened without a great deal of anxiety and worry.

Boys left school aware of local customs and work habits. Within a short space of time, they absorbed a number of different skills - all to do with building and farm work. These skills they picked up watching their elders and listening to their conversation. The tractor driver knew a thing or two about machinery and its maintenance. The ploughman could repair a fence, weave a hurdle and dig a ditch and the dairyman could become a shepherd - if needs be! No different for their wives and girl friends - it was a matter of being versatile, for jobs were rare and times were hard. Not one of them does the same job... day in and day out... throughout the year. They may like to but circumstance dictates they turn their hand to anything that needs doing.

At the start of the Second World War when the government were forced to make the country 'as self sufficient as possible' farming began a series of transformations. As much land as possible was brought into cultivation - some neither economic nor practical. More tractors and harvesters brought into use quickly to cope with difficult terrain, larger fields, and lack of skilled ploughmen, insufficient casual and migrant labour and conscription of The Women's Land Army.

The country was at total war it was no good having too many scruples about maintaining parks and gardens or maintaining small fields and non-negotiable gateways. From the time when I was old, enough to take notice until well into the 1950s when rationing still in force, self-sufficiency was the governments aim. The farmer was as much fighting the war as the soldier; if not cooperative, he was forced to comply with The

Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery's strictures or removed from his land. It was a difficult time; the seasons dictated the speed of progress towards the government's diktats... it was not many years before, that flails were used to thrash out the corn.

In the winter of 1939 there was enormous activity on the land... two million extra acres were to be sown in preparation for war. There was not enough equipment including horses – only fifty-five thousand tractors were available, in all of Britain.

A frosty start to the day... Winter starts in mid November when the last leaves swept off the trees - by the harsh cold wind. It does not take long for the Technicolor picture of summer to fade and the cold hard reality of winter about to descend... The icy blasts harden the furrow's ridge turned up by the plough's mould-board as the field is prepared for the winter sowing of wheat. Over the hedge the field of swedes dug up for market and the remainder placed in clamps next to the potatoes and mangold-wurzels. The carrots and beetroots taken inside the barn and put into tubs of dried peat.

Soon the onetime rain-filled clods now frozen rock hard. The dry twigs, lifeless rumpled leaves and remnants of half-eaten acorn and chestnut, crackle underfoot. Everything covered in the rime of hoarfrost... the countryside, glistens in the sparkling winter sunlight. On the allotment garden it is the month of digging and planting, making sure the beds are ready for next years potatoes, cabbages and onions.

The occasional flurry of snow chased hither and thither by the north wind. The last of the leaves drop at the beginning of December... the bare trees show their deformities to the windward side as the chill wind dries up the last remaining moisture. Wheat sowing continues unabated as the last field are ploughed for oats.

Whilst the hedgehog, dormice and bat hibernate, other animals lie still - conserving energy... Not all animals are retiring though... for the fox and weasel are on the prowl.

It is time for grandad to prune the fruit trees and take cuttings from the currants. There is little time for the birds to feed... grandma leaves out an enamel plate on the grass full of table scraps... it is not long before the plate is bare! The gorse on the common and the winter-toadstool in the wood, give the only colour to an otherwise grey scene. Pairs of hooting tawny owls begin their courtship feeding... not giving the foraging mouse and scurrying vole time to linger!

The wind begins to be noticeably colder – it is now bitterly cold with clear skies. Walking about close to the stream, the dead leaves were now frosted and sparkled in the morning light. The mistletoe in the lime trees looked like airy nests against the sky. The ditches are checked to ensure they are free and not blocked. The manure is taken to the remaining field that have so far escaped ploughing. Any good day is taken up spreading lime on fields taking brassicas.

The edges of the stream freezes... it is only the swift flow of the water in the centre that keeps it free from ice. The snowstorm for-fills the promise of the dark, heavy clouds... the lanes and fields merge: it is truly, a bleak mid winter scene. The wind swirls the snow about creating banks against the hedges. It is just as well that the workers in the butter factory can walk to work - for trying to cycle is impossible! Some dried reeds disguised the fact that the young growth had started to show through the frost-covered ground as a lonely bulrush nods its bedraggled head at the strength of the wind. It starts to rain and the light fades fast... The sheep begin to move towards the sheltered side of the field... A patch of dread flag iris cropped down display new growth - just visible under trampled leaves. A flock of lapwings fly overhead as a startled partridge races away.

Grandad spends his time in the greenhouse studying the seed catalogues the trays bearing the seed potatoes are under the shelf starting to sprout.

Back in the cottage, the fire in the parlour range heats the parlour and casts a cheery glow. Outside hardly a sound disturbs the snow-bound village... The family gather round the fire comforted by the crackling, hissing sap, as it bubbles out of the burning wood; the occasional crack heralds another flying ember... the nearest target extinguishes the glowing missile whilst grandma serves out the next round of cooked chestnuts... passing them in turn round the ring of fire lit faces. They do not linger... the offered nut, far too hot to help shed the peel...

The snow gives way to slush and the banks of the stream overflow. The bridged, one time ford, holds back the flow... the water creates a pool that dissipates towards the reed bed. A weak sun and drying wind soon returns the fields to a furrowed brown. At last, time to break up the spade turned soil - in preparation for outside sowing. February is the month to sow parsnips – the first vegetable to begin the cycle all over again. It will not be long before the purple orchid graces the woodland glade, to be followed by the pansy and violet.

There was talk about a mole that had been busy in the garden making a series of mounds across the grass under the apple trees... it is just as well that the mole is not distracted in its digging by the sodden ground. The snowdrops are a pitiable sight, dipping and bending under the weight of water. The rain continues to fall... Is it possible to be warm again and to run barefooted over the grass?

As soon as the scattered primroses line the ditches, the bees begin to fly. Now, at last, spring is in the air - to last from March to the end of April. Throughout England in the thirties, and at other times - after tillage farmers would sow their seed to coincide with their area's weather and ground temperature -

knowing that spring is a period of instability. It is time now to attend to fattening and breeding stock.

Therefore, it would be wrong to say that on the first day of spring the corn was cast... wheat was sown in February, oats in March and barley in April. What decided the issue would be how the sun's rays had warmed the ground, the local meteorological forecast for future sun and the access to machinery... not on the amount of rain or wind. The sown seed is then promoted into life by dampness and decaying plant litter acting as an insulator from the cold night air. Usually after the warmth of the March sun just as the blackthorn comes into bloom - plant growth is triggered - when the ground temperature is 43°F. The early potatoes are planted and the summer carrots pricked out... early dwarf peas and summer spinach sown in succession. The onion sets are given their regimental rows together with the shallots. There is so much to do that it is late before granddad settles down in front of the fire.

The buds on the oak tree noticeably green peep out. At last, winter is over... Along Perry Street, the ivy leaves on the walls are bright and shiny and opposite the church, the Jubilee Tree outlined against the pale blue sky. There is talk about some snow; forecast for the afternoon... the news does not interest the cock blackbirds who watch their hens battle it out on the grass. The wind now is blowing quite hard a few drops of waterfall - shaken out of the trees...

The rooks are repairing their nests. It is a time of great activity in the field, hedge and tree. The invaders migrating from abroad challenge competition between breeding birds for what food is available. The dawn chorus proclaims each individual's territory, beginning well before sunrise. Now the swallows begin to arrive... just before the cuckoo's call.

Down by the stream the willow's twigs and branches show more colour and buds have started to form on the ash. At last,

spring is beginning to show itself... the hawthorn buds are green and the pussy willow worth collecting. Those blackbirds have started rowing again as they chase each other making such a racket. The work on the farm increases in intensity, the machinery shaken out and oiled.

Before sowing could take place the farrows had to be levelled off and the clods reduced. Harrowing with drag harrows with iron teeth reduced the soil to a fine tilth. Rolling could be used alternately to further reduce the lumps of soil. It was always beneficial to cover sowed seed to prevent birds from destroying the field. Sowing was still partly done by hand but quickly died out in the early thirties except awkward corners and small fields. A good sower of seed could cover an acre field using just three pounds of seed.

Mechanical drilling was often done with two horses and would take an hour to cover an acre field. A trickle of grain fell down the funnel into the small furrow from the box. The roller followed the seed-drill, in many places drawn by horses

Mangelwurzels spread over the next field by hand or from the back of a horse drawn cart this gave the sheep something to crunch particularly at lambing times and fertilized the field - they were particularly difficult to pull out of the frozen ground in winter.

It was the schoolchildren's job to scare away the rooks using battered pans and rattles. The high branches of the elms hold the rookery - the nests made out of twigs laced together hold firm against the swaying of their homes. They are there surviving the winter storms to be rethatched the following spring. The rook's cries... filled the air.

In the houses and cottages, the start of spring heralded Spring-cleaning. All the rag, wool hand-stitched loose rugs would be taken out of the house to be beaten. As the cottage door was left open on most days - not only to air the living room but

allow the smoke filled atmosphere to clear, the rugs would be damp... having to be hung on the washing line to dry before house-work started.

In the garden, it is the month of almost continual weeding, transplanting and thinning out. The greenhouse is taken up with pots of this and that sprouting up... The sweet peas are taken out to be planted and summer cabbage given another row. We start having rhubarb tart for starters...

The stream seems to know winter is over - that new life forming... it bubbles and chatters over the rounded stones on the streambed in celebration, sparkling brightly - in the morning sun. The catkins hang down from the hazel as a new growth of bramble entwines round the stem. At the base a patch of assorted primroses, some white, others pink, vie with the violets to brighten up the riverbank, mainly colourless in its winter coat... I wonder who is going to hear the first cuckoo....

The cows from the farm start to enter the field over the hedge there is a great deal of lowing. The milking is still done by hand in many areas - especially small farms, 100 million gallons a year was transported to London by rail in the thirties using special milk vans. Field crops were planted by hand every potato sown by gangs of local women and children all paid just four shillings a day, the same rate for stone gathering. However much the land around is finding new life the farming people still are challenged by the daily grind.

The swallow whirl overhead... they swoop round the eaves darting here and there just for the fun of it. If only they would be still - just for a moment. The reeds, once flattened and bedraggled, standing upright, resplendent in green. The hoverfly staggers by as he hurries home carrying his sacks of pollen. Now it is the turn of the wagtails to dart amongst the now active undergrowth wagging their tails vigorously on landing. There is no doubting the advent of summer as the May buds start to

open... All along the bank, the riversides bestir themselves. The flash of orange-red and turquoise startles them as the kingfisher showing off dashes by...

Early May sees the birth of summer... the weather makes a perceptible improvement. The trees spread their canopies giving shade... filtering the sunlight onto the ground. Now the insects start to home in on their particular source of food. The open countryside starts to change colour as each fruit starts to ripen. The birds start to quieten when the lazy days of summer herald school holidays and another harvest about to be planned for.

The splendid horse-chestnut tree in the next field now has bright green leaves and a few sticky buds are opening... it will not be long before the flowers open... At last, summer is just around the corner..., it has taken so long. All the winter rains and chill winds seem an age away. The hawthorn blossom is such a delicate thing but the most prolific flowing tree - which starts the race - for all the other blooms to follow. In the field, the first buttercups give voice to early summer suns. The cuckoo call seems to echo, bouncing off the trees in the wood. Down by the stream the early summer sun warms up the cow-parsley the myriad small white flowers give off a scent that is slightly sour - hangs in the air. Close to the riverbank, the cow's foot weed. It appears as if a larger version of the watercress, or giant clover; whose flower has to wait two or three days before its ball is fully open. Is it any wonder that it is such a favourite of the bee... who unfortunately has to be content with nectar from the comfrey? It is just as well that the bee is such an active insect - life would soon come to a halt without its labour. Little do that pair of tufted ducks care about such esoteric thoughts, they are far too busy - concerned about their nest and the batch of speckled eggs it contains...

In the deeper stretches of the river a pair of swans continue their patrol - first this way and then that. No river scene

is complete without their graceful presence. Dusk begins - soon after tea; the evening stroll requires the welcoming comfort of a coat. A turn up the road, over the bridge... a glance over the hedge shows the mist is beginning to raise... the reed bed a distant outline.

A second sowing of French beans is tackled first thing after breakfast on Saturday, quickly followed by the potatoes being earthed-up. The kitchen garden is now almost fully planted with neat orderly rows stretching across all the gardens. Nothing is left to chance for it is most important that the garden produce all that the family needs.

CHAPTER III

Over the garden gate

The Tinker calls – Tramps along the way – Pedlars and Knife-grinders – Proud Gypsies – The onion seller – Shopping at Chard – The Carrier Van – The penny bazaar – Summer holidays – Taking the train – The station handcart – The mechanical reaper – The one-horse rake – The swath-turner and the hay sweep – Thrashing with the huller.

Tinkers still visited the villages in their carts setting up their braziers to heat the pots and pans. They would grind and sharpen the gardening tools, household scissors and kitchen knives. Their call of ‘scissors to grind’ an oft-heard cry as they spun the grindstone wheel.

The tramps made their way along Perry Street with their loads of clothing tied in bundles. It was not unusual to find one setting up his pot over a fire or making his lean-to tent. They

never seemed to be thin... perhaps it was the amount of clothing they wore that fattened them out? They were in the main successful beggars, housewives giving them a crust or drink of milk to make them go away.

For hamlets and outlying villages – away from the main highways, the population was sparse the Tinkers and Hawkers took the place of small shopkeepers – they were an essential part of the countryside – a much relied on source of communication as well as suppliers of essential goods.

Pedlars and Knife-grinders also had a place in rural life... they plied their trade too. In those days the Pedlar was called the Chapman and was very welcomed... he passed on news and gossip to outlandish places in a similar way to the Tinker carrying an amazing variety of goods in his carpetbag – pins, needles, vests, caps, girdles, laces, gloves, knives, glasses, tapes, dusters and much else besides. He sold clothes for babies, cleaning materials for the kitchen and floor. Lengths of material, aprons, ribbons, and thread, for the dressmakers and wool for the knitters. All were very handy for those unable to get to the shops in town. The Pedlars had their rounds and were expected to provide the same produce summer and winter... for they were relied on... His round was passed on - from father to son - jealously guarded. No tradesman's cart invaded his preserves... for in some instances, he worked conspiring with a local town's, general store - which provided his merchandise. It has been known for Tinkers to set up shop within the village, and in time to be accepted and integrated into the running of the village co-operative. There was no other means of obtaining these articles for who else would travel on rutted tracks in all weathers and in all seasons.

