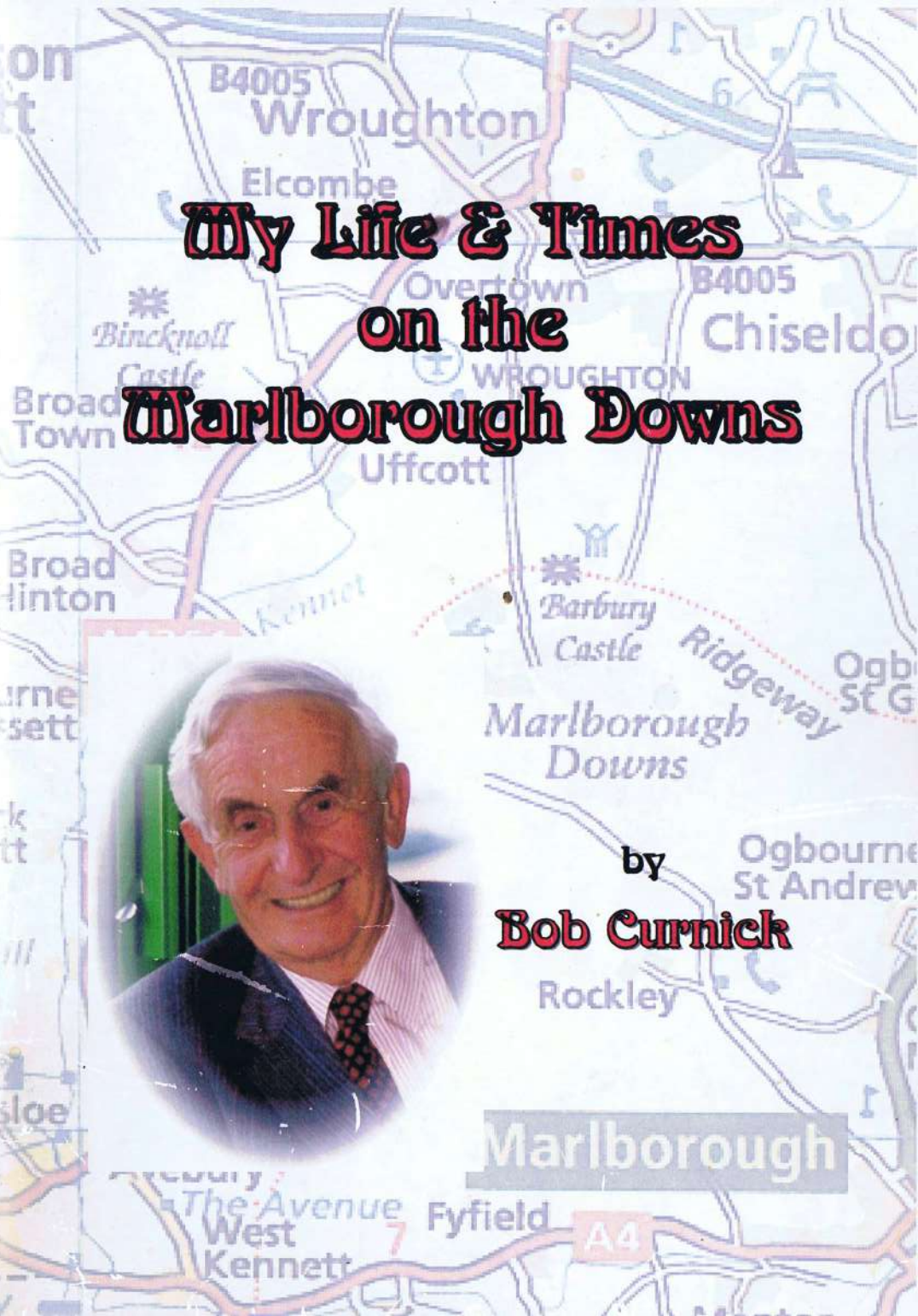


**My Life & Times
on the
Marlborough Downs**



by
Bob Curnick

Marlborough



My Father, Arthur Curnick, and his twin brother Kellow, were born on April 27th 1879 on a farm in the village of Stert near Devizes. They were the youngest of seven children; Fanny the eldest and only girl, Robert, Tom, Harry, Frank and a stillborn twin and finally Arthur and Kellow.

Grandfather William, who married quite late in life, died when my Father and Kellow were only 9 years old. They were farming at Little Hinton near Swindon by then. Grand-father moved farms quite frequently. In later life, when I questioned one of my uncles as to why they moved so often, he explained that in the late 19th century farming was so bad, that some landlords had difficulty in letting their farms. Very often, a larger farm with a better farmhouse would be offered rent free for the first year and so by moving on often, farmers could live rent free for several years.

The Family's standard of living was quite high, with five older children at school and a governess for Arthur and Kellow. All this changed rapidly with Grand -father's death; he was buried at Little Hinton. Grandma managed to get Robert, who was about 19 years of age when grandfather died, started in farming but the money soon ran out. Tom, by sheer hard work, also got started on a farm at Kingsdown, Swindon, opposite the Crematorium, which was a Manor House in those days. He later bought Manor Farm, All Cannings, in about 1913, where his grandson John Curnick still farms today.

