

“From Pigtails to Pony-tail!” - a meander down Memory Lane”!

1940 – 1960”

By

Pamela (Lincoln) Jessop a.k.a “Jimmie Lincoln’s daughter”

Email: pejai10@talktalk.net



School photo – approx 1948/1949

And today

I arrived home from the V.E Party, in St Ives, to be told some news that meant life would never be the same, again! We were to move!

Still bedecked in my best red, white and blue clothes clutching the small Union Jack Flag, I had received, we piled into our battered ,old car and went off to this place called Hilton!.

We trundled past the Grange and its cottage, bumped along a dirt-track running the eastern side of the Green, past three “wattle and daub” white painted cottages called Wraggs Row. There, nestling in the corner amidst its “Cottage Garden” full of Roses and Regale Lilies in full bloom, stood, a grey painted, “Dutch-style” detached bungalow, complete with 21/2 acre Paddock. We lost our hearts to the place, there and then!

Standing under the Oak Tree on the Green, decision made, Dad turned to Mum and asked “What shall we call it?”. Small daughter, pipes up, “Fair View”!. “Fair View” it became, until the bungalow was demolished and replaced by St Francis Fold, decades, later.

By many years of prodigious hard work and saving, Jimmie and Gwen were about to achieve their “dream” - for the “Lincoln” family to return to its Farming “roots”! Both had full-time jobs – unusual for women of that era, when upon marriage they were expected to become full time Housewives and, then, Mothers. The daughter of an ex-Suffragette, Gwen had never subscribed to that idea! Something, she instilled into her own daughter, too.

Also, together with Jimmie’s father, Jim, who was with us that day, too, they had run a Small-holding, in St Ives area, for many years. Sadly, this was Jim’s one and only visit. He died a few days, later, never to see the fruition of all his labours.

The move had been precipitated, after Jimmie had suffered a horrendous accident which left him with only partial use of his left arm and internal injuries. He could no longer manage his full-time job, as a HG Driver, with Everdell’s Haulage, in St Ives. But, the Compensation part – the sum of £100 represented a large pay-out for those days and meant, together with savings and selling other assets, they could buy Bungalow and Paddock, outright!

By the time, the VJ Day celebrations took place in Hilton, we had moved. The chickens arrived together with their various “arks” and coops, which were placed at the far end of the Paddock. Only for them to take roost in the surrounding trees, come evening!. Hedgerows became far more inviting places than nest-boxes, to lay eggs! First two lessons learnt – PDQ!

Pigs were bedded-down on straw in their two, hastily erected sties, complete with individual, outdoor, yards for exercise ect.

Our black Labrador called, the very original name of, “Sooty”, had a large, cosy kennel, outside the door.

Ducks and the two “Nanny-goats” never did make it from St Ives!. I never thought about it, until I started to write this!!!! Maybe, the” Nannies” had butted one backside too many, demolished that precious row of vegetables or eaten the last piece of clothing, from a handy clothes-line –all among their favourite tricks!.

Although, life went on much the same for the live-stock – it was a very different story for the family!. Leaving behind, a comfortable three-bedroomed, semi-detached house, with all mod cons – albeit the bath was in the kitchen and the WC outside –electricity and close to the shops, the bungalow came as a “shock to the system”.!! But, in Life one must adjust and adjust we did!

We soon got used to the warm glow cast from the paraffin lamps, as we sat around the black-leaded Range, in the evening, listening to an old accumulator-run radio – which had an unfortunate habit of “dying” at the most inopportune moments!. Mostly during “Dick Barton, Special Agent”, In Town Tonight” or ITMA!.

During the day, this same Range was used to cook the most delicious, nourishing foods, even, though, Food Rationing was still in force – and, in fact, had become far more stringent following the ending of hostilities.

Even, taking our weekly bath, using a galvanised bath which was kept outside, pulled in, laboriously filled with hot water from pans on the range and, then, lugged outside, again, for emptying, was pleasurable before the fire with warm towels and clean clothes waiting on the fireguard.. At least, there were only three of us to use one lot of water – I often wondered how the huge village families managed.

On the odd occasion, a piglet or newly hatched chicks would be carefully wrapped and placed in a box, at the bottom of the barely-warm oven and lived to tell the tale!

But, visits to the “Earth Closet”, at the end of the garden was a very different matter!. Jimmie was truly thankful when, the Council introduced the “Friday man”, also known as the Night Soil Operative – and he no longer had to dispose of the contents of “the Bucket”, on the garden, once a week. But, we had fabulous Roses!

There was no running water for the first few years and every drop had to be carried, in buckets attached to a wooden yoke, from the Village Pump in the Grove. This was used, in our case, for drinking, cooking only. As one of the first jobs, Jimmie had descended the Well situated behind the cottages, on our land, to clear the detritus of decades - he was unaware of the danger he was running!. Then, after installing a hydraulic pump, he constructed an overhead piped, water- system. This was used for the livestock and, later, watering crops. This was copied by many others in the village.

So effective was it, that in the great Drought of 1946 we were the only people, many times, with any water at all. I, clearly, remember seeing pumps and hoses, used in Reeves Brook, that time.