The proud gypsies, with their dogs, still wandered the lanes of England, most staying within their locality where they knew the habits of the workers and the farming community. Some

stayed in town during the winter only travelling during the summer months to sell what they had traditionally made; others worked picking the summer crops. The women sold wooden pegs, woven baskets and bunch of 'lucky' heather whilst the men picked the fruit, helped with the harvest and planted the seed. In winter, they sold scrap metal and made-up their stock. The traditional highly coloured bow-topped van, with its decorated sides and neat, stepped, glazed door - displaying gaily painted cans and boxes, all pulled by a single horse. Often there a convoy of gypsy caravans which passed by heading for an old familiar campsite? Underneath the cart, a cage was to be seen carrying a clutch of hens. The rabbit catching lurcher loped along ready at a call to find a rabbit for the pot. The families would all meet up at the same site to pick fruit or vegetables in season... re-establishing past friendships - cementing family links.

The Spanish onion seller on his bike operated from coast to hinterland. Having his own route cycled year after year, with his strings draped over every part of the bike so that it looked like a travelling stack on wheels.

It is the time of year when the sky shows a saturated blue above the new, fresh foliage of the nearby elms. The sky's colour so intense that it creates a lightening vignette - halo, around the skyline branches. This distortion or adjacency is purely an action of poor eyesight not actual. It is unlikely for a human being not to be uplifted by nature's allure. At last all the trees are in full foliage although still not fully formed and the sunlight reaches the ground below allowing under plantings to flourish.

Early summer mornings in June are heralded by the cocks crowing in all the chicken runs - at the bottom of the garden. This would be the start to one's day, quickly followed by the dawn chorus and the chatter of swallows in the eaves.

There being no traffic as such only the clip-clop of the milkman's horse and cart, resplendent in its coloured paint

outlining its panels... the open back, made it look like a chariot, swayed as the milkman descended to deliver the days supply. The welcoming chink of his bottles and clank of his churns was another reminder...

Along the roadside dense thickets of blackthorn covered in early morning dew, sharp smelling and alive with bees feasting off the white blossom. In the fields, the chirping grasshoppers fidgeted and the ever-buzzing insects flew about with a purposeful beat to their wings. Along the lane the mighty stag beetle worked his way over the rotting wood, his, was only a very short life, whilst the ants formed up one behind each other carrying their scrap of leaf, to who know where? No phones rang, no planes flew overhead and no dust was disturbed on the lanes. There was always plenty of time and the tranquil scene remained unspoilt even through the war years. Down stream from the bridge there are two workmen cutting the weed and dragging it to the side of the bank. Quantities of weed escape the attention of the men and drift down river becoming entangled in the trailing willow branches. It is late afternoon and the warm light highlight the heads of the marsh orchid amongst the waist height reeds. The swans paddle by now accompanied by their young, little grey-brown bundles of downy feathers. It is getting late and the background hum of insect life quietens the evening strollers start up the road towards the Poppe Inn.

The end of each day was announced by the screech of owls in the neighbouring trees, the local cats fighting for territory, and the bark of foxes in the copse. Pathetic crying... another victim would follow the occasional fluttering, scuffles and rustles... The countryside was not always sleeping!

Most villages were self-supporting in that they had a shop, a butchers and bakers. The fields and gardens provided the rest. Many folk had a bicycle - adequate for getting to work or shop - there was always the carrier to cart the extra purchases.

Village life carried on with the help of small businesses - passed on from generation to generation. Because families were large most of the children, on leaving school, left home to take up employment in the nearest town, which was in this case Chard. At least one boy always followed the father's occupation and one of the girls looked after the aging grandparents. [*Later on, the same girl looked after the parents*]. Other girls within the family provided help in wealthier homes, close to the family home.

Those children left at home after the parents had died usually took over the tenancy. Although it was difficult to travel about there was a lot of visiting of families, friends and relations, which closely bonded the community. Most of the village and local industry served the farmers - their farms and country estates. There was, throughout the year, a general working up towards harvesting time - getting all the machinery into working order.

It was not often that my grandma went shopping to Chard. The lack of money being the chief reason but distance and time made it a chore not an enjoyment. The children going to school, then to work, had to be looked after. Still, there were times when a visit had to be made, and more often than not, for clothing. Only working class mothers inhabited the shops. Nobody who wished to be thought of as middle class would be seen in such places. The workers manners, clothes and speech would embarrass the shop girls of high-class establishments. The formidable shop-walker, in black jacket and striped trousers - who's job it was to provide security and to stop shop-lifting, would soon hover close to unfamiliar faces as soon as they came through the door enquiring if he could direct you...?

The shop windows would be dressed very conservatively. The plaster models and designer sets represented daily scenes, most of the produce was kept in glass fronted drawers or cupboards - not in a position where the customer able to handle

the goods. The shop assistant would be told the item to be assessed and they would have to fetch it and point out its suitability. If the article was large then the shop's carrier called to either see the client to the door or to take the item out and place it in the dogcart or carriage. It was possible to take the item on approval. Then the carrier would take the clients name, address, and list the goods taken. No deposit was required and the client departed.

Tills or cash registers were not on the counters. The cashier sat in a glass sided cubicle at the back of the shop. The shop assistant took the cash to the cashier - who placed it and the price tag in a metal container that was taken by cord and air pressure along a tube to the office. The receipt and change returned by the same route. If the change included a farthing, this was used to buy pins or some other small item.

The penny bazaar was a favourite place to visit, especially for children to spend their savings. Such places had an open front and display counters presenting all their produce to open view. They were always well attended the crowd shuffled through at a snails pace as... the excited children stared in wonderment. This was the forerunner of Woolworth's 'thrupenny and sixpenny' store.

The shops stayed open late on Saturdays particularly those in the street or market place. It was the place to buy cheap meat for the weekend roast, at the end of the working day. On market days, the place was alive with people, with stallholders all shouting and declaring their wares. It was always colourful and exciting with the one-man-band playing, jugglers and the occasional beggar... all demanding attention.

Grandma was so careful that whenever buying any material - it was carefully examined. The material was rubbed to see if the cloth was full of 'dressing' - which would wash out leaving the garment thin and limp. Clothes for her children were

always bought too large, so that they could be worn for the longest possible time and then handed down. Invariably the colour was white, in that way they could be repeatedly washed - without wondering if the colour was going to last, and being the same colour as sheets, pillowcases and towels they could all be washed together.

All bed linen was white, which allowed girls, about to be married, to sew on lace edging... similarly the towels, flannels and tray cloths – embroidered then laid in tissue paper in the lowest drawer. Each daughter reserved this drawer for her private things – for her ‘bottom drawer’, items kept aside for when she became married. On rainy days this drawer was carefully turned out – relined, and then refilled. Keeping a bottom drawer was started at a very young age and used to condition girls - to seek a husband and start their own home. It was also used to keep the girls occupied. If they left home to be ‘in-service’, they lived in - treated as one of the family, under the control of the housekeeper. In that case, the bottom drawer stayed where it was; ready for the day she left home for good.

Household items were bought to last a lifetime. Good saucepans and frying pans were very heavy - made of iron, and carefully treated with oil, which eventually became burnt-on and black. This was never washed or scoured off, but left – being just wiped out. For boiling vegetables, plain white enamel was thought to be suitable.

As the summer term passed my brother and I looked forward to our holidays. My mother, anticipating her return to the country, tries to pass off the excitement by taking it all calmly. The weather promised lots of fun on the beach at Bridport where mother’s sister Ada, who was a year younger, lived with her husband and daughters, Christine and Jean. A visit was also a necessity to Dora, mums other sister, who was

married to Sidney Wood, a butter maker, and daughter Sheila, who played the piano so beautifully...

The packing for our holidays went on for weeks – it was one way mum could rely on - to entice us boys in from the garden – to find a space for some other vital thing! Father had previously written out our warrant – for an employee’s family, to travel free on the railway, sanctioned for annual summer holidays. Now all we had to do was wait... how time did drag...

At last... the appointed hour. Up early, a quick breakfast, and out of the house... we marched to North Harrow train station... dad staggering slightly at the weight, as he manoeuvres the two large suitcases up the stairs... onto the platform.

The Metropolitan line train carries us to Baker Street... where we swap over platforms to take the Bakerloo Line tube for Waterloo - Southern Railway’s main line station. Stan and I had to see the driver and his massive steam engine, one of the must do things! The guards whistle jolted us back to reality, called us back onto the train, to find mum and our booked seats, to start, officially, our much looked-forward-to summer holiday.

The train, slowly made it way out of the station, its wheels slipping then gripping, to the accompany of much chuffing and billows of steam, to gather speed... as we made our way past the back gardens of the terraced houses along the line towards its first stop at Clapham Junction. The banging of doors announced our departure as we eagerly looked out of the window to watch the houses gradually disappear... to be exchanged for the marvellous countryside... then onwards... to Exeter Central, where we changed trains to take the little branch line to Chard Junction - on the Taunton Line.

The Bristol and Exeter Railway Company built the railway line from Taunton to Chard by 1866. The last British canal was built this same year... Chard Canal ceased to function in September of that year. The broad gauge track was converted to

standard gauge twenty-five years later. By the time of the first world war began a branch line was run to Chard Road station, later to be called Chard Junction. Lord Beeching finally put paid to it in 1962 for passengers and for freight, 1966... long after we took our holidays there. Special rates were charged for farmers coming to Chard Fair and Great Markets and many of their livestock travelled on this line. Excursions were run to Lyme and Seaton with Bank Holiday specials doing a roaring trade, and of course, we went along too...

These entire little branch lines were attractive and frequently used at summer time for holidaymakers. They became part of the countryside linking the outlying villages and hamlets as much by sound and sight as for actual use.

We all gathered on the platform to sort ourselves out, before shouldering our bags once more to make our way outside the station to load our luggage onto the station cart, which was trundled down Perry Street by the porter. By the time, we reached Rosalie Cottage with grandma at the cottage door dad was totally puffed out...

Looking back to those far off days the weather always seemed perfect. The skies cloudless of cerulean blue the new foliage on the trees sap green and the blossom dazzlingly Chinese white. The oaks always the last to show their colour and in the hedges - made-up of hawthorn, willow and elder, blackberry and dog rose sent out their tendrils to tie the hedge together... At the base of the hedge the primrose paled beside the dandelion and shiny buttercup. Next door's poplar shimmered in the breeze and the apple blossom blew about. Every plant alive with tiny insects fed on by birds.

At last July, the cricket bat is put aside and packing begins... even though it is still weeks away before the family sets off. The sunshine, and the heat from the sun that is now overhead, reminds us that there are new discoveries to be made

in the field and hedges, and the brook is always there to be damned.

The young corn is growing apace-showing fields of pale green and gold just standing level with the poppy and daisy. The buttercup is only just visible. The days go slowly by... not long now ... The golden ears of wheat sway gently in the breeze against a background of dark-green hedges with purple blue shadows. The morning dew beads the heads as gossamer webs glisten in the fresh morning air. Not their time yet the hay now took preference... every year the same thing happened... the reaper was rescued from where it had stood all winter. Haymaking lasted most of the month, it was rare for the weather to be so bad that haymaking not completed before the harvest.

The farmer made sure his reaper blades sharp and properly set. He would be filing and hammering for days on end, making sure the harness not split or broken, but cleaned and oiled. This was no time to make do, the reaper had to do the harvesting as well as the haymaking, it was critical that all would last the season.

Meanwhile, on the banks of the river the yellow and purple loosestrife is in bud. Meadowsweet everywhere with its delicate tracery of white flowers, an attraction for the hover fly and digger wasp. A young thrush with speckled breast displays its buff feathers as it cocks its head on one side as if to say, 'watch me'.

Our journey had taken us past the fields of bleached grass glinting in the summer sun as the breeze wafted the tall slender fronds this way and that. They were pictures etched in our minds, of wonderful hazy days with a backcloth of hedges and mighty oaks, of chirruping crickets and the curlew's call.

Making hay began in late June, early July... My brother and I watched the grass being cut on the meadows along the railway line - as we travelled by on the train. It is now July - the start of

high summer. The scythesman still tackled a field - usually around the gate – so that the grass was not trampled flat by the horses. This opens up the field for difficult corners and field edges to be penetrated - before the reaper and binder got to work. Grass badly flattened by bad weather also was left to the scythe or sickle using a bender to lay the hay over.

It was not strange to see a line of workers in a gang working at intervals. Some fields just cut, others drying, some cut, and turned or being tied. Much of this work was done before breakfast; in the early mornings so that it was cool for the horses.

Many Londoners and city dwellers spent their summer holidays working at piecetime rates for farms during the war sleeping in converted barns and outhouses. It was important to have this all done before it rained for if left lying in the swathe it lost its quality – started to go black. The advent of imported tractors and combines plus the need for greater output – larger, squared off fields; saw the demise of the scythesman in the fifties.

A team of horses could cut three-quarters of an acre in an hour. A workers wife would provide a snack at ten o'clock, noon and again at three. Horses would be 'loosed out', home-brewed beer or ginger beer passed round to compliment the doorstep sized sandwiches. A second team was prepared that followed on bring further drinks and lunch bags, nosebags for the horses, extra knives, files and whetstone. A three in hand pulling a reaper all acting together was an unforgettable sight that lasted well into the sixties.

After the grass, lucerne and seed-clover had been cut, it was raked into rows...later sometimes into cocks-of-hay or cock making, [piles], to further 'make' [dry]. It was most important to have the hay completely dry, any dampness will create heat – start a fire. The dry hay, then gathered up and pitched onto

carts, fitted with ladders – side-walls, at each end to increase the load capacity... all, pulled by horses, dressed in shaft harnesses.

The one-horse rake, often residing the winter under some hedge close to where it had been last used, exposed, to have its knives sharpened and set - adjustments made with a spanner, and liberally dosed in oil. The horse keeper, lines in hand, would mount the iron seat and set off the contraption... rattling and clattering. By releasing, a lever regimented the swathes - left a trail of sweet smelling grasses laid out in long lines.

Machine cut grass, lays in neat rows perfect for drying, and could be left until the next day unless the sun too hot when it could become sunburnt. The haymaker was kept going all day to make the hay fit for stacking – leaving the hay light on the ground so that the sun and wind can get freely into it.

The driver of the rake sat upright occasionally flicking his whip. The horse nodding his head set out across the field. Every now and again, the driver raised the lever, which allowed another gathering of hay to drop into line.

Drying grass was left out to dry for several days, perhaps tossed by hand or turned by a swath-turner to ensure it was thoroughly dry then raked into haycocks by the use of a two pronged fork. With an eye to the weather, the farmer would decide if it was time to stack the dry hay... if it were, the hay wagon made its rounds to gather up the pitched hay to cart it to the stockyard where the rick was built and thatched.

These four machines – the mower, tedder, rake and loader were considered an excellent investment, even for small farms of less than 50 acres. Hay barns began to be used as a permanent shed for the storage of hay or corn. Where there is a hay barn, the hay can be stacked when ready not having to wait until there was sufficient to complete a rick. In cases where there is not enough to finish a rick a ‘tramp-cock’ or rick cloth erected.

Whatever, it was important not to allow the hay to get wet whilst the rick was in the process of being made.

The haymaking methods changed by the appearance of the first hay-loaders, which ousted the pitchfork and its backbreaking work. The hay-sweep became the latest equipment in the thirties plus its compliment elevator - for taking the hay to the top of the stack. A pony harnessed to a pole turned the elevator, which lifted up the straw onto the stack was another method of winching.

The horse age ended, mostly during the beginning of the war, when more fields were made over to stock rearing. Horses could not cope with the difficult land now ordered for ploughing - meant to help make Britain self sufficient during wartime... this speeded up the introduction of tractors. Farmers were fined if they refused to plough up meadows, which flooded or left difficult hillsides to gorse and fern.

The horses would obey 'the word' putting their shoulders to the collar. With a clatter, the chattering blades would whirl round and the once rippling grass would be cut, leaving sweet scented grasses, vetches and clovers lying flat.

Threshing with the huller, the clover was sometimes mixed with the grasses to give a richer fodder for the stock. Rotating grass with clover and then corn enhanced fertility and improved yield. The cart would off-load the slightly green hay to make a rick; if the building is not far advanced, the walls were built up, if higher, the hay pitched onto the elevator.

Ricks had sides slightly sloping outwards... the rain would drip off each stalk to the ground. Each layer of hay would be tied and trodden down. Haylofts, above the animal stalls... were stocked from field to loft. The artificial drying of hay was a means of circumnavigating a wet harvest - using an action of tossing and agitation along a conveyor belt and fanned hot air.

CHAPTER IV

Field and Farm

The hedge fruit ripens – Harvest time – Fagging begins – The reaper gets to work – Catching rabbits – Trussing the sheaves – Making the stooks – Loading the wagon – Steam power – Massy Harris – Threshing – Unricking the sheaves – Thatching the rick – Bradford's warehouse – September chill – Autumn cold and damp – Christmas cheer.

In August, all along the field edges, the fruits ripen... The summer thunder and lightning passes overhead... leaving the sudden rainstorm soaking the banks and ditches. The garden tiger moth dances past the river, the heat of the August sun entices the moth to spend sometime near the water and nettle bed – not far from the bank. The docks have almost gone to seed... and the purple and yellow loosestrife, lining the bank, give accommodation to the bittersweet, which wrap its tendrils round their stems. Just as I turn away, I notice a small frog crawling out of the water to disappear under a rotting bough. No chance there for an easy meal for the passing geese, preparing to migrate to more distant climes... the river giving a temporary resting place as they land in a flurry. The countryside look particularly beautiful giving a warm glow to the local elms given a three dimensional effect emphasised by the purple coloured distant hills. The recent heavy rains, battered the thistles - knocking the down off their heads, give an invitation to a large black slug - making its way amongst the vegetation. The last drops of rain glistening like diamonds on the blackberries slide

off onto the ground. The radio forecasts a spell of fine settled weather.

At last, the countryside was prepared for the harvest to be cut. It was if the fields were in tension just waiting for the exact moment... for it took great judgement to make sure the corn heads were just right for cutting. Too ripe, the grains would fall out of their husks whilst cutting... not ripe enough - too much moisture, the grain would not separate properly and be left in the ears. It was now a question of a few settled days of good weather. Harvesting was not just for the farmer and his field crops but went on in the hedgerows attended to by his wife – also, part of rural life, habit and custom.

Now the stage is about to be set - the farmer has chosen his moment well. The latest weather forecast plus a final check of his fields tells him that the harvesting moment had arrived. He enters each field and checks between the crops leaf-nodes – the swelling, where a leaf joint show, for a slight greenness to show... it is just right – perfect for harvesting... he returns to the farm to tell his men.

The spare farm labourers, their friends, women not engaged in housework and we children would turn out to help. The men were all clothed in old Sunday best suit, much used and baggy, hitched-up with string, and wearing a waistcoat. Workers of the period, whatever calling - hedging, ditching, thatching or sowing, wore the same outfit come summer, winter, sun, wind or rain... cap, navy, black or pin-striped jacket [rarely taken off], trousers held up with bracers and belt, collarless shirt, waistcoat, with looped chain, and leather hobnailed boots... under them all, a pair of long johns. Their wives wore long voluminous skirts, petticoats, pleated blouses sleeves either rolled up or buttoned at the wrist with pinafore or apron... with scarf or shawl in winter. No one ever wore a jumper or cardigan except us children.

I remember much speculation about timing - order of which field to be cut, and workers to be engaged. The atmosphere created by the numbers of people involved and the noise and clatter of horses moving about. It was after all the culmination of the years work and meant a great deal to everyone in the village. The reaper, now thoroughly serviced after haymaking, hitched up and ready to go!

At first light, the horses are groomed and harnessed up. Some fields were sown with wheat, which was grown especially for thatching – required longer stalks. When it became time to harvest, it was critical that there was some moisture left in the stalks – explains why the farmer has chosen the timing by the trace of green to the leaf joint.

One of the men would go around the field ‘fagging’ to cut an opening with a sickle, then the first swathe with a scythe, swinging it from side to side in easy motions, occasionally sharpening it with his whetstone. The object was to make the headland wide enough to get the horses or tractor in - without trampling down the corn. A farm worker could cut an acre of corn a day and his wife or mate could follow on and tie-up in sheaves with straw bands, women who stacked up the sheaves were called bondagers. A great deal of farm work was performed as piecework - by casual labour. In the twenties the harvest was still cut and bound by hand with a sickle or reap hook... taking four men to finish an acre a day.

Other cutting devices augmented the scythe: the reaping hook is an enlarged sickle, used to cut off the ears of the wheat – leave the tall straw standing. The sickle has a fine toothed edge whilst the fag-hook has a step just below the handle – the blade and handle on different levels, made to cut hedges or bramble without skinning your knuckles.

The main excitement was when the mechanical reaper got closer to the centre of the field. The field of corn was

reduced in size - gradually gave way to stubble, whilst my brother and I became more and more excited in anticipation of how many rabbits would run out from the centre. The plan was to chase and shout as loud as we could for this confused the rabbits that ran down their holes then out again. This was what all the spare hands had been waiting for. Even Uncle Ken Larcombe, who had a metal leg, would throw himself on the rabbits. Eventually there would be a pile that would be divided up - their legs to be laced together, and strung out on a stick. How proud we were when we marched home to present grandma with our share of the spoils.

If the drying was too advanced, the stalks would snap – the thatcher would take a quantity of straw shake it and spread it out and re-sort...into a thatching bundle. Before delivery to the thatcher a part of the head or ear of the corn would be drawn off – knocked, rubbed by hand or shaken - allowing a small part to be left to give ‘grip’ to the straw – so that it would not slip when laid. A quantity of the thatch would be laid with the ears down and some ears up, to make the laid thatch even.

The mower or reaper would then start cutting the grass or grain stalks laying them flat on the ground. Men followed, gathering the stalks together into sheaves, which were about sixteen inches in circumference, pressing them close to their apron-sides whilst they tied-off the sheaves using twisted stalks, or string, to make a band. A good days work for three horses was ten acres and for one tractor a similar amount.

By this time - late morning, when the men had been at work for five hours, there was an easy stride to their work as they grasped another bundle of stalks together. All were sweating, clothed in just their shirtsleeves, with their waistcoats on... a watch-chain holding them closed about them. There would be a shouted conversation and the occasional burst of laughter – it is as well the women were not there to hear their ribald jokes. The

sun shines overhead emphasising the stillness outside the circle of workers, all looking forward to their lunch break. Over the hedge - in the distance, a ridge of hills purple stand out against the white horizon. The air was thick with dust smelling of cracked nuts... The reaper continues circling the field – the flails flapping and cutters chattering... the horses trace tinkles. Old Dobbin snorts disturbing the rabbits hiding in the uncut centre... a flash of white, a rabbit darted out to find shelter in the hedge... Little realising he is one of the lucky ones to escape...!

It did not take long for many of the women of the village to appear at the right time to start gleaning. Children too were playing about excited by the alteration to their normal routine. Sandwiches prepared and bagged up, and bottles of ginger beer clinking in the basket... all that was required. The water in the stream that bordered the field is clean enough for the children to drink. Cloths were laid out to place the gleanings into, whilst the broad pocket in the apron was for the loose ears. We prowled the field vying with each other to see who could collect the most. While this was going on the binder was following up. There was no let-up...

Not far away the farmer was using a binder to gather the loose straw into trusses tying them into sheaves. The binder, pulled by two or more horses, took the place of the reaper and gatherers. This machine always looked flimsy with its circulating bars whirling round. The binder's flails bent the stalks onto the knives, which cut the corn. A canvas belt conveyed the cut corn into the binder, which bundled and tied the stalks with twine - into sheaves, to be thrown out to one side of the machine onto the ground.

Whenever the first field was cut the binder, needed considerable adjustment to ensure the twine tied the sheaves properly - without breaking. Thereafter, once the team got into

motion more corn was cut and bound - ready to be made up into stooks. The binder cut out hand gathering and tying the cut straw into sheaves. It still needed a team of men to stack the sheaves into stooks

Two sheaves were held in either hand to prop against each other. Next, the butts of another two rested against the first two, heads up, propping each other up. Six to eight sheaves was a common number in which these were stacked into stooks or shocks. Further sheaves added depending on the abundance of the harvest and set of the weather- but always an even number so that the ends were not blocked stopping the air blowing through. The ears, always standing uppermost, gave the sheave a top-heavy appearance.

The stooks were stood-up in lines facing east and west to allow maximum drying conditions and to cast off rainwater. The binding machine - using binder-twine, could take the place of a man gathering the stalks. The binder cast the sheaves onto the ground for us to stack them up, into stooks, ready for the sun to dry them out. If these stooks became flattened by bad weather - so that the ears reached the ground - in danger of sprouting, it had to be restocked. The combine harvester superseded the binder in the 60s - which cut, gathered and tied a bundle into sheaves, discharging the bale onto the ground... made stooks redundant.

The large, flat, high-railed wagon - shaped like a boat, circulated the field, pulled by two horses as the stooks were separated and pitch-forked, by the pitchers using a two pronged fork, to the stacker or loader, standing on top, who built the load higher between the corner poles. The middle of the wagon left until last so that the loaders had a platform to work from, for no man threw from the ground to the top.

More often than not, there would be a number of wagons working the field. The horses, pulling the swaying, lurching

wagons, trampling down the stubble whilst kicking up the dust. The lead horse, led by one of the pitchers, making its way either out the field or to the next group of stooks. When fully loaded the sheaves were stacked in various barns before making into a rick in the field. Every moment was vital to get the corn under cover before rain set in.

In the 1840s, flail threshing and winnowing done for sixpence a bushel. Other farms hand-flailed but winnowed by hand-machine... by the 50s, horse threshing took over linked to a bar outside the shed that turned the flail... the winnower had either a single or double fan to blow away the chaff.

Extracting the seed with hummellers or flails was surpassed by steam powered tractors linked to thrashers and loaders introduced in the 1860s along with fan-tackles and chiggers which were supposed to divert the chaff. In reality, they spread it everywhere making the whole area a throat blocking haze. Allis-Chalmers tractors and combines considered very advanced lead to the Ransomes' 1930s threshing machine – towed wheeled thresher, that made an enormous difference and hauled from farm to farm... until superseded by Massey Ferguson. By 1941, a Massey-Harris tractor cost £365 and a hay-loader £48.

In 1950, it was still possible to see a threshing gang working beside a steam traction engine. Steam engines continued to pull wagons after the war - until the late 40s whilst the steam road roller continued for a further twenty years.

The threshing machine was due any moment – hired from the local supplier. It usually came with its own team of men who were familiar with its working. The decision to start threshing was a judgement made by the farmer. His starting point would be the price of flour, the position of his bank balance and the gamble he was prepared to make on the state of the local economy. Usually the corn was threshed in late autumn and early winter. If done outside, the state of the weather or what was

forecast, the adjudicator. It wasn't long ago that the flail was used – mainly in the winter, to give work when bad weather kept the workers from the field.

Threshing was always done in a hurry - at that time by steam power, using the maximum number of workers. A full water cart was always to hand. It was no good finding you were out of water halfway through the job - having to close down the boiler. It was the farmer's responsibility to see that water was always available and sufficient coal to hand. If local water unavailable it was pumped from a stream or pond into the water tub. Welsh steam coal was shovelled into the boiler as gradually steam pressure rose... The tall chimney belched black smoke and the whistle blew – at last pressure reached... The great flywheel turned and the piston rod jerked backwards and forwards... the belt started to flap and the speed regulator spun...

The thresher started pulsating – humming its never-ending tune as every piece of loose metal, associated bit of tackle and worn bearing started to rattle and shake. One man started to go round the road wheels on the engine, to hammer in wedges – prevent the engine from moving closer to the thresher and another man wedged the thresher – the idea was to stop the belt from slipping.