Hilton was, finally, connected to the Mains Water Supply, toward the end of the decade. Electricity arrived about 1950. “Fair View” was, possibly, the last place to be connected to the Mains! The “mains circuit”, actually finished, at the corner of the cottages in Wraggs Row – nearest the bungalow! So, to become part of the newest development, my long-suffering parents had to buy an additional Pole and pay the cost of having the Bungalow connected!. But, I, well remember the excitement of coming home from school, one day, being told to “close my eyes” and when I opened them, the rooms were full of light!

Next, Dad, laid tons of hardcore as a base for a driveway, leading from outside Grange Cottage, right past the bungalow and into the Paddock, itself. After this had been “tamped” numerous times and allowed to “settle”, tons of Gravel were laid on top – pure hard graft and his “pride and joy”. Sadly, it was to prove a contentious issue for many years, among the older villagers who were, understandably, reticent of “change” in the old order of things! Then, the precedence was accepted and led, eventually, I believe, to a metalled road/walkway being laid– not that, I have seen it.

He had to abide by ancient by-laws. One of which was to allow “the right of a wheelbarrow way” from the front to rear of the last cottage in Wraggs Row. This was marked by an overhead board about 18inches wide, attached above head height, on the cottage wall. Apparently, this was to keep the area underneath free from mud etc. Not too sure, it was very effective but the swallows loved it! Every year they would return to

build their nests underneath it and we would watch the young “fledge” from the sitting room window.

No colour exterior paint could be used, other than green and no vertical or horizontal stripes could be painted. This applied to all properties directly facing The Green – it may still do so.

Each such property was permitted to graze a cow on The Green during the summer months. For some obscure reason, we were, also, allowed to let a pig “root” for acorns, providing it was “ringed” through the nose and attended at all times!. Each pig had a turn but never, once over the years, did we ever find a” truffle”!!! Not sure, quite what we would have done with it, if we had!

With the help of friends, family and “casual labour” from the village – the men folk were only too happy to a few extra hours, after their normal day’s work, if it meant, they could treat the “missus” and children to a trip to a Bank Holiday Market, in St Ives, a few “rides” on the Hilton Feast Week or St Ives Michelmas Fairs, or, even, in some cases a new pair of shoes or boots for school. The original two sties became 20+, each with its own separate indoor and large outdoor areas, farrowing rails and infra-red lamps, under which the newly born piglets were placed, safely away from the still labouring sow. From the original two litters, gilts were kept for breeding. Their brothers were not so fortunate – taking a one-way trip to St Ives abattoir!.

These “Wessex Saddlebacks”, and their daughters were to form the basis of breeding stock for the next, two decades. The boar used belonged to a local farmer – I must admit to having forgotten his name and apologise to any of his relatives!. All, I can remember he had a farm, somewhere near the Ford, almost opposite the Church. The reason, I remember that, was because Mum and I would go with Dad to drive the sow to the boar – but, at the Ford, we had to turn back! The rest of the performance deemed, too much for female eyes!!!! It has just occurred to me, that was, maybe, why we never did get a boar of our own!. How life has changed. But, this was the 1940’s.

I, only remember two Gilts being “bought in”, both Pedigree but their stay was remarkably short. Bad-tempered and “nervy” at best of times, come time to deliver they went berserk – nothing in reach was safe. On one occasion, “Maria Martin of somewhere or other” – the name went on – lunged at Jimmie’s Wellington boot, completely removing the toecap. Luckily, for him, she did not bite into his flesh – as pigs have teeth like that of a Pike, they are very difficult to detach!. But, for a stocky, rather rotund gentleman, not given to sporting activities, Jimmie cleared that farrowing rail with inches to spare!. He would have been an asset to the Hurdlers in the London Olympics of 1948!. What could have been a nasty situation, became a “family joke” for many years!. That was the “first and last” attempt at developing a Pedigree herd. Methinks, “Maria” and her sister, made rather expensive sausages!

Although, technically, all the sows/gilts had to have an “official” name, to satisfy the bureaucrats from the WarAg, the family soon gave them “pet” names. “Brenda” soon became “Old Fat”. She was possibly the most placid, prolific sow, known to man – but utterly lazy!!! Her philosophy on life seemed to “OK, I have produced all the kids, again, I want to lay down,- lay down she did, simply used to flop down whatsoever she

was – and if they get in the way and get squashed, well....!”. On one occasion she gave birth to 26 piglets in one litter and, every one survived. According to, The Farmers Weekly/Farmer and Stockbreeder who featured it in their magazines, it was a record and stood for many years. Jimmie was, justifiably proud. “Fat” could feed 25 piglets, number 26, the “runt” of the litter spent the first few weeks cuddled up with hot bottles by day and in the bottom of the almost cool Range, by night. She was christened “Angeline” – quite why Mum gave her such a “fancy” name, I do not know – not her usual style! Every two hours, night and day, Mother or daughter would feed her, with a baby’s bottle.

The main problems arose, when “Angeline” decided we were her “Mum” and simply refused to be separated, despite our efforts. A visit to the “privy” meant no chance of privacy – with a small piglet squealing, at top pitch, outside the door. Let her in, or leave her indoors and the consequences were worse!. On occasion when, cycling to Fenstanton to catch the School Bus,” Angeline” would be belting , along, the road, full pelt, behind ,squealing fit to burst!. All very embarrassing, then, but humorous, now, I am writing this, as a septuagenarian.

Then, came the sad Monday morning, when she was loaded up with her brothers and sisters and sent to St Ives Pig Market . What a sight, they made, in the Ring, one litter, 26 “weaners”, all ready for “fattening”? The Auctioneer started his rapid, almost indecipherable “patter”, interest in bidding was almost palpable, although, with these canny, old Farmers and Dealers. It was very difficult, to tell just who was bidding. May be, a raised eyebrow or finger, here, a slight nod, there, or the extra puff of smoke from a pipe in the mouth, - Dad’s way! – somewhere, else – but, the sharp-eyed Auctioneer, never missed a bid. It was always, an “entertainment”, in itself, on Market Day.”

Monday Market Day was the social “high spot” of the week. Dad dressed, “de rigueur”, in his Tweed “hacking jacket”, gaiters and highly polished boots, would join the other Farmers eyeing –up the various “lots”, to buy or look at the “opposition”, , before selling began. Everyone, was aware of “sharp practises” around the Ring, - the Farmer who bid for his own pigs, so forcing up the price, the Farmer who “bought in” if his animals did not reach the anticipated price, the presence of a “ring” – unscrupulous Traders who did not bid, meaning only one of their cronies had to bid, keeping the price artificially low. The latter would soon become known and the perpetrators simply “disappeared like butter in the sun” to hit the next Market, near-by, that day!. What changes, when money changes hands...?.

Following, a quick visit to the Market Office, and the deal was finally done, cash paid in or out, according to whether it was buying or selling – may be, both!. Then, off to the Market stalls, set out on Market Hill, bright, noisy, always busy and bustling. It was possible to buy, just about everything from those stalls. To Mother, dressed in her “best clothes” and always a hat, and daughter, if school was “out”, this was the nearest to “shop till you drop!!!”. Bi g difference, it was all cash – Credit cards were very much a thing of the future – if you did not have, you did not get – simple philosophy of life in those days!

If it had been a successful day’s trading, it would mean a new dress, for at least one of us, or, if very good, a new hat for Mum too!

Then, the womenfolk, were left to carry on looking around, whilst, Jimmie joined some of the Farmers for a “chinwag” and his customary Pint, usually in The Dolphin!

In the morning, they would have left, with, pigs under the “Net” in the back of the Lorry – duly, emblazoned with his name and address on the driver’s door – several flower boxes, to be put on rail for Leeds wholesaler, stashed where-ever possible, and, early on, a couple of crates of eggs, for the “egg packers” .

The return, may have meant, another lot of Pigs, several boxes of Day Old Chicks collected from the Train from Weybridge, a few bags of “feed” from Senescal’s, some Ironmongery from Ruston or Whaley’s, the weekly shopping but, inevitably, included some frippery or “gee jaw” from the “cheap-jacks”. Their almost hypnotic “patter” and antics took much will power to resist!

Bank Holiday Monday Market Days, bought a mass exodus of people to the town, from early morning. In some cases, it would be the only days of the year some folk left their Farm or village, to go out as a family unit. The Market was much bigger, sometimes stalls were set up in Bridge Street or The Broadway including, on occasion, a small Fun-Fair! Simple pleasures but enjoyed and remembered, just the same!

I cannot leave the “pig tales” section, without referring back to Louis King’s mention, in his account, of Dad and his “pig swill collecting” – although, this incident happened in St Ives, shortly before we left. Jimmie was contracted to collect “kitchen waste” from several Camps around the area. Whilst, he was away on his “reserved occupation” War Work – driving a “low loader” full of Bombs through London’s Blitz, etc!!! His father, Jim, would use a “sit-up and beg” bicycle with a two-wheeled trailer attached, containing a couple of oil-drums to carry back, what he could. Jimmie had a two-wheeled trailer on the back of his car, with several tanks. One summer evening, we passed under the archway, by what used to be Robb’s toyshop, into Crown Yard, carrying a particularly “liquid” load of swill. The axle snapped the trailer up-tipped and, it was then, we discovered there is a slight decline, all the way down to East/West Street – to where Jimmie Fisher had his shoe-menders shop. My poor parents were paralysed by embarrassment and disbelief, not knowing quite what to do!. Until the “Dunkirk Spirit” surfaced, again – people came out of their houses with mops, buckets, brushes, whatever, to set about clearing everything up, to much laughter, singing and merriment. Possibly, the only “grumble” we heard, was about the amount of good and usable food which had been thrown away, whilst we children were starving.. But, these service people were fighting for our lives – could we really deny them?

I wonder what would have happened, had it been in 2009 – I, daresay, everyone would have been inside, on their “mobiles” or the Net, demanding Compensation!