Two men usually unricked the sheaves of corn onto a cart, Which in turn off-loaded onto the elevator? The sheaves passed along the conveyor to the bond cutter who cut the string or untied the band to release the stalks, which were then entered into the drum feeder. At the other end of the feeder the now husk-less straw was taken off the drum to be taken to the straw-stack...the grain was bagged up from the side chute using a sack-trolley in two hundred-weight sacks and loaded onto the grain wagon. Ten men often carried out this whole operation. The spent straw not always taken immediately to make a stack – some

farms would tie the straw into trusses using a straw-bond, sold-on or ricked-up.

The husks left to fall onto the ground although the very action of the belts driving the action, the spinning drum and conveyor tended to blow the husks out making a cloud of irritating, itching husks surrounding the whole operation – covering everything. From removal of the corn from the ear to grinding at the mill, as much husk was removed as possible - winnowing – by using draughts of air - by blower or fan...

The threshed straw went to build the rick. This straw would be animal feed for the winter and cut out of the rick by the ‘fogger’ using very long and broad hay-knives to cut away a truss, bound and carried to the field. Un-used ricks, which were surplus, broken down and spread on fields - to be ploughed-in or cut-up to make manure heaps. About this time, the ditches would be dug out and re-shaped.

Ricks could be either round or square-sided, with or without end hips. They were built mostly in the rick-yard reasonably, close to where the animals were to be fed – near to the chickens - to nest, feed and lay. If likely to be infested with vermin the rick would be built on staddle stones [*mushroom shaped stone or iron to prevent vermin from getting into the ricks*] - if not, a base of bundles of brushwood laid to allow air to circulate - kept the straw or hay off the ground to prevent rotting.

Once the rick built up the top was thatched. At the turn of the century, this would cost the farmer 2s for five hours work. At the sometime, the ricks were being built, the swedes and mangles made into heaps [clamps] and covered with straw and earth to keep off the frosts. Potato clamps were specifically for humans although if sufficient, at the end of the season, they would also be fed to the pigs. Both these root crops were used as winter-feed for the cattle. In the winter cattle, food was not just trown on the ground but placed in large wooden troughs and

hayracks. The carter's stockmen and shepherds were expected to administer to their animals when they were ill. Old remedies were used perfected over the ages to cure swine fever, foot and mouth and foot rot. Antiphlegestin, Stockholm tar and castor oil popular medicants. The only animals to be kept in close confinement were pigs. In some farms, they were allowed to feed off the apples in the orchards or in small fields to graze the acorns.

Very often, particularly for hops and soft fruit, town's folk would descend on the farms to do casual work – staying in purpose built wooden huts. They considered this not only a method to earn a little extra but as a holiday too. It was usually an expected and organized event at harvest time and the same families met up every year taking in turn to look after the children. The huts were provided with cooking facilities and a communal sink and the latrines very basic. After the harvest was over the huts were cleared out and then let to Youth Clubs, Boy Scouts and the Boy's Brigade for their annual camps. Just after the war I started to take my holidays with the Boy's Brigade in just such a camp, [over a period of six years], using the farmers straw for my palliases. We marched, wearing our uniforms, including pillbox hat, from St Helens railway station, in the Isle of White, to the campsite, led by the band playing St Georgia...

After the harvest had been gathered in and the festival blessed in the church, the village held its thanksgiving. In times past known as 'The Revels', but Puritanism soon put a stop to all that. Now the village fete and garden show took its place... still draws the inhabitant together... for the children to run wild, the merry-go-round spun - by the efforts of the showman and his cranking handle. There were country dancing, races and hoopla, ducking apples... and the maypole to be laced – danced round... However trivial it may seem, it was planned for, looked forward to, and continually remembered...

A demand was now made on Bradford's warehouse for coulter, ploughshares and dung forks, as the crops were cleared from the fields. Dung was tipped in piles across the fields and old ricks broken up and interspersed too, ready for ploughing. It was the time for the stable hands to start repairing the harnesses and to put right all those faults with the carts and wagons.

The morning started bright and clear. It was the most perfect September day... the sky was cloudless, the only sounds disturbing the peace - the cooing of the wood pigeons and the squabbling of the rooks high in the trees overhead. Not far away a stag rears on its hind legs to knock some more acorns off the lower branches of the oak... a shaft of sunlight through the branches lights-up a peacock butterfly - which settled for a moment before continuing its erratic journey. On one of the top branches, a kestrel swivels his head - to left and to right, surveying his kingdom...

The wet grass from an overnight shower sparkles and thousands of small cobwebs glisten from tiny water droplets that shimmer in the sun. Gradually the morning mist lifts from the ground as the sun warms the air... piles of newly dug soil advertise the underground rum of a mole. Autumn has begun, we put aside all thoughts of how well Somerset is doing in the cricket league... the football season is upon us.

The countryside now changes. The sun is still hot but comes to us lower in the sky. September kicks in with a sudden chill makes one reach for the jumper. The ground begins to show the first scatterings of fallen leaves. They are in a variety of browns, reds and oranges blowing about the ruts, rustling and chattering as they pile up. The dewy grass, covered with early morning webs, soak my shoes that are not waterproof - giving me wet socks again... The acorns and fallen twig lets crunch underfoot. The humming and squawking wildlife quietens as day

by day their food becomes more difficult to find... finally the blackbird and song thrush leave for warmer climes...

Tomatoes are starting to ripen outside and the potatoes, onions, beans and marrows become staple diet. The weeds keep coming... it is a full-time job to keep on top of their growth. The pears and apples on the trees behind the privy are picked as they become ready. Those not eaten are wrapped in newspaper and stored on trays in the outhouse.

The local thatcher lays out his unthrashed wheat straw... gathers and ties them, in handy bundles. On wet days, he whittles his pegs, sharpens his scissors and prepares for the next fine day. His first job Monday morning is the cottage in Perry Street, by Crossways Corner. It is there that he places his very long ladders – in readiness, carting and stacking his prepared bundles for an early morning start. He not only works for the farmer repairing barns, haylofts and making ricks but also re-thatched and replaced roof ridges in the village.

The fields, banks and ditches would show greater variety of plant life then, to now. There were trees of fruit, nut and thorn varieties of bush rose, vetch, yarrow, knapweed and birdsfoot. The ditches were deeper and damper, with grass more lush and succulent. Insect life not only of greater variety but larger: dragonflies, stag beetles, butterflies, moths, glow-worms, snakes, lizards, toads, frogs and crickets. Birds too would be more numerous. In fact, the whole flora and fauna would be almost unrecognisable by the profusion of differing types and species, especially the winged insect variety.

As September led into October... the cabbages displayed frayed edges as the butterfly's caterpillar nibble away - gradually reducing the leaves to skeletons, a number lay across the leaves producing a crosshatched colouration of yellow and black. Some

of the cabbages have their hearts completely destroyed – going mouldy and black. There is no time to be sentimental the caterpillars have to be removed – pinched out. By now the beans are stringy and the marrows hard. Digging in earnest... preparing the ground to sow the spring cabbage must be concluded... All the old decaying crops removed to the compost heap. The time for sowing the broad beans that are going to stand the winter will give the New Year a good start.

The compost heap was broken into and manure from the yard made up the load to spread upon the stubble. Now is the time to start pulling and cutting the tops off the cattle-beet... followed by the autumn ploughing and the planting of beans... Immediately drilling the winter wheat, the horse teams prepared in advance, putting at least a two-horse drill on the light soils. The mangels could now be collected up and carted off to the clamp - which lay beside the potatoes. All this was done before the bad weather set in – in mid-November.

Autumn is well under way. October starts cold and damp. The early morning mist lies late into the morning giving the fields a ghostly presence. The river is clear and low and the banks encroach – the luxuriant grass weighed down by water droplets sags dipping their heads into the water... the water reflects the growth making the width of the stream appear even smaller. Lower down a pair of swans go through their bonding ritual ducking their heads then reaching up until finally they touch one another.

The thick hedges provided not only a field boundary but also give new material for future hedge and fence, shelter for the farm animals and birds and provide a byway for wild creatures – to pass from field to field. The hedgerows at the side of the lanes would not be cut becoming, in some cases, interlinked over the middle of the road forming a tunnel - which shut out the daylight. In the evening or winter nights these lanes were

frightening places for us children; the trunks began to form faces and the long tendrils of the branches looked like arms ready grab any unfortunate passer-by. The glow-worms light twinkled in the dark ditches and lane sides whilst the bats flitted above on their set course to the nearest food. The hooting owls and barking foxes gave a sinister background to the shadowy undergrowth...

The hedge banks and ditches were ancient boundaries of tracks running from hamlet to village, from village to town... a source of wonderment at the diversity of wildlife, a fascination at the beauty of the leaf and branch - forming a varied, colourful picture.

The ditches flooded every year. Tall rushes, herbs and reed shoot up at the expense of smaller, less vigorous plants, when the ditches are lush and green – it is impossible to see the bottom of the ditch and quite difficult to extract oneself - if clumsy enough to fall in!

In early November, the wind penetrated the stoutest coat. The skies were washed out and threatening. The rooks were buffeted, being blown off course having to make an extra effort to regain their perch. They complained creating a tremendous racket. When they took off to find food, they swept over the fields in gigantic swoops soaring upwards to gain height and then down again almost plunging into the ground. They seemed to keep this up for hours, almost as if they were at play...

Halfway through the month, the better weather arrived and a walk by the river revealed a wider streambed - now that the dead and dying vegetation had rotted and fallen away. The trees were beginning to look bare - half their leaves had fallen. The reeds with their yellow stems and black rotting heads were flattened by the wind - lay in the river the fallen leaves clogging their matted remains.

The warm weather never lasts long for the rain settled in again turning the roads into glistening rivers of black ink, gurgling

down the drain, leading to the river. Now the mornings were frosty quickly thawing out to leave just the shady areas icy on dead leaves and limp grass. The river changed again now reflecting browns and ochre's. It is going to stay that way for some time to come... Back at the cottage, work continued... the war had not changed the routines of life one jot. The butter factory, near Chilson Common took over the mantle of chief employer after the net making industry had suffered yet another poor year.

My grandfather and two uncles cycled off in December, as they did every morning, with their sandwiches and a tea can over the handlebars of their ancient bikes. They both wore cloth caps, faded jackets, open waistcoats and collarless shirts... and spoke in the traditional way of Somerset folk - punctuating the conversation with a fair sprinkling of ay, baint, twas, tis, thou, taint, thee, ee, bin, lor, cetchum, take'un, thee-self, thy-self, and gurt, Zs instead of S, and U instead of O. All used in a kind of spoken shorthand and quite difficult to follow – as if the language was only made-up of vowels.

The early mornings were crisp, the frost glistening on the roads. The forecast is two days of rain and sleet followed by strong winds. The river is high and unusually brown from mud washed down stream. Last weeks rain has made the current strong as the water rushes over the stones swept down from higher ground. Once again, the moles have been active on the grassy bank every so often the brown earth thrown up into soft crumbly piles. Out of all the greenery, left by the winter's blast the ivy remains bright and vibrant. The flowers of pale-yellow populate the tops... by the end of December the berries will be very dark green. Also looking strong, but not as colourful, is the holly with its many bunches of bright red berries - declaring a hard winter... should look a picture pinned to the beams in the sitting room, along with the mistletoe, from the oak in yonder

field. There is just time for grandad to plant the shallots... before he sits down to the main meal of the day. Then off with his sons to the Poppe Inn... known before 1927, as the Country Hotel, this, the local pub, was the meeting place for most of the local village men folk... this is where they played darts, shove-halfpenny and dominoes, until about ten, when they returned home to sit by the fire, play cards or relate the local gossip to grandma.

After Christmas, when all the festivities were over, the farm-workers tried to keep indoors, or at least stayed close to the barns where the seed-barley could be thrashed. On dry days, the broken fences and gates could be repaired or the stack-yard swept. There was always something to do even in the foulest weather to keep the men busy.

At Rosalie Cottage, life got back to normality after the Christmas jollities over. Other than during the winter the cottage door was left open – guarded by a large, cast iron dog. Step over the threshold onto the thick stone step, which spans the width of the door; take the cambered sandstone brick path through the gate onto the road beyond... Turning right, start up the hill; a few paces more and there... some steps, with a neat set of iron railings – supporting a handrail - lead to a gothic door. The school stands impressively tall, an official building... surmounted by the bell tower... the autumn term was ending - another year almost over... The children are practicing their carols; ‘The Holly and the Ivy’ filters out - in time with the piano... Another cold day, the third week in December – the last week of term.

The sun shines weakly as it tries to penetrate the moisture-laden air. Nobody dallies, head down, they move quickly to get inside out of the cold. There, the fire blazes up, casting is warm, flickering light, against the brass warming pan... the paraffin lamp is already lit, the smell of the oil another part of my memory bank... gives light, as well as comfort.

On the beams in the living room the pinned holly and mistletoe remained. The painted and crayoned cards still lurked behind the clock and candleholders. The table is set again as grandma bustles about cutting the bread ready for the evening meal...

Life in the village changed little. This was the quietest time, it was as if everything waiting for warmth to strike flesh or ground. Inside the cottage the fire crackled in the hearth and the clock strikes midday. The wind and rain of January has passed to clear cold days of February. The farmer over the hedge has started drilling the spring beans and peas. In a few weeks time the oats and barley would have go through the same procedure. In the village school the children stayed in during their break times, the cold penetrated up from the floor making their toes as cold as ice. The coke fire did little to keep the cold at bay...

Tatworth was not a normal rural village. The lace mill, butter factory and railway junction made it more isolated from the affects of low farm prices - than an economy solely reliant upon what could be produced from the land. The offshoots to all three plus the corn mill at Forton gave it strength to resist unemployment. Even when there were hard times for lace, production one or other of the employers would come to the rescue, plus the largest landowners like Parrocks Lodge and Forde Abbey. This relative isolationism was reflected in the population's view of the outside world's troubles, as being a hindrance to the perpetuation of all that was good and normal. Life, like the language, was slow and ordered, in pace with the seasons. Within all his rural activity, the creative industries fed off the large manufacturers circulating wealth and jobs. This circular life in Tatworth, where all benefited from this mechanism - each part fed off the other, maintained the coherence of the complete social group.