So, this outlines the Pig –breeding aspect, from 1945 onwards. But, from these small “beginnings”, arose a Farm, which though small in acreage, diversified into many areas and provided “casual” employment for the local villagers, throughout most of the year. Many local folk of a “certain age”, have said to me, over the years, “but for Jimmie Lincoln, I would have gone bare-foot to school”. What finer accolade could anyone have?

At the end of 1945, the 2-3 acres of Arable land to the right of the original Paddock, came up for Sale. I remember, hearing my parents agonising for hours, over whether or not they could afford it and “if only we could!”! Then, one Sunday afternoon watching an ancient black Ford “sit up and beg” car, making its stately way along the Drive. Following, by my parents dumbfounded, disbelief, as they were offered the tiny “loan”, they needed to complete the purchase. This elderly couple had received much support and kindness from my Grandparents, when their Pilot son had been shot down and badly burnt, during the Battle of Britain. On hearing about what, my parents wanted to, they decided to return that kindness, by helping son, Jimmie. A case of cast thy Bread upon the Waters.....!??

This was to be put to growing of multiple crops, such as seasonal vegetables, salads, soft-fruit, flowers etc. But the beginning of this venture did not start easily, for the summer of 1946 was one of the hottest, ever recorded. The sun started to shine at Easter and never stopped until October, apparently. It was the worst Drought in England, in centuries.

That first year, half the acreage was to be planted to outdoor tomatoes. Jimmie’s father-in-law was Master Seedsman, at Wood and Ingram in Huntingdon. He had garnered seed from a few, fresh tomatoes, the previous autumn -, then, grew tray upon tray upon tray of seedlings, in his own small greenhouse. The plants grew with vengeance but the Drought persisted.

Eventually, it was decided planting would have to go ahead. All available workers were rallied, Jimmie, luckily, had cleared out the Well, as a priority. So, he filled endless tanks, on the back of his wagon, transported it, next door, where each individual tomato plant was watered, every other day. Between times, the hoe was used between each plant, to bring any dampness from below root level back up, again. Not that small daughter did much, that year – she was immersed up to her neck in the water-tank, wearing her bathing costume, playing with other children whose parents had the back-breaking task of toiling, in the terrible heat, to keep the crops alive. But, manage it, they did – no mean feat!

Come the time to pick the soft fruit, Jimmie would say to the pickers, on the first day. “OK, ladies, eat as many as you and the kids like but take none out of the field, unless you pay for them”! How the pundits scoffed at his logic, those first years – but he was right?. A couple of days of gorging, followed by tummy-ache, Raspberries, Strawberries, Blackcurrants, had lost their appeal – no longer a forbidden fruit!.

Summer months also bought flowers, Sweet Williams, Sweet-peas, Cornflowers, Carnations, Pyrethrums, “Esther Reads”, Blue Scabious and Anemones. All seasonal, old-fashioned, “out-dated” in this day and age, when Roses can be flown into the Country, for purchase in December!!! But, then, the epitome of luxury and a very “special” treat , one of the few available, in War-torn Britain.

One picking –session, stays in my mind. It was Feast Week; we had a sudden “glut” of Pyrethrums which just had to be cut. No “casual” workers” around, they were, busily spending their hard earned cash, at the Fun Fair, set up ,on the football pitch area, of The Green, that year. No alternative but for all three of us, to get “stuck in” and pick, never mind the fun of the fair!. Only thing was that was the year “Put another nickel in,

the nickelodeon”! was the No 1 “hit”!. Great rhythm for picking, AT FIRST!, but as it was on the Dodgems “music loop”, it came around about every fourth song!. Think, we were picking and hearing it, in our sleep, that night!

Gwen who had worked at Price’s Flower Growers, at The Woolpack, pre-War, could make any flower look its best. She would take a plain, long brown cardboard box, line it with several sheets of tissue paper – colour co-ordinated, if possible, - then start to lay the bunches in rows, the second row overlapping the first stems, third over the second, working from both ends, to meet in the middle. The resultant “gap” here, was filled with bunches laid across the last two rows of stems. Final result, one mass of colour, just flower heads, to be seen!. Tissue paper which had been draped diagonally over the sides, before filling, was folded over and lid put in place. All ready, to be opened, for sale, at the Wholesaler ‘in Leeds, the following Dawn. In the small “corner shop”, by opening time, at 9 am!

All the produce was taken on a daily basis, to St Ives Railway Station, to catch the train for Leeds, about tea-time. Many a time, the Guard has been known to have delayed blowing his whistle, after spotting the Lorry pulling into the forecourt or, even, on occasion along Station Road.

Then, with the Post, a few days later, came the moment of reckoning – had the goods for that day sold, at all, was it a good price , was it bad one – no way of knowing, always, that uncertainty!. But, Jimmie and Gwen’s mantra was “give a good produce, well presented and value for money, people will keep coming back!”. Good business sense – one used, myself in later years, in my own business. They did, right up until, Gwen’s, very untimely death, in 1955. She was the one with the business acumen behind that aspect, no mistake – without her, it simply could not survive.



Cornflowers ready for Market. Gwen Lincoln, 1954

Long before then, they had bought the land to the left of the original paddock, given over to hens and pasture. Dad's delight was to go to the back door, turned through 180 degree angle and say "all I see, I own!". It was, certainly, some achievement.

Also, by 1948, they were leasing land for potatoes, root crops, corn etc.

For many years, he held a contract to provide a well-known Scottish Whisky company with Malting Barley. Unfortunately, he lost this in 1953, one of the wettest summers, on record. The Barley had been cut slightly, too damp and went "musty", eventually. The villagers, all rallied round in an attempt to save the grain, which was spread out over the Tithe Barn floor and , as much heat as possible applied. It was "turned" continually – even, the Squire lending a hand – but to no avail – the damage was done.

I remember standing beside my parents, watching Barley being cut, on Christmas Day – that was how late and what a disaster Harvest was, that year, for every one

Potatoes were harvested, in August/September, toward the end of the School Summer Holiday – although, in those days, for any child over the age of eight or nine, a holiday it was not!. It meant working in the fields for the boys and older girls. So, our "potato gang" would consist of Mum, and all the children. The boys worked alongside their mothers, as were the older girls, so long as they could pick up and empty a loaded willow, wicker basket – which weighed several pound, even empty. The next eldest girl/s were put to minding the "tinies", sitting in the shade of the hedgerows, playing games, anything to break the monotony, of the seemingly endless days. Should, there have been a "new" baby, since, the previous year, that would be in a basket and "Mum" would discreetly disappear, regularly, to nurse the infant. In all the years, I never

witnessed one incident bad behaviour, hooliganism, swearing or anything else – these children knew and understood, work or starve – sad but true, even, in the 1950's!.

The adults were paid” piece-work “, so much a sack – so all this effort paid off, in the end. First year, was a definite “learning curve” for Jimmie – he paid by the row – not a good idea, more potatoes in the ground than in the sack, that year!. So, everyone had their own assigned rows but needed to get the sacks filled, as quickly as possible - problem sorted!

Next “problem” was really, quite amusing. The “gang” was transported in the back of the lorry seated on straw bales – the kids loved it, quite an adventure. They would scramble aboard with great glee”. We had a portable “step” but most of the ladies had to be hauled aboard, the rest of the way!. After, a couple of days, Jimmie realised that everyone weighed, rather more, in the evening than in the morning!. After, careful watching, he realised why – potatoes were being taken home to feed the pickers and their families! He called them together and said he realised what was happening and understood, why. He had decided that, if he had been employing permanent Farm Labourers, they would, by then, be in “The Month” and entitled to food, either provided by the Farmer/wife or in the form of “Harvest Rations” So, in this case, he made a Daily allowance of Potatoes, for each “picker”- woman or child . The proviso being, they were taken out of the field, in a bucket or basket – problem solved, to everyone’s advantage! As, a consequence, there was always a number of people who could be relied upon, to turn up, any time required and do a good job!.

The very first year of Potato “picking”, bought three real “characters” into our lives. Just, after, we started, that first day, we were hailed, by three people who could only be called “gentlemen of the road”. (Had they all been male, that is!) It proved to be, a Scottish gentleman – otherwise known as “Sandy Mack” – his wife and 20-“something” daughter. Seemingly, they walked the roads from Scotland, each year, working their way down the country doing whatever “casual work” they could find, most of it on a regular basis. They would arrive in Kent, for Apple picking, stay for the Hop-picking, then, start the road back to Scotland, toward early autumn, arriving in time for Hogmanay, I guess!

Our “potato picking”, was on the route back. Each year, certainly, well into the 1950's, they would arrive, within day or so of us starting to “pick”. One year, they arrived early – and “camped” in the corner of the field. But, the supply of “casual work” was ever decreasing, due to the introduction of mechanisation and use of insecticides, etc, in farming. During the Post-war years and through-out the 1950's/60's, farming literally, underwent a revolution! Fields of corn/root crops were no longer weeded by hand, threshing became a thing of the past with introduction of massive combine-harvesters,” roots” were no longer “knocked” to remove surplus soil, so that the “tops” could be safely hacked off with a specially designed sickle, by the person following behind. Sprouts were no longer picked, by hand. Men and women would be wearing sacks around their shoulders, to keep out the biting, Siberian winds blowing across the fields in December.

That first year was to remain in our memories, forever. Pre-war, my parents had been keen “campers” and still had the tent, in the shed. Feeling sorry for the little family, Jimmie decided to lend them the tent and all the equipment, for the duration. Mum

played “Hallelujah”, declaring “we will never see that again” etc, etc. Next morning, we all arrived – not as sign of Sandy Mack or the tent!!!!!! Poor Jim was taking a great deal of “ribbing” from the “pickers” and cursing from the ‘missus, about his gullibility. When, out of the dyke/ditch, at the far end of the field, first climbed Sandy Mack followed by his family, all “bright eyed, busy tailed” and ready for work!!! They had pitched the tent, in the dried out ditch, for protection from weather, predators etc. They were all cosy, warm and dry. Only mistake, not knowing how to pitch a tent, they had placed the tent-poles, wrong way around, causing extensive damage to the canvas. So, from then on, after repair, it was always known to us, as Sandy’s tent and went along to the fields, with the Spinner, Willow baskets, weighing machine, and all the other paraphernalia, before we started.