CHAPTER V.

Village Life

Religious Bodies – Education of the poor – Curriculum – Education Acts – School Boards – School's Assistant & Teachers – National Days & Holidays – Health & Hygiene – Sports day – School milk – Doctor and Nurse visit – Education Act – Playtime – Scholarship - Lessons for Life – Country ways – Help at home – Work.

Village schools in the eighteen hundreds had their teaching practice based upon learning by rote... in classrooms holding a number of other age groups. In most schools, there was only one large room, which was cold, damp and dusty. Religious bodies... mainly the Anglican National Society established in 1811, controlled the institutions. Church schools greatly outnumbered voluntary organization. All schooling required fees supplemented by donations and government grants.

‘The Education of the Poor’, such as it was, was ministered by the church – by the Church of England’s National Society. At this time, there was no Government provision or legal requirement. The provision of a school was dependant upon patronage and beneficence of the Rector of Chard Church... plus, bequests and subscriptions. Only five years before A Parliamentary Act banned the use of child labour although it did carry on for a few more years.

In 1837, Victoria came to the throne one year after the Union workhouse was built on the Crewkerne Road. A further two years saw 243 people sheltered there from the town and

borough. Out-relief was a fund raised to help the unemployed... that year a sum of seventeen hundred pounds was allocated for that cause.

The start of the century had seen harvests ruined by bad weather and the lead up to the coronation was to see little improvement. William IV had been on the throne for seven years... now it was the chance to turn round the economy. Victoria was eighteen and she was made of stern stuff. One the continent 1830 was a year of revolution. England was up in arms serious rioting broke out. Farm machinery was smashed, ricks set on fire and fists were raised. The rain in 1828 had been the worst in living memory and agricultural prices dropped. During the next ten years farmers' begged form a reduction in their rent – a few had to sell up and move away to the town. The lord of the manor in a number of estates gave land over to the community for allotments. It was a bad time for all particularly for the already poor. There was much unemployment for neither farmers nor workshops were taking on labour. The poorhouse in the town had to turn people away. The Mayor of Chard called a meeting where he put it to the assembled parishioners that the severe weather was creating hardship. It was decided to make donations and a collection was immediately taken – which raised £60. The plan was to purchase coal, bacon and peas and share those out to six hundred poor persons.

The social gap was widening as the inefficient and uneconomic farmer sold up and the wealthy tenant and lord increased their holding. Landowners had benefited from the purchase of low price land.

The industrialisation of manufacturing brought to a head the scandal of child labour. By 1844, the employment of any child below the age of eight in the textile industry was banned. Between eight and thirteen, the child had to attend school for three hours a day. Many parents evaded the restrictions where

they could. Textile workers opposed the raising of the minimum working age of half-timers.

Lace schools were set up to teach children to read. The commissioners later tested the children to find out what had been learnt. The results proved that although the children could read the majority could not write.

The Union workhouse was still a necessary. Inmates were issued with a hammock although it would appear that these were not in a very good condition. An issue of string gave some comfort to repair the netting and to ensure the hammock hung properly. Two rugs made by previous inmates were all that were allowed for each person. There were complaints about not being able to wash and the violent disturbances resulted in two months hard labour, in the House of Correction.

It was the large acreage now of the thrusting landowners that allowed them to survive the hard times after the act of enclosure. Once again, the Pouletts gained most. By 1865 horse-powered threshing machines had been installed, improved land drainage continued, whilst fields redesigned both assisted hay farming to reach its peak by the end of the century.

In 1866 J B Gifford, who owned and founded a lace manufacturing business at Forton - then moved to Holyrood Mill forming Gifford Fox & Company, was approached to finance and provide premises for a Co-op. This he did with the additional loan of £15. This proved to be a very successful enterprise although it did not stay at the mill but moved to Fore Street under the title of Chard Industrial & Provident Society.

The shop's staff was in the main local people. To them came Thomas Dolling as a twelve-year-old errand boy in the year 1879. He was a Chard Board pupil who was not only accomplished at schoolwork but also diligent in the shop. Within twenty years, he had risen to become the head of the Co-op. For

the next forty years he stayed and directed the operation taking it to great heights.

Tatworth boasted the building and consecration of a daughter-church to St Mary's of Chard. This became the Mission Chapel of Tatworth in September 1851, [*at that time, still considered a hamlet*]. When built it was consecrated by the Bishop of Jamaica – the foundation stone being laid three months before, in June, with much approbation.. The chapel built on a quarter of an acre of land donated by the lord of the manor, Earl Poulett together with the necessary stone and fifty pounds towards the total cost of one thousand and forty pounds... All previous churchgoers from Tatworth attended St Mary's Church, Chard, which was short of seating for the poor – even as far back as 1827. Years later a gallery had been erected but the church still lacked accommodation. Those worshippers attended St Margaret's *Chapel of Ease* in South Chard.

Tatworth village school was built in 1872 in the same Early English style as the church - built some twenty years before... together, gave the village a new status – Tatworth was now recognised as a separate community from Chard – became a parish in its own right... Thirty-percent of the population was aged fourteen or less and it was deemed highly desirable to have a local school. The new school was built of local flint stone with brick quoins around the windows and doors. Two gable ends faced the road separated by two lean-to aisles and a front porch. Two sets of steps mount the pavement to arched wooden doors, which led into cloakrooms. Topping the whole was a bell tower, whose ringing bell called the children.

The pupils were mainly from homes who's parents worked at the mill or creamery - they all knew each other or knew of each other. – It was that sort of village school. Very few lived at a distance and most walked or rode a bike. Living opposite, the picture of the school was taken from an upstairs bedroom of

Rosalie Cottage, gave the Collins children an even greater sense of belonging, not just to the school but to the community as well.

When the school day was over all the children came out in succession - the youngest first, making the otherwise deserted road alive with their shouts and calls. It was a happy place remembered fondly. They were all oddly dressed especially the younger ones. Their chatter was joyful if rather quaint not in the least embarrassed by their local patois. The boys in their caps and the girl's hair tied up in ribbons skipping along in their pinafores. The majority would come from poor homes but that does not explain how they were brought up. The village was in the main a god-fearing place, its inhabitants Low Church ridged in behaviour and set in their ways.

The boys and girls who lived at the other side of the village - near the railway station or Chardstock, used lane, path and short cut to reach home. Along the way they could usually find some stick or special find to show-off with... betting each other that theirs the greater find, and couldn't be bettered. It was the boys who liked to find a stick to make a bow or make-pretend sword, catapult or pipe. The girls, who kept well away from the nettles and briars, were the authority on what could be eaten safely or which leaf would make the better print. They chatted and giggled, keeping to their own little group, as they weaved their way past the cowpats refusing to take notice of the boys... by now, carving their name on the beech tree.

Their past-times, games, hobbies and interests are little different from those played generations ago. The boys kick a ball or tin and the girls skip, play catch or hopscotch – the same the world over. The differences are those that are forced upon them by local authority or government edict. Their clothes less tattered these days, fashions changed too, but childish behaviour remains the same... The bullies demand subservience and the meek

consideration, the confident were heard, and the shy tried to hide. That, after all, was the way of the world!

The village was lucky having the mill and creamery, with all their ancillary trades, giving training and employment to its inhabitants. The Chard Road station and sidings, gave employers the means to import labour and transport goods. Both the warehousing sheds and ironmongers provided all those ancillary pieces of equipment necessary to support both these firms engineering shops.

Ten years before the school was built, education standards were linked to ‘student results’ – under the Revised Code. There was an annual examination, an attendance record level, religious instruction and needlework for the girls. Specific subject grants for grammar, history and geography were brought into being in five years later in 1867, which raised the number of subjects - giving a broader curriculum; these subject became ‘class’ subjects eight years later. Shortly before, a number of other subjects were included: Latin, mathematics, science, modern languages and domestic economy – cookery and gardening. By the turn of the century, the curriculum as we know it was in general use and not long afterwards, ‘payment by results’ ended.

Child labour under eight was forbidden, six years later the employment of children on farms was not allowed [in a group less than ten] even though eight-year-old children could be employed if they had attended school 250 times during the preceding year. However, all the laws passed to regulate labour were widely evaded.

The Elementary Education Act of 1870-73 compelled Chard authorities to ensure that there was adequate provision... to establish a Chard Board School. The cost of the board was met by local taxation. Church Aided Schools had to rely upon voluntary donations topped up by donations from the local

gentry. The Board Schools provide national elementary education for over two million children. There was made a universal curriculum, which had to be followed. Secondary education did not have the same encompassing system until the School Boards tried to instil order. Eventually the Education Act of 1902 ensured the basis of all public education and lasted until the Education Act brought into being by Rab Butler in 1944.

My mother, started school at the age of four, in 1912. Academic standards in the Board Schools still did not rise sufficiently even after the 1902 Act set out targets levels of Standards I and II. Standard I required an ability to read from textbook including words of more than one syllable. Dictation, writing down a few common words in a neat hand, the ability to add up and subtract not more than four figures, and the recitation of the multiplication table up to six. Many children did not reach even this low minimum standard and it is unfortunate that teachers resorted to harsh methods to improve their standards.

Village schools, at the turn of the twentieth century, laid great emphasis on the principles of Christian religion, morals, reading, writing and the casting of accounts with beads. Some pupils went on to grammar schools. Girls were accepted into the village school but not allowed into the grammar. The grammar school curriculum consisted of Latin grammar and literature, history and geography - to some degree, and a little Greek... The scriptures were essential so too arithmetic- mental and addition. Diction and manners, given special regard along with National heroes. Marching, some games and physical exercises considered fitting in short measure. Boys attended six-days of the week and church on Sundays.

Those parishioners who valued education – the ability to read and write and reckon, were usually those who could afford

to do without their child's labour, for as long as was necessary. Those folk were tradesmen, yeoman farmers and lesser gentry. When the School Boards were put in place it was to those citizens – those unable to afford individual lessons by tutors and public schools, they were planning for.

The School's Inspectors - noticed in both town and country, the bad treatment of schoolchildren. The nation's children were from this time forward going to be educated. The 'payment, of teachers, by results' had disappeared by the time Elsie went to school. Although the children in Tatworth had the benefit of an education in a new school, operating a regulated curriculum they still lacked the cultural benefits available to town children. Eight years before, the Board of Education defined elementary education as 'forming and strengthening the character of children, and developing their intelligence', assisting boys and girls to, 'fit themselves for the work of life'. Girls were expected to be self-sacrificing, domesticated and moral... boys, hard working, loyal and brave, both extolled as, 'Children of the Empire. The Nation was proud of itself believing that there was, 'further noble deeds to be done', the Empire was supported throughout the country.

Heads of rural schools not only maintained discipline within the school but were sometimes expected to control the behaviour of their charges outside as well. In many outlying hamlets, sending older children to school was looked on as wasteful labour.

When Elsie went to school in 1912, children were being given cocoa or some other warm drink for a 1*d* during the midday break. The local nurse still discovered 'dirty heads' during a school inspection, teachers were always taking care that when children scratched they were inspected for lice or flea bites. Inferior meals at home caused some of the children to be undernourished. Giving free school meals afforded the school

the opportunity to instil good manners and proper eating habits – to eat properly with a knife and fork. A full-time dentist travelled from school to school checking the children's teeth. He carried out inspections whilst the children were sent out to play. Cheap spectacles were obtainable free of charge and instruction given about the correct way to clean one's teeth. The health of the nation's children had become a national issue and initiatives started to improve the general state of health and other child welfare matters. The Rowntree Foundation highlighted the 'serious physical deterioration amongst the poorer section of the community in their 1901 publication. The First World War evened out the vast difference between children health in good and bad areas, by government inspection.

Every day began the same for all children. At the turn of the twentieth century, most working-class families expected their children to contribute to the running of the household. Tasks were learnt by following their parents round the home helping as they went. The boys took on the heavier work whilst the girls helped with the sewing and food preparation... water had to be bought from the stream... each day had its routine of household chores. All this work had to be done before going to school... It was expected that Elsie and her sisters helped their mother look after the chickens, fetch the eggs, and clean them out. The washing had to be mangled, hung out, turned, and then ironed when dry. The vegetable gathered from the garden washed and put away for the next meal. There was a half-time system at the mill; children over the age of ten could work limited hours, whilst receiving their education. This continued until after the First World War.

After the war, the troops were dismissed and returned home. They might have been informed by letter that the village had changed or they might have seen for themselves a few of these changes when they were sent home on leave. However, it

was a different thing altogether when they had to face the changes day after day. Younger people were not content to put up with things that had gone on for centuries. They wanted to sample the so-called good living to be found in the towns and cities. Women too had seen for themselves their sex working on the land and others had gone to work in factories. The industrial age had started the decline. The First World War had carried the momentum further shattering the old ways. Things were never to be the same again. It was not just the working class that had to adapt. The upper classes, particularly the large landowners lost their sons who were going to take over. Working arrangements at the mill continued, but not for long...!

Children still worked at the mill crawling under the looms, with bare feet to stop slipping, to retrieve the ends of broken threads. These ends had to be instantly repaired in very hot and damp conditions to quickly get the gliding jennies back into action again. They felt proud they were contributing to the family's income as they felt the sixpence in their pockets. The children of farm workers also turned their hands to the work in the fields. Picking up stones, weeding the crops and collecting potatoes. No child of the poor was allowed to get away from, 'working for their keep'.

The bell on the roof tolled at 9am. It seemed very loud and the pigeons scattered at its sound... the noisiness of the children greeting friends subsided and the running around stilled... lines were formed outside the door and all waited for the teacher to admit them. No talking was allowed and each child allotted a seat - after the girls put on their pinnies. Any late comer received a black mark and this was entered in the term report. The roll was called when attendants were ticked off in red. All the Collins children went to this school - there was no escaping either the building of its influence - it was built opposite Rosalie Cottage!

Prayers and Hymns started the day - always the well-known favourites learnt by heart... as the scholastic subjects were reinforced by repeating them in rhyme - intoned in a singsong fashion. It was an unchanging ritual going back generations. Classes started at nine o'clock and lasted until three thirty every day; these went on until she was fourteen. The school hall divided by a large curtain, which did not reach the top of the pitched roof, one side for the younger children and the other side for the older ones. The sun's rays, finding a gap in the curtain, penetrating the dusty haze, created a spectrum on the opposite wall as they passed through the glass ... normally drawn back for morning assembly and special occasions.