The “ware” potatoes weighed out in 1cwt, Hessian sacks, were collected, every couple of days, by Hampton’s Haulier and taken off to Covert Garden, London, to a Wholesaler. Here, before, unloading could even be considered, a pan full of potatoes, taken at random, were boiled. As a result of this, according to the whiteness, length of cooking time, consistency etc, depended whether or not the load was acceptable and the price to be paid. A whole load, could be rejected, should a couple of potatoes turned black – i.e. frosted or blighted. Luckily, this never ever, happened to us. But, many a farmer had to bear the cost of transportation, back and forth. Then, to have the man from the WarAg, pronounce the potatoes as “unfit for human consumption” and dye them Bright Blue!. These, together, with the “chat” potatoes – those too small, as stipulated by WarAg, as fitting the above criteria and so, dyed Blue, found there way into the Boiler with the Swill and went to feed the pigs!. Seems “double standards”, now, to my way of thinking, at my age. To think, people, now, clamour to buy, the same thing, every month of the year – as “salad potatoes”!. Other potatoes were put into “clamps” – long trenches covered with straw – for use or sale over winter.



First visit, to Royal Show, 1949. Shows Mr Rule, in background.



Cousin Daphne, me, “Sooty” and Colin Reed

Sugar-beet harvesting and Sprout picking, mainly for Christmas trade, brought the year to its conclusion. Livestock needed attention, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, fifty-two weeks a year!

Throughout these years, changes were made to the Bungalow- mainly, due to necessity following major repairs. The Drought of 1946 was followed by the Winter of 1947 – one of the worst on record. Snow fell, almost constantly, for six weeks, temperatures plummeted to mid -20’s, the country came to an almost complete standstill. Liquid, left, in cups on the kitchen table, froze overnight. With no such luxury as Central Heating

and very little Coal – which was still “rationed”- or wood to burn, life was very uncomfortable. Beds were heaped with any spare item, including Jim’s war-time Great-coat!!! Birds would be frozen alive, if they perched, too long. After, several days of being “snowed in”, there was no alternative but to start digging a way out, alongside The Green. The Squire, started from The Grange end The two men met in the middle of Wraggs Row!. As soon as possible, we set out in our little upright Ford, to fetch supplies from where-ever we could get them. To, this day, I can remember, passing between two ice-walls, unable to see the sky – so deep was the snow, our little car was lost from view!

Come, March, snow was still with us, but ferocious, bitterly cold Gales came, too. The Gable-end – very tall and highly “pitched” – blew in, landing on the ceiling immediately above my head. Luckily, the ceiling stayed intact or, may be, I should not be recounting the story, today. As, a result, though, an “outhouse” attached to the wall below, was demolished. So, Jimmie and other helpers set about building a new kitchen, to include a bath and boiler, plus another room for packing the flowers. The sink was removed from the living room and there were proper cooking facilities – I.e. Calor Gas – for first time. Lots more space!. Sadly, he elected to use Asbestos for the roofs – cutting it by hand saw!. No one knew of the dangers, then. In, 1981, he succumbed to Asbestosis, as a result.

In, late March/early April, there was a sudden, “flash thaw” – snow, literally, disappeared overnight but brought utter chaos, in its wake! Floods, of unprecedented proportions! Water came like a torrent, off the only “high ground” – which gives “Hilton” its name – situated behind us. Took the entire side wall of the Bungalow with and continued across The Green and onwards, to I know not where!

But, my memories of that day, still come back to me, in my dreams!. We were at school and, it soon, became obvious that getting back home was nearly impossible. But, Mr Charter, put me on his shoulders, straddling the central bars and holding onto the top rail of the footbridge, managed to get me across. I was terrified and still suffer Vertigo, when looking into fast moving water! But, for the rest of his days, I was eternally grateful for the actions, that day.

School closed for the rest of the day – one of the few times, I, ever, remember it happening!. The other time was possibly, during a Measles epidemic which hit the village, in 1948. Every child in the village contracted it, eventually. Seem, to think, I was one of the last. It impaired my hearing – although, no one realised, for decades. Also, my sight – as it did many others and led to a lot of children wearing the “owl like”, NHS spectacles! Luckily, for us all, the fledgling National Health Service, had come into being, only months before!. So, for the first time, Parents were able to get Medical help for their children without worrying about how, they were to meet the cost. Even, in 1950, Babies died of “summer diarrhoea”, children contracted Impetigo, Scabies, TB, Lockjaw, even small wounds became infected and “life threatening”. Tonsils could only be removed in the winter months, for fear of infection post-operative – then, only as an extreme measure. The advent of Antibiotics was heralded as a “god-send” – so it was, at first. But, there was simply no way of knowing the final outcome of the cumulative effect. Hence, this “man made miracle” was over- prescribed, until we have the situation, we have today!