A trained certificated male assistant teacher received £100 per year; his female colleague received £10 less. Teacher training colleges insisted upon a strict religious calling for their student intake – they must be free from all faults. It was about moral ascendancy over literary knowledge. It was not always the case that properly trained teachers filled the vacancies. Acting teachers, who were usually the brightest girls in their final year, were preferred – heads considered that they understood their jobs better and had an empathy with their charges. Elementary teachers were, ‘uncultivated and imperfectly educated’, commented one Chief Inspector. It was not unusual for the local squire or magistrate to require schoolteachers to attend Sunday school, play the piano, and organize out of school educational trips without payment...

The first and second year children followed the seasons with calendar records noting when the first snowdrop showed itself, when the first cuckoo called, and the first swallow flew. The class would be given the task of drawing these and the best ones displayed on the wall.

All the younger children and newcomers used slates and squeaky slate pencils and approved lessons like English and

arithmetic checked by the local authority. Scripture was compulsory for all and once a week the vicar would come to talk about moral behaviour - told in the form of a story. Country children were taught to observe and appreciate the countryside and local history sometimes by a village elder. When the class was considered capable, they were given lead pencils and told to copy letters of the alphabet and words from cardboard specimens. The next stage, after obtaining the correct standard - exercise books with faint green lines were passed out, was to copy off the blackboard simple sentences, this carried them to the next stage, linking sentences together to make a paragraph.

After the two years, the class graduated to the use of pen and ink. Every day the ink monitor would pass out the filled china inkwells placing them in the drilled holes at the top of each desk. It was found difficult to control the ink at first or even to make the pen work at all. The nibs had to be clean and the points not splayed out or crossed - by too much pressure - when a new one issued. Blots and smudges appeared as if by magic. Sleeves and hair sometimes got in the way. But these hurdles were soon overcome and the class settled down to perfect their copper plate writing - less pressure on the pen for up strokes and a firmer pressure on the way down. There was always a controversy whether strokes down should follow directly on top of those going up instead of making a loop.

It was considered important by school authorities that 'drill' superseded random gymnastics. The class was told to march swinging their arms forward with the opposite leg - in military fashion. All the arm and leg movements were to be done in correct order - following an accepted pattern - so that each exercise known in advance. Every muscle had an approved exercise and running strictly regulated. If the day were particularly cold then marching, swinging the arms, hopping and coordinated exercise - the class all following round and round

folding and unfolding like a snake. There was never enough space for games and no equipment if there were.

Once a year there was sports day when all the classes did their exercises before their parents. There were three-legged races, egg and spoon and sack races, throwing the beanbag and catching the ball. All the children had to bring an enamel mug to school so that lemonade could be served out. There were iced and currant buns provided by the school authorities. Prizes won and achievements recognised usually in the form of a book.

Music lessons consisted of practising singing the National Anthem, the national songs of each country making up Britain, popular patriotic songs and folk songs. This involved much practice, which was taught using the tonic sol-fah system using a tuning fork to start on the right note.

The whole school marched into the playground to salute the flag and sing all the songs practised.... on Trafalgar Day - with an emphasis on why it was so important to have a navy to protect the country and its trade. After the First World War, Armistice Day was observed when once again the whole school assembled to salute the flag and observe the two minutes silence with the flag at half-mast.

National and Saint Days celebrated - Flying the Union Jack and the flag of St George a prerequisite for all organizations and groups. Empire Day considered the most important national event next to the Kings birthday. Patriotic songs sang and tales of daring do – exploration, discovery and invention, read aloud and cheered. All these national events were celebrated during the Sunday church service following on from the school.

My mother and her class were taken for country walks where the names of plants and trees were written down and the local wild-life pointed out. Collections of grasses, leaves, butterflies and other insects mounted and named. Records of when certain things happened throughout the year were copied

down and older children made their own sketchbooks, which were initialled and coloured up. Prizes were presented in the hall at the end of each year, these were mainly books.

There were three teachers taking different groups called standards. Infants were taught to knit dishcloths and to patch holes and darn. Elementary dressmaking, buttonhole stitching and pleating was also taught. Reading was considered especially important and frequently checked by the School Inspector. The quality of writing using correct English neatly formed Geography, History and Nature Study, Needlework, Cooking and Gardening.

Most pupils had long hair, plaits or ponytails [on leaving school hair was 'put up' either in a bun or braids round the head or draped either side below the ears]. Where possible in large families most of the clothes would be hand-me-downs. If these were not available, they were purchased at 'bring and buy sales' or made by mother except shoes and hats. Generally, the dresses were of checked gingham, knitted socks and cotton knickers. Winter wear usually navy skirt attached to a bodice, with hand-knitted jumper, knee high socks, brown lace-up shoes, knitted woollen vest, a liberty bodice buttoned down the front and an assortment of other buttons to hold up suspenders and knickers. In extremely cold weather, fleecy knickers were worn with a pocket for a handkerchief.

Nothing was ever wasted in the clothing line. Discarded clothes cut down, shortened, taken up, patched, darned or cut into squares for rag rugs. Worn sheets turned side to middle or made into pillowcases. Worn pillowcases became handkerchiefs, liners or tea towels. There was no end to the amount of make do and mend necessary to look after a large family. All families had a rag bag the contents useful for repairs or making up patchwork quilts and mats.

The only outside building was the coal shed and a row of lavatories in the playground. They contained a wooden seat over a bucket that was emptied each week by the school caretaker, who also provided the torn-up newspapers on a string!

There were lessons on Health & Hygiene – the importance of washing hair emphasised as was brushing teeth, cutting nails and what was good to eat. The importance of bathing; the girls were taught how to look after babies. However, there were no lessons on sex. Girls were instructed on how to look after and run a home and this was linked to sewing - the make-up of curtains and covers. Boys were instructed how to dig, why to dig and how to plant out vegetables and run a greenhouse.

There were talks on how to avoid common ailments by a local nurse who cautioned about practising old country remedies, dispelling superstitions, and tales of false beliefs - especially about the menstruation period. Some children smelled strongly and no one wanted to share a desk with them... much of the nurse's talk was trying to make children aware without spelling out the truth. Children sometimes wore underwear all the year through.

There was neither school milk nor lunches – sandwiches were eaten at the lunch break... there was always water from the tap in the playground. The eldest children did not finish until three-forty-five to give the infants and their mother's time to clear the front entrance. Those children who had an elder brother or sister to take them home had to wait inside.

The rooms were well lit because there were such large windows set into the gable ends. In winter, it was always cold due to the high ceilings. Two large round stoves heated both ends of the room – however much the stoves were stoked it was never sufficient to heat the corners. The floor was bare boards, which gave off clouds of dust whenever there was any movement particularly when there was the morning assembly and for the dancing class.

Infants were taught to knit with two needles and then four. Darning, using a wooden mushroom, how to turn, hem and take-up and gather in, how to sew on buttons, make floor cloths and cover buttons and taught fraying out – removing each separate thread from a patch of material and un-picking – unravelling an old woollen garment, were methods used to provide material to make-up new. Sewing bags made and each girl's initials graced the sides – these were end of first term tests and used by the teachers to keep one class quiet whilst the other in the room carried on with their reading and writing. Material was supplied by the council – always-white cotton. From this articles of clothing were made, pillowcases and nighties. Patterns had to be traced suitable for the child's size. There was a communal box of thimbles, needles and thread. Embroidery with coloured wool made simple samplers.

A school inspector of the day noted that a number of children had died through diphtheria. The winter always brought the usual bout of illnesses, whooping cough, mumps, chicken pox, scatlalina, diphtheria, scarlet fever, colds and influenza. The Schools Medical Officer had to be notified especially an outbreak. These problems affected the standard of education. Special lessons were arranged for children to catch up with lost lessons. Regular attendances by the Doctor and Nurse to inspect for medical examination and general cleanliness. Doctors Fawsus, Cosh and Daniel came from Chard surgeries, as did Sheppard, Weaver & Geelie the dentists.

If there were, any problems the parents were visited to check that action had been taken... Heads were examined by the Nurse, for nits and general health. Proper clothing and shoes for winter wear identified, reported and logged. There were no aspirins or cold remedies. Antibiotics not long discovered. Infections spread by contact. In the early twenties, there was a national epidemic of mumps and illness.

The senior classes had to fill in nature notebooks mostly by personal observation, making sketches and writing explanatory notes. It was encouraged that everyone should be observant and knows what to look for when each season arrived.

Poetry was used to promote a good memory. Popular writers of the day discussed and passages read out. On Speech Days, prizes would be distributed for every subject. As with national songs, poems and noted authors - these works committed to heart - to the extent that they could be remembered all through one's life.

In rural areas, in the early twentieth century, most children left school at twelve, to start work. The Education Act of 1918 raised the age to fourteen. The School's Inspector noted, 'that arithmetic was not a strong subject but that the discipline was good and the children attentive to their lessons'.

In the early afternoons before the youngest children pored out of the main school doors shouting and screaming their mothers did the shopping and made courtesy calls pushing their coach-built, second-hand, much used prams, containing the latest addition. It was a time relished by the mothers knowing their peaceful existence about to be extinguished. They remembered their time in the same school sometimes even the same teachers. The layout of the schoolrooms recalled - the smells and sounds the same. There were brothers, sisters, cousins and even more distant relations, mingling with friends made many years before all doing the same lessons in the same manner.

After school my mother roamed the woods and fields with her sisters and brothers in search of birds' nests and 'fruits of the hedge' to take home and present to their mother which might stop her complaining about their torn clothes. She was strict which was necessary considering that at thirty-seven she

had eleven children to look after. Her life was a constant endeavour to make ends meet. Gentle, devoted and strong willed, worshipping respectability and constancy.

The children played hide-and-seek and Red Indians leaping the streams, climbing the trees, collecting bluebells in the wood and constructing bows and arrows. Mum would be wearing her pinny and hair in ribbons, her brothers, corduroy knee breeches and a jersey. They would search the hedges for suitable sticks to make into pipes, whistles, catapults and peashooters, spud and pop guns, bows and arrows, lances, swords and daggers. The vibrating blade of grass - held between thumbs, made a whistling noise when air blown through... Owl hoots, produced in the same way, but without the grass... betting each other, they could whistle louder or longer. Children still trundled their hoops, bowled marbles – tip-cat'd and skipped; drew hop-scotch chalk lines, spun tops and constructed 'cats cradle'... Girls played their singing game - joined hands and skipped... here we go gathering 'Nuts in May'; Jenny Jones visited, Orange and Lemons chopped off heads and What's the time Mr Wolf - tempted giant paces... The Big Ship Sails and The Farmer wants a Wife gave everyone a chance. Throwing a ball against the school wall, clapping hands, whilst spinning round, sevens or swapping marbles or cigarette cards all games played at school. Conkers were strung in the autumn and daisies threaded in spring.

All the children in the village went to Sunday school, whose numbers had been built up since the chapel had been, erected thus enabling a choir of boys and young men to be formed - the Morning Service, followed on after the school. The choir was used, as a means of teaching basic music to the children - would make them keener to continue attending. Occasionally there would be special services for a christening, saint's day or Mothering Sunday. The annual Empire Day was celebrated using paper hats previously painted in the Union Jack

colours. Patriotic songs were sung - stories of daring-do – Cecil Rhodes and Captain Cook, atlases perused for its pink areas and places of British influence. It was a day for rejoicing and celebration, greatly looked forward-to.

The organist who doubled as the choirmaster religiously stuck to the few Hymns, Ancient and Modern, which were well known and practiced. It was a way of ensuring that there would not be any embarrassing silences of mumbled verses. The church brought together all the various elements of the population cementing the community together. Whether the day wet or fine, the music of the choir gave the stark interior a softer touch.

In the winter, the cold seemed to be far more intense. Clothing was not so efficient at keeping the cold out and often children had chapped hands and legs. Some cried, when their hands started to thaw out, whilst standing round the coke brazier. Many of the children reached school having to stumble over rutted ground and frozen field still wearing ordinary shoes worn by much use – usually from being passed on from older brothers and sisters. Sometimes the soles would be so thin that studs and blakies would not hold in to the leather. Fortunately, the Collins children lived opposite the school did not suffer these setbacks. This was about the only positive aspect to having the school so near.

My mother told us that her reading was done mostly in bed by the light of a candle. During the evening, before going to bed, time would be filled by knitting in front of the fire, resting her feet on the logs set before the fire. Her sisters would embroider, make spills – rolling up strips of newspaper, make dolls' clothes and Christmas presents: kettle or iron holders, gloves, pin-cushions, handkerchief sachets, lavender bags, padded coat hangers, peg bags and tray cloths – many of these would be crocheted or contain crocheted borders. French knitting, using a cotton reel with looped wool over pins, made a

long cord that could be tacked in the round to make mats. A useful present could be made from sewing mothballs in red silk... providing leaves, cut out of thick felt, to represent holly, a hanging loop of platted wool would ward off moths in the wardrobe.

Dishcloths were knitted from heavy cotton yarn, face flannels from old cut down towels, old dresses made aprons, rag rugs, patchwork quilts and sacking doormats. Cardboard cutouts were decorated with coloured paper stuck on with flour paste to make theatre sets were some of the pastimes, which contributed towards passing long winter evenings.

Her brothers designer poker work using red hot skewers spliced onto a wooden handle, cut jig saws out of thin picture pasted boards and interlaced wooden spills to make mats.

Along with the harvest revels, Christmas Day and Boxing Day were the other two great occasions for the whole family. Both these were holidays celebrated by everyone, although the animals still had to be looked after. Holly and mistletoe – the only decorations, were draped across the tops of pictures and laid across the ceiling beams. Carols were sung, everyone singing one verse on their own, party games enjoyed and simple presents unwrapped. The children went to church three times on Christmas Day and on each occasion; they enjoyed a special meal the highlight of the day's events all served with parsnip wine for the elders. The church choir did the rounds and the children knocked on doors after singing a carol. Neither New Years Eve or the next day were marked by celebration, it was back to work with a vengeance.

Amongst the children who left school in the twenties there were few who went on to higher education. Some of the girls took up nursing or teaching - the only two positions which required training for girls. Those who were to become pupil-teachers could stay on at school to teach the youngest children

and pick up some of the skills necessary for teaching. Trainee nurses might be taken on in hospitals if they were near enough. Both positions were underpaid receiving less than the lowest paid worker. Women teachers, and nurses in training, could not get married, having to leave if they did so.

As a bright thirteen year old from a lower-middle class family, residing in the country – father perhaps a self employed artisan with a flourishing business employing others; the track to become a teacher would be as a class monitor to an uncertificated teacher, teaching the first induction class of about fifty children. If he proved capable, he would be offered a formal indenture - as a pupil-teacher. The first hour of every day was put aside for instruction... you would be also expected to take an annual examination for each of the five year apprenticeship course when you then proceeded to a teacher training college - to take a two-year course. After 1903, the starting age for apprenticeship was sixteen paid £2 per annum. Their title was pupil-teacher in a four-year course. It is clear that a national scheme was still a long way off. The observance of one scheme rather than another depended on the local authority - whether it was at a board school or attached to a religious body.

There were no unions or tribunals working arrangements were strictly adhered to. Pupil Teachers had to attend county classes twice a week This continued until the Second World War had been underway for a couple of years. Then the emergency of all out war made such rules irrelevant. The training for both skills took until the pupil was eighteen - then earning about £1.16p per month One pound usually went back home to mother and the rest on lodging and keep, leaving very little left; then a college course undertaken for full training.

The County Council paid any travelling expenses – this was the only grant. Books had to be bought and college fees had to be paid – by the parents. An oath had to be taken by Pupil

Teachers that they would not work out of the county for two years after qualifying. It also meant that the now trained teacher could not get married until after that period had been completed.

Some children were bright enough to sit for a scholarship examination when eleven – and then go to a grammar school. However, there were so few places that extra cramming had to be contemplated. School uniform, books, sports equipment and satchel all had to be bought, and the fares paid for train or bus. It was quite impossible for workers children to think of such treatment.

If the child was to go into ‘trade’, he had to think of an apprenticeship. There were no such schemes for girls until the late seventies. An employer had to be found to take on a lad and there were many who wanted the chance. Most trades took five years - to become full trained, others took seven. The parents had to pay the employer a fee for the privilege - which might be several hundred pounds. This often meant that the boy had to leave the village and find lodgings. At the end of his apprenticeship, he would have his ‘papers’ stating that he was full qualified. He was then likely to be taken on as an ‘improver’ at the lowest paid rate, for at least the first three months; by which time the employer would be in a better place to judge whether to take on the worker. If taken on, it would take several years to be accepted as a fully trained worker, then, and only then, would he receive the ‘going’ rate for the job.

An alternative was to work on a farm – as a ‘lad’, to pick up the skills of a land worker - this maybe, looking after animals, helping repair walls, ditches and fences. Alternatively, as a carrier’s boy, delivering. Other employment could be found working for the local estate – park, garden or ‘in house’. Girls usually stayed at home under the watchful eye of mother – perhaps making lace, straw dollies or making garments. What is interesting is that women were more adventurous than men and

that of those women it was the younger who opted for urban life – more often than not, to life in-service. It is clear from census figures that economic and social developments since the latter part of the nineteenth century have confirmed that women were attracted to town life... It only needed the stimulus of a shortage of men in the work place to attract women from the home. Each of the wars in the twentieth century has contributed to this trend. By the time the First World War was over women had seen a complete change in social cohesion. This was the start to the breaking up of class structures. The numbers of men killed and maimed, particularly the officer classes, was felt by the gentry who were looking forward to getting back to pre-war standards. Inheritance taxes completed the breakdown...

CHAPTER VI

The Lace Mill

Elsie plays her part, 1922 – The Lace Factory – Mr Phelps helps out - Perry Street Mill – Bobbin Lace - Lace Hand - Earning a Living – Ten years before the loom - Leaving the mill - In-Service – Forde Abbey - Mrs Roper - Lady's Maid – Upstairs, downstairs - Days out – A visit to London – Ladies night – Courting and Marriage.

Girls from agricultural labourer's families in their first job often only worked for their keep - so that they might receive training and eventually that much sought after reference. The turnover of servants was high the average time in a first job was

three years. Positions for more skilled trades were found through the grapevine – the church, tradesmen, family or friends.

My mother started work, four years after the Great War finished, in 1922 - immediately on leaving school at the age of fourteen. Her father, aged fifty-two, was employed as an independent lace engineer at Small & Tidmus net factory doing maintenance work.

Elsie's mother Rosa was looking after ten of her children at home. [It is uncertain if they were all living together, but certainly seven were – which made Rosalie Cottage very cramped living indeed.] The eldest child Dora was twenty-two, who worked as a lacemender - one of a group of women who checked the lace for breakages and snags - repairing holes by drawing threads together. Four years later, she married Sidney Wood and left home, to live in Chard. The youngest child Vera, adopted, was now aged four.

The number of children conceived close together was normal for the working class and the lack of living space common for the poor. The obvious lack of family planning being the result of the absence of sex education, lack of discipline and personal ambition... there was also a degree of, 'conforming to general behaviour patterns'. Even though there was a national exodus to the cities and towns, there were still insufficient jobs and housing.

In the 1920s, neither the Tatworth Parish Housing Scheme, at Wellings Close provides sufficient housing nor did the Perry Street Factory cottages mainly taken up by retired workers. This shortage mainly affected the growing population of young people with children. Money was short, jobs hard to come by and even when they did, the choice was limited; everything had to be within cycle range.

It is not generally realized that between the end of the First World War and 1922, one quarter of the land in Britain changed

hands. It was not appreciated at the time and has scarcely been written about after. It was not just one factor that brought this about... the great landowners were short of cash, and they were tired... Tired of the responsibility after so many of the owners and their male progeny killed in the slaughter at the front. It could have been put down to taxation, poor grain harvests, imported grain prices forcing down its profitability and the decline in the old tenant. Landlord system. However, I do not think it was. It came a head... the old ways could not continue. The aristocracy had let them down now it was the turn of the Trades Unions and the Labour Party. Surely, the workers could rely upon each other.

In the twenties, most working-class families expected their children to contribute to the running of the household. Tasks were learnt by following their parents round the home helping as they went. The boys took on the heavier work whilst the girls helped with the sewing and food preparation... water had to be bought from the stream... each day had its routine of household chores. Even though Tatworth had two main employers that made the village more self sufficient for jobs at least forty per cent of labour was connected to the land.

Agricultural prices had been falling for six months and continued to fall. The price of wheat had halved in six months and the farmers, to combat this, shed workers, reduced prices and reduced the acreage of cereal cultivation. It took ten years of struggle for the farming industry to recover and by 1932, the Wheat Act guaranteed prices and control through Marketing Boards.

Knowing that her daughter needed work her mother arranged for her son Cecil, to introduce Elsie to Mr Phelps - the manager of the lace mill. Her good references and connection with the factory - through the family, ensured that she would stand a good chance of being employed - to become a trained

lace hand. This was no light matter. Only one child in six was offered training of some kind, and to be an apprentice was even more difficult...

My mother's references and good school report stood her in good stead. She started work at the Small & Tidmus net factory in 1922, the fourth member of the Collins family to work there. This was three years before the 'mule' spinners, became the first group of workers to be enrolled as legalized trade unionists. The man in charge of the lace factory was Fred Phelps who lived at the top of St Margaret's Lane, opposite the thatched chapel of ease.

The Perry Street Lace Mill was Tatworth's main employer giving work to over fifty people in lean times and a hundred when in full production. The mill had been developed by Cuff & Co. in 1830. Ten years later J B Payne had bought it but had very little capital to develop the mill. The power was supplied by a feeder pond discharging into leats. During the next ten years, the industry was in the doldrums and the workers on half time.

This unsettled production was caused by the usual social problems – industrialization, labour problems, cost of living, export restrictions, fashion changes and wars. In effect, lace for fashion was a luxury; however, for mosquito netting it had a permanent place in the nations shopping list - during wars and troop settlements abroad – later for parachute silk.

Mr Phelps, the works manager, saw to it that Elsie was properly taught, and then she was placed under the watchful eye of one of the senior lace hands... It was not long before she was crawling about under the looms joining the broken thread in company with the other girls. Eventually she was allowed to wind the bobbins. The Manchester spinners, their wagons rolled into the mill yard at frequent intervals, supplied the yarn by the **hank**, **which** were slipped over the free-running spoked frame and

drawn off by Elsie and her fellow trainee girls **to** wooden **bobbins**.

When sufficiently filled the wooden bobbins were placed into a basket, taken to the machine bobbin rack, and placed in rows... their threads taken through feeder guides to **brass bobbins**, an inch and a half diameter within a slim case. Once winding completed they were packed tightly into a bobbin carriage ready to be inserted into the lace machine. The yarn from each bobbin **threaded** through an eyelet.

Another rack was filled with a long line of wooden bobbins their threads drawn off and taken through guides, to converge with others – **warping** onto a drum. From the drum groups of threads taken off onto a long roller called the beam... this beam was then taken to the lace machine and placed in position.

A bundle of threads were then untied lead through guides to the net roller and when given tension - the warp was ready. The brass bobbin carriages then set into slots in the machine. The machine was set into motion. The weft thread was given a twist as it engaged with the warp thread **making** a series of interlocking loops.

There Elsie worked with her assistant for ten years, with the great mill wheel, within the building on the floor below, revolving with enough weight and power to shake the building, throbbing and thrusting away, as it gathered speed. A clackerty pulsating action that seemed to be beating time with your pulse. The mill's power transferred by an iron shaft beneath; above, on every floor, the pulleys, spindles, cogs running in and out, and drive belts slap and clap as they start the bobbins spinning... then nothing but the mighty crescendo could be heard. The lace hands signalled to each other by hand, mouthing the words – much like the deaf and dumb. The world trembles as the tiny cotton particles dance to the tune. It was the job of her father to

repair and make his own machines in the workshop alongside the mill.

The 'lace hand' or 'twist hand' worked with a boy or girl to look after a pair of machines... setting the machine up – untying a bundle of warp threads... leading them through the guides to the net roller, to be tensioned. When the brass bobbins were slotted into carriages the machine was ready to start... knitting - twisting as it engaged with the warp thread. The labourers made up the largest numbers in the mill followed by lace menders and lace hands.

After learning the trade, she was paid five shillings a week; a labourers wage was forty-six shillings. Nearly all lace manufacturers kept a general store and made the workers take goods for money. Two loaves of bread and half a pound of butter formed part of the weekly allowance. Mother could well remember the noise made by the machinery, the dust and the fluff that flew about – being breathed in... and the danger of fire and explosions. She worked among the rows of whirling spindles where the threads often broke when the tension was too great... twisted and spun. Her first job was to repair these broken ends as quickly as possible moving as fast as she could taking care not to slip on the oil-soaked wooden floors. It was so hot in the spinning and weaving sheds maintaining a moist atmosphere to prevent the threads breaking... that the girls wore just their slips throughout each day. Elsie stayed there for ten years until she was twenty-four, working her way up the ladder... becoming one of the senior lace hands.

Both men and women operated a number of looms packed closely together. Although this made a short distance to cover, it was tightly packed. The operator had to maintain his or her own looms making sure the area was swept clear and the machine oiled. The breaks in the cotton and lack of weft made good if the young trainee girls were not there. The weaving shed

were kept cool and damp in summer and steam heated in winter... the object being to stop the cotton from breaking and assist in a better weave. However, the dripping condensation and damp atmosphere did nothing for colds and chills. In summer, the floors kept damp to hold down the flying dust and fluff, which could become a hazard being flammable and causing lung damage. From accounts of factory life at the turn of the century it is obvious that the working conditions for both men and women would not remain in such a depressing state... relying on time to heal the sore expected... however, forces more urgent pushed evolution.

The comparison is easy to make between the periods prior to each of the World Wars... both lengthy agricultural depressions. It is also not difficult to see why these depressions were immediately reversed by rearmament and conscription. The second agricultural revolution saw the state intervene to reconstruct rural Britain. There was an urgency to expand production at any cost we were to become self-sufficient.

Grandfather gave up being a self-employed lace mill engineer when he was sixty-five, in 1935. The Salter & Stokes creamery had open up in South Chard near to Chard Junction some years previously and he and his sons went to work there. In the 1938, The Wiltshire United Dairies stated a milk processing plant on the site, the most modern in the world at the time. Shortly afterwards it became part of the United Dairies Group... then in turn Cow & Gate... all part of the Unigate Group. Now there was no family connection with the lace mill.

Only a cycle ride away from Tatworth is Forde Abbey. Mrs Elizabeth Roper [d1943] inherited the Cistercian foundation of Forde in 1905 from her cousin Mr William Evan. The original abbey had been built to accommodate twelve brothers in 1142 –

after taking six years to build. By 1200, it was considered one of the major scholastic, religious foundations in Britain, continuing its role until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. The last abbot, Thomas Chard considerably enlarged the building adding the cloisters. After the dissolution, it fell into decay until bought a hundred years later by Sir Edmund Prideaux –who later became Oliver Cromwell’s Attorney General - further enlarged it to today proportions. In 1702, the estate came by marriage to Sir Francis Gwym, whose inheritors continued the ownership until a relation of the present family, Mrs Bertram Evans, bought the building and nearly two thousand acres of land, including five farms, in 1864.

In 1905, there were eight resident servants for the family. The in-house servants included a housekeeper, governess, a nurse and nursery-maid, a cook. A parlour maid, and a ‘tweeny’, who combined the duties of housemaid with those of the kitchen. For outside duties, a coachman/chauffeur and stableman who occupied the stable mews, whose duties involved driving the new car – the brougham was still kept, as were a pair of horses for carriage work, and a hunter for him. Head gardener with a staff of four who maintained a kitchen garden and park, and pig man whose duties included the pig-sty, chicken houses and milking the cow. The laundry was done outside the house in the village, as was the shoeing of the horses. Increasingly the number of servants was reduced the work taken over by part-time staff. As the main services were introduced so there was a further reduction in staff. Before mains water was piped to the abbey, there was a great deal of water to be supplied to the rooms daily. There was three breakfasts to prepare - for the nursery and schoolroom at eight and for the dining room at nine.