The Health Service meant Mothers could, now, go into Paxton Maternity Hospital, to have their Babies. No longer worried about having to pay for a Doctor or qualified Midwife – which could amount to an entire week’s wage for a Farm Labourer, if the birth was difficult or complicated. Many women had to rely on female relatives or the local “chair –woman”, to deliver her!. The latter, who is named in Jack Dady’s book, proudest boast was she “saw them in and more often, laid them out!!”. I have a distant relative from that era, who delivered babies in a Norfolk village – her only qualification – she had had thirteen children of her own!!. But, guess that is as good experience record, as any. So, fewer Mothers and Babies died, in childbirth and the whole experience rather better. Mothers still had a two week “laying in”, afterwards. For some, the only respite they got from continual, hard work every year or so.

The village was served by, three Doctors, in those days – the Doctors Dansie and Dr Musson. The latter drove a little black car, as did the younger, Dr Dansie. The elder brother, very often, arrived, at the Bungalow, on horse-back, as was his want. He passed to reins to Jimmie, to hold, just outside the back door, unbeknown that he was absolutely terrified of horses – even, though, all his ancestors had ridden or been Cavalrymen, including one in the Household Cavalry. The horse took one step back, Jimmie took one step forward, the horse went one step back, again, Jimmie followed.....! That was the last time, Dr Dansie came on Horseback – may be, having to hike the full length of The Green, down to The Grange, to find his horse, wasn’t quite what he had intended!

In similar vein, the Hunt used to meet, regularly, on The Green – and a sight for sore eyes, it was, too! For some reason, “Johnny Fox”, broke cover, nearby, on the Football pitch. The hounds took up the scent, the Master sounded “Fox away”, the Hunt gave pursuit! “Johnny Fox” belted up the drive, along the side of the bungalow and disappeared through a hole in the hedge!. The Hunt were in full pursuit along the Drive but could not see around the curve, at the top - for ahead of them were six-foot, closed, metal doors, a hedge on one side and high netting fence on the other!. In other words, a complete “dead end”!!!. That was when, we found out there is no “reverse” or “brakes” on a horse – they just kept piling up at the back, the Hounds were “circling” and baying – still smelling the “scent” of fox- it was complete mayhem!. Eventually, everyone sorted themselves out, very red-faced and somewhat “ruffled” but no –one or horses were injured. I guess, old “Johnny” was somewhere nearby, surveying the carnage.

Even, Jimmie, eventually, saw the funny-side of the incident!. But, “Johnny” went, too far, one day, when he got bored and decided to bite the heads off, the entire flock of hens, in the Paddock, in broad daylight with people around! As, any Fox, will do!. So, he was shot, poste-haste!



1949 Jimmie rides Colin's bike! Mrs Lincoln snr by back door.

Hilton School did well by me and gave me a good, solid basic “grounding” in the three” R’s”. As well as having been lucky enough to be born into a family of “thinkers”, I” loved to learn”, for learning’s sake. Also although, times were difficult for me, as a “carer” to my ailing Mother, by the age of eight years, I was, fortunate to meet many people in Hilton, who influenced my life and “broadened” my vision. I am, rather reticent, to “name names” but, hopefully, should those people still be living in 2009, I hope, they know who they are...!

This resulted in my passing the 11+ Scholarship to The Abbey Grammar School, Ramsey, in 1950. So, begun, the “loosening of the ties” with my peer-group in the village, which was inevitable. But, by no means, complete. I still visit friends in the village – not as often, as I would like but whenever, I can.

The village Green was central to most activities the weekly, Cricket Match on summer Saturday afternoons, when the sun always seemed to shine and the” crack of leather on willow” was almost soporific , as it was enjoyable – never to be missed, if at all possible. According, to where the side-screen was placed, there were several “viewing places”, including a specially built seat, by the front door, or the Veranda but more often than not, just sprawled out on the grass. It was a poor afternoons cricket, if, at least, one ball did not land, close by or, even, in the garden itself! One “Hilton player” who will be instantly recalled by those of a “certain” age, would reckon to land, at least, one ball over the “pavvy”, for a six!. He was invariably a good afternoons entertainment!

Saturday afternoon, invariably meant, visits from relatives or friends, from Huntingdon or Cambridge, to watch “the Cricket”. In fact, when I started “courting” in 1957, my husband-to-be, would try to arrive on his motor-bike from Cheshire, in time to watch the Cricket, on Saturday afternoon!. On his release as a Japanese Prisoner –of-War, in Burma, my Uncle Ron – Mum’s brother – recuperated and regained his peace of mind, sitting outside on the veranda. Overlooking the peaceful, tranquil Green and watching, endless cricket matches.



Saturday afternoon watching Cricket,1955

The Pavilion – just a simple wooden affair with shutters and a couple of seats, served as a “meeting point” for the younger ones – do not think “teen-agers” had been invented, then! – during Summer evenings. I guess, many a romance started – and ended – there. It was a place for the illicit cigarette – you could hear the coughing, right across the Green. Or maybe,, a “kiss and cuddle” behind the building. But, never was there graffiti, loutish behaviour, swearing and heavy drinking, so prevalent, today!