It was the housekeeper’s job to control and direct the staff inside the house. Many of the servant’s duties carried over into

other tasks to help. The gardener and stable-hand trimmed the lamps, filled the lamp's bowls and pumped water into the cistern.

Life at the abbey was highly structured. To maintain the house and grounds required an enormous amount of work... it needed to be painted on a regular basis both inside and out and the grounds kept mown. The annual spring clean was a major event when a number of village girls were employed to dust, polish, and attend to the crystal chandeliers.

Mrs Roper announced locally that there was a vacancy for a live-in woman's maid/house-cleaner. It was common knowledge that the Ropers were good employers – considerate towards their staff. Her sister told Elsie that there was a vacancy for a maid and it was for this post she applied after telling the foreman at the lace factory her intentions to apply. The management graciously supplied her with good references to go with the application. She soon heard back that her application was satisfactory that she was expected to attend an interview in a few days. This she did and the interview was a success to the extent that she was offered the position of ladies maid instead. Elsie considered she was very fortunate, excited by the thought of leaving the mill - having a far gentler, cleaner, superior job.

She was lucky to be employed by someone considered a good employer. Mrs Roper was fortunate too, in that my mother was very keen to leave the mill - to do more gentle and refined work, in comfortable surroundings. In 1932 at the age of 24, Elsie left the lace factory for good. The job description was changed to that of 'Lady's Maid', after my mother had been interviewed. Mrs Roper was delighted to find someone who understood quilting and cap making even though they were outdated skills. A Lady's Maid was often expected to originate new dress designs whilst up dating others. Her other main task was to dress and fashion her mistresses hair. Having worked at

the Lace Mill, she was familiar with the skill of maintaining-materials, cleaning, stitching and re-adapting old work.

This was towards the end of the Depression - things were just beginning to 'look-up'. It was a new start for my mother, at a time when there was more optimism about. It was also the time when many estates were breaking up. The wealthy had tried to hold on skimping here and there trying to make ends meet. Many failed and their homes sold up. There were many house sales. Land was sold to absentee landlords as an investment. The old ways stated to disappear. Into this new world, my mother trod without knowing where it would lead. She had been offered the position of Lady's Maid and she was excited, as she had just cause to be...!

The four year period between the end of the First World War and Elsie 'going into service', one-quarter of the land in Britain changed hands – the largest change of ownership since the dissolution of the monasteries – it was the break-up of the landed estates. Once again, much of the land ended up being cultivated by farmers. There was a shortage of domestic labour, rationing was imposed and the state intervened in the running of the countryside. All these things were to affect Mr and Mrs Roper. Forde Abbey survived and continued to play a part in society. Even if they had to show a little more discretion...

A Lady's Maid was a considerable step up in the world, no more backbreaking work replacing shuttles. There was always the possibility of visiting London, which she had to agree to do before accepting the job. Quite often Elsie wore clothes handed down to her although she was obliged to alter the dress so that it was not recognisable as her Mistresses. Her ordinary dress was black stockings and close fitting floral dress. There was a strict code of behaviour even though Mrs Roper was easy going. My mother would never speak badly about her mistress and nothing would ever induce Mrs Roper to disparage her maid's character.

Elsie's position in the household was just below that of the housekeeper – above the nurse, and about the same as the governess. Most came from middle-class parents in reduced circumstances, which is why my mother was so delighted to be offered the position. Her income was £20 per week. Although the work was not arduous, she was very much kept on the go – adjusting Mrs Roper's hair, changing her clothes and preparing for the next outing. The biggest drawback to the job was that generally the mistress preferred their personal maid to be young, good looking and well turned out. As the older ladies maids lost their calm so fear of unemployment followed.

Mum was woken at seven every morning by the housemaid to quickly wash and comb her hair; her day lasted until ten o'clock at night having half an hour for breakfast, tea and supper, and an hour for dinner. She had to be ready at half-past seven to take tea and toast, the morning paper and any letters to Mrs Roper. The bath had filled and the toiletries prepared, before taking breakfast with the other servants in the Servants Hall. Immediately afterwards she had to be upstairs to help her Mistress to dress.

She had a comfortable bedroom next door to her mistress. The bed was made for her by the upstairs maid, with clean sheets every week. There was hot water for her bath and jug, and on cold night a hot water bottle. Once a week she had her own tablet of soap and a lighted candle placed by her bed at seven. Her main tasks were to correct, alter, make-up her mistresses clothes in the sewing room and attend to her mistresses every want.

Dinner was at one o'clock, the first course in the Hall, and the second in Nan's [the governess'] room. Work started an hour later, completing her morning work. A walk in the grounds could take up the rest of the day until teatime at four, when it was time for a buffet meal of sandwiches and cake. This lasted a further

hour when the mistress's clothes were to be prepared for the evening - or, for 'calling'. The timing for the evening's entertainment discussed well before.

It was now four years after the First World War. The services reduced to pre-war levels... the influx of so many men onto the job market created massive unemployment. There were groups of men on every street corner around the job centres. The social changes brought into being by women taking over men's jobs changed forever the role of women. They liked the responsibility and the freedom from household drudgery... women were not going to give up their newfound status. Women's fashions displayed this change - skirts and dresses were designed to be worn level with the knee. It was the age of the flappers - short straight dresses, dropped waistlines, cloche hats and short hair - cut in a shingle, or bob if slightly longer. The Marcel effect, corrugated waves, was achieved by using curling tongs.

It was the time for women to display boyish figures to go with the shingles and long cigarette holders. Waist was small, and hips and busts kept in proportion. Undergarments changed, now waists compressed in roll-on girdles with suspenders attached - stockings always worn. A shapeless bra known as a bandeau flattened the bust. Over these were worn cami-knickers or a camisole and French knickers.

Length of outer garments kept well above the knee consisting of sleeveless dresses with dropped waistlines. Strait skirts with perhaps box pleating that mother had to continually iron. Shoes had medium heels, pointed toes and a bar across the instep, considered very stylish. Hats were cloches, tightly fitting over the ears with a close turned-back brim. It was mother's job to sew trimmings of ribbon on the hats to match the suit worn for the next day.

Each morning's task was to prepare Mrs Ropers clothes, for the day as well as seeing that the previous were put away - clean and tidy. Any repairs set aside for future work by the seamstress. There was generally an hour for needlework and specialist ironing. Once Mrs Roper was ready for her day and had left her bedroom the room was tidied, bed aired and remade and the next set of clothes laid out for the afternoon or for travelling out – walking or riding in the dog-cart. Carpets cleaned, surfaces dusted and dressing glass polished. At monthly intervals the furniture was polished.

If a shopping trip arranged then mum would accompany Mrs Roper to help her with the bags and be a companion. If visiting, presents or gifts set aside ready for the occasion. If she stayed in there would be tea, served in the Servants Hall at eleven...

In the winter, it was mum's job to make-up - keep lit, the bedroom fire - to ensure the room aired. A clotheshorse draped with recently ironed clothes to air them properly. The lake in the garden, enclosed by the flower borders and tall trees, held the evening air, which made the house damp if the windows left open and fires not kept in.

The Servants dinner served at midday and taken with the rest of the staff. The pudding, and after dinner tea served in the Housekeeper's Room where mum's friend Nan, who was the governess, entertained her.

Between the hours of two and four – when tea served in the Servants Hall, mum was able to catch up on her sewing and any leisure-time practices before helping Mrs Roper to dress for Afternoon Tea - served at five. She may have visited the garden to arrange with the Gardener to cut some flowers for the bedroom.

Thereafter, the bedroom was set ready for preparation - dressing Mrs Roper for dinner and the evening's entertainment.

This started at half-past six and ended with tidying up the room and toiletries, preparing the bed, inserting the hot water bottles, which were changed at half past eight. An hour later supper served in the Servants Hall after which the rest of the evening given over to leisure activities until the Mistress retired to bed when the final undressing supervised.

Her life revolved around Mrs Roper who always referred to her as Miss Collins. A lady's maid had to be with her mistress all the time whether at home or away. Every piece of clothing had to be in perfect condition - properly washed, ironed or steam-cleaned. All sewing completed, the dressing table equipped with all the necessary items and the bathroom laid out ready for use. For the lady of the house her maid was not only a helper but a confidant and friend.

Elsie was expected to travel with Mrs Roper wherever she went - to supervise her comforts and to carry anything extraneous. For the annual move to London - for the 'season' the ladies maid went along as did the chauffeur. This state of affairs for the wealthy was going through a transition period. Increasingly young staff did not want to enter service - the duties were considered boring and beneath them. Socialists and Trade Unionists, pointed out that servants were being exploited and should seek better wages and the 'Girls' Friendly Society considered the moral welfare of the young. Inheritance Tax finished off what industrialization started. The Second World War completed the transition not just the death of many young men who would have received an estate as an inheritance but the rise of Socialism and the victory of the Labour party. By the time, Elsie started her new job the General Strike was in the past and the Government bent on rearming the nation. A period of full employment, massive house building and euphoria took the place of stagnation and decay.

The lady's maid was responsible for dressing her employer's hair and laying out all the clothes to be worn that day - for every occasion. Dignity at all times and in all places was essential. Mrs Roper used Pond's Cold Cream at night and Pond's Vanishing Cream during the day, with a hint of rouge under a thin dusting of powder. Cremola hand cream used to soften the hands and scented lavender soap was at the side of the basin. Gloves of soft leather, white for summer and brown for winter, washed by my mother and dried very slowly to retain their softness.

My mother stayed with Mrs Roper for only a year... as a companion rather than as a Lady's Maid. That same year, 1933, she met her future husband at a Masonic dinner... they married ... at St John the Evangelist, Tatworth and the wedding breakfast held at Rosalie Cottage. Three years later, I was baptised - held at the font, not far away, from where my parents were married...

It was a long way for my mother to have travelled... From the garden gate, that lead out onto the street; the stream and its bridge - that never ceased to play a part in every day life; the dominant school building opposite - refusing to play a minor role, and of course, 'The Mill'... and the childhood, teenage friends - all enduring, the cold, the damp and the clammer...

The secure family routine... closeness of relations and friends... wandering the country lanes - looking over the hedges at trees on far off purple hills, that touched the sky...; all things of the past but retained inside...

Now it was to be a life of suburban pavement and shops... children, a pram and brick built house..., cinema and shops... all that makes for town-life. I am sure it was all, what my mother wanted - imagined in her dreams... whilst working away at the looms, and later... attending Mrs Roper.

It may not seem an enormous step, to travel from rural cottage to suburban semi, but it was for my mother. Perhaps it was love that gave her the strength to endure the concrete to the brick-lined path. Still, we must agree, it must have been very exciting to marry ‘a man about town’, especially one who was a ‘war hero!’

Elsie’s upbringing, despite the obvious lack of amenity and convenience did include security and love – the sort of love common to the time not sentimental and clinging. What stood her in good stead was her love and understanding of nature, which permeated her soul. She had witnessed the change in how the land was managed. The reliance on the horse now given over to the tractor, the decline in the number of village craftsmen and the move away from country ways to industrial muscle. The deferential attitude accorded to higher social classes by generations of tenants and workers were now questioned – changed for good after World War 1. Peoples ambitions, like my mother’s, did not included working three looms for the rest of her life. She wanted a bit of luxury not servitude... Mum could easily have returned to Tatworth, but, as with all dreams, reality dictated otherwise... what price then a glow-worm in the ditch instead of a street lamp... It is just like forgetting the pain of fingers thawing out, especially when the sun is burning the back of one’s neck!

By the time mum took us on holiday she had been living away from home for nine years. In those nine years she had been in service, married, moved to two London suburbs, had as many children... whilst suffering the blitz. Not only had her life changed, but work back at the mill had altered too... Her father had been retired for six years, missing the bombs, randomly dropped on the mill. The mill by 1941 was turning out mosquito nets for the Far East... the village meanwhile became inward looking when the blackout descended. Rationing had to be

coped with and the extra hour of double-summertime allowed more work to be done in daylight hours. The Make-do-and-Mend slogan, initiated by the government, indicated the sort of attitude that should be adopted - for a country under siege. The already hard rural existence was made harder still by shortages and absentee men folk. It was the woman's job to 'make ends meet', which they did, turning to age-old methods of living off the country. They had not only the means to do so but also past experience to draw on. In fact, there was little change in the life of the Collins' family or in the day-to-day life in the village. Some of the innocence and obedience, dignity and pride had rubbed off, replaced by: better education, fewer acceptances of past rules and regimes, more casual attitude to dress formalities, manners and etiquettes.

Elsie never forgot her early life, which shaped everything she did. Recounting those times brought her eyes alive and a smile to her lips. Giving time to her past kept the memories dust-free - easily plucked from her memory-bank in times of stress. She could recall and name the trees down the lane, the shrubs in the hedges lining the winding path, and the wild flowers in the meadow. The ford and the bridge, not far from the garden gate, served the brook, which bubbled and chuckled as generations of laughing children played in its crystal-clear water. Flocks of sheep passed over the bridge, hurried on by the shouts from the shepherd, later, the farmer's cows pushed and shoved to get to their stalls - to be milked. The banks that lined the waters edge burgeoned with rush and thyme, waterlillies and cowsfoot. The willow in the hedge, beneath which the waters flowed, alive with chattering sparrows pecking at the berries then wiping their beaks on the lichen covered boughs. All these she left behind... for a town life, she hankered for... to step away from the fluffy, damp atmosphere of the lace mill and in-service attendance upon Mrs Roper. All these pictures were the rock

upon which she clung, recalling their colours and shapes to pass on... more to satisfy her longings than to educate us children.

The chapters here arranged in such a manner to give a rise and fall to the story. The beginning describes a hill that allows the panoply to open out – an entrenchment, there since ancient times, sheltering our forebears. My grandparent's house, the garden and stream, bridged over to flow under the hedge to the field beyond. The lane outside leads to the school and mill where most of the population work. Finally mother's marriage and my christening..., forming a link with the past. She would be pleased her tale is told...!