Possibly, as a “barometer” of the changes that came, so quickly, to Hilton from 1947, onwards, it is as good as any. Before then, few people worked outside the village. Sons followed Fathers, into Agricultural jobs, living in “tied” cottages. This meant, if the job was lost for any reason, the family would be homeless!. Girls, became “housewives and mothers”, very young, for obvious reasons. So, people did not need to travel far but walked everywhere. A few had the heavy, “sit up and beg” bicycles. Boys and girls left school at 14 years of age and immediately became part of the Adult world – dressing and behaving like their parents – no separate “identity” of their own. One poor girl of my acquaintance, left school, one week – and the following was sporting a “Marcel Wave” and looking, at least, twice her age!.

In 1947, the school leaving age was raised to 15 years. This was following shortly afterwards, by National Service, for all able-bodied males, from the age the age of 18, deferred to 21 years, in the case of Apprenticeship. Suddenly, horizons broadened, as young men went away from the village – some may have only made it to the next county

and others were posted to Singapore and Germany, etc. But, it was the furthest, anyone but a very few, had ever travelled before. They came back with wonderful stories. A group of lads went to Blackpool and the village folk feasted on the descriptions of lights, entertainments, sands, etc, for months. Suddenly, the young were separate entities, with an identity of their own. Being better educated and healthier than their forebears, both sexes left the village to work, in St Ives, Huntingdon, Cambridge and even London. They had money in their pockets – may be, not much, but for the first time they had “choice”.

These changes were reflected, by those gatherings of young people, by the Pavilion. Heavy old bicycles gave way to lightweight, dropped -handle-bar machines. Then, the first motor-cycle – a very modest BSA – arrived. Followed, by larger more powerful models, with all the extra modifications!!. All the males trying to out do each other. The odd Lambretta scooter was in there, too. Both factions wearing the appropriate “dress”!!! We, at last, had a culture, dress and music of our own. A new, beautiful, young Queen was on the Throne. Even, the last of “rationing ended in 1953. That was for Sweets, in time for the Coronation. The whole world seemed to have completely altered, from the grey, austere place, up to then, which was Post-War Britain .Anything and everything seemed achievable.



1954 – Gwen, Pam with “bobby-socks!”, and pets.

Colour was everywhere. The girls were, no longer, stereotypes of much older women. My favourite fashion was the era of very full circular skirts, stiff with layers of

petticoats underneath, completely flat “ballerina” pumps, “bobby-socks” and hair tied up, at the back of the head. Some of us, who shall remain nameless, have been known to sneak out, on Saturday afternoons, in front of our Mother’s ever watchful eyes, with “bobby-socks” over, horror of horrors, “nylon stockings”!. Birth-control and sexual matters were openly discussed – no more stories about “Storks and Gooseberry bushes”!. Even though, Birth control was only given out to married women. According to our parents, this generation was the worst ever known, we were all “heading for Hell in a handcart”! What changes?

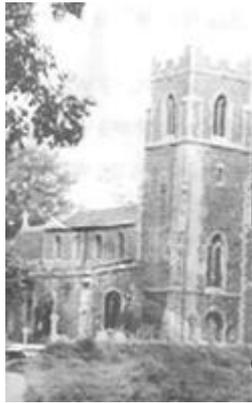
Yes, the age of the” ponytail,” had arrived! With it came, Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Cliff Richards and the Shadows, Top of the Pops with Jimmie Saville, “6 – 5 special” with its “Hit or Miss”!.

In 1957, my “best friend from schooldays” – she married a “Hilton boy” and came to live/still lives in the village-, and I went on our first independent holiday!!!! We went to Butlins Holiday Camp in Clacton. There, I met my future husband, a young man from Cheshire. In recent years, when “researching” his Family History, we discovered his Great Grandparents were named Feakes and had a business in Petty Curie in Cambridge – small world!



Pam and Kathleen, Butlins , 1957

In 1959 – exactly 50 years ago – we married at Hilton Church, on a beautiful, sunny day. The Church was packed to capacity. Many stood around the walls of the Church. Others just had to stand outside – the villagers had turned out in full force, to watch us marry. Reverend Herbert Moore conducted the Service, Mrs King played the Organ and arranged the flowers. Mr King rang the Bell. Jimmy Key drove Dad and me to the Church and, then, the newly-weds to The Dolphin, for the reception. Arthur Lee provided a fully decorated Coach to drive the guests, there. Cliff Darlow iced the Wedding cake. Mr and Mrs Stocks stood in the garden at The Grange to wave me on my way. The “Furness” and “Britten” families threw confetti over us, on our way out of the Churchyard. It really was a complete” Village Affair”!



Hilton Church 1959

My “ties” with this beautiful village have been slowly eroded over the years but I still return, on occasion, in my dreams!, Or, if situations get just too stressful to bear, I visualise myself, walking in the Wilderness or sitting under the Oak Tree on The Green.

So, ends my “meander down Memory Lane” – I hope, you enjoyed reading it.

**“From Pigtails to Ponytail,
From Little girl to wife.
In between are the special years.
We remember all of our Life!”**

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