Harry was the black sheep of the family. A girl in the village claimed Harry was the father of her unborn child. Harry quickly joined the Army and was posted to India. He later took part in the Boer War at the turn of the 20th Century. Returning home, he took a farm at Sevenhampton, near Highworth. He married and had two daughters and a son, but still living rather wildly, bankruptcy and a divorce occurred in the 1920's. School fees were impossible and Richard, his son, had to leave and he joined the Household Cavalry. He subsequently had an illustrious Army career, promoted to the rank of Colonel and being awarded the OBE for his work in the Middle East during the 1945-1949 war. Richard (Dick) married Eileen in 1939 and was, virtually straight away, posted abroad. It was nearly 13 years before the two were reunited to resume married life together. Dick died tragically on 3rd May 1991 as a result of a road traffic accident. The car in which he was a passenger, travelling to attend the wedding reception of John and Madeline Curnick, was being driven by Eileen Curnick (nee Godsell and wife of Arthur Curnick), from Bishop's

Cannings. Whilst turning into the Devizes road, her car was involved in a collision with another vehicle.

A coincidence, which I understand to be true about this incident, was that when the police arrived at the scene of the accident, Dick was being attended to, but they were confounded by the driver and front passenger giving the same name, viz. Eileen Curnick. To differentiate between the two women, the Police asked for their respective dates of birth, only to find that they too, were identical.

Dick's wife died in January 1999 and both she and her husband are buried near Marlborough, in Axford Churchyard.

Uncle Frank was a schoolteacher who started in the profession at Sandford Street, Swindon and eventually became the headmaster of a school in Dover. He left teaching and went into farming, taking the tenancy of Clay's Farm in Stratton St Margaret, near Swindon. Uncle Frank married a Miss Sordy, a farmer's daughter from Alnwick, Northumberland. Sadly, his wife was unable to carry babies to full term. After several miscarriages she eventually carried a baby up to 8 months, only to be knocked down on a footpath by a local girl on a bicycle and as a result, lost the baby. Eventually, a son Arthur was born seven months into the pregnancy. He always suffered badly from asthma until his death at 60 years of age. In 1938, Arthur married Eileen Godsell who lived in County Road, Swindon. Uncle Frank's wife died at Clay's Farm, in the 1930's. Frank and his son Arthur took a larger farm at East Woodhay, near Newbury in January 1940 and both remained there until they died.

I once questioned Uncle Frank as to why he left the teaching profession. His answer was that he had climbed as high as he could go but the money was not all that good. Cousin Arthur was educated at Cheltenham public school. When my Father and Uncle Kellow reached their 14th birthday, in 1893, Father became an indentured apprentice to a baker in Marlborough High Street and Kellow to a butcher in Newbury. A copy of Father's Articles of Indenture Agreement is reproduced elsewhere in this book. After completing his apprenticeship in Marlborough, Arthur, my father, worked in a bakery in Reading where he met my mother, Elizabeth Kate Deane who was a schoolteacher at St. John's Road Reading. They were married in 1908. Their first child, a girl, was stillborn and their second child, my brother Frank, was born 23 April 1911.

Kellow never married. When Fanny was 40 years old she met Herbert Sordy, a brother of Uncle Frank's wife; although nearly 20

years younger, they married. Sadly, Herbert developed appendicitis shortly after their marriage. In those days operations were not readily performed and Herbert died in his 20's from Peritonitis. One of mother's brothers also died from peritonitis. I believe one of the first successful operations for appendicitis was performed on Edward VII, Queen Victoria's eldest son. The Sordy family did not think much of their daughter marrying Frank Curnick and I believe they were horrified when their 20 year old son married 40 year old Fanny only to die soon afterwards. Fanny never married again but spent the rest of her life looking after Uncle Kellow, her bachelor brother.

During the 1914-1918 war my Father served with the Royal Garrison Artillery in France, and Uncle Kellow in the Middle East, surviving Gallipoli, the battle with Turkey.

With Uncles Robert, Tom and Harry farming, and Frank being a schoolteacher, they were not called up for war service. Two of mother's brothers and subsequent husbands of her two sisters, as well as my Father and Uncle Kellow all survived the war, although one of my Mother's brothers was severely wounded with horrific shell splinter wounds to his stomach. Father suffered damage to his lungs from mustard gas and when he returned to England in January 1919, he promptly developed pneumonia. Mother not only continued in full time teaching but brought up their eight year old son, Frank and nursed Father through until August 1919 when he was well enough to go to Bournemouth for a few days holiday/recuperation.

Upon his arrival back in England in January 1919, Father was greeted with the news that Robert, his eldest brother and a bachelor, had been accidentally shot and had died of his wounds. Robert had been out shooting after a light fall of snow. As he climbed over a stile his foot slipped and the 12 bore shotgun (no safety catches in 1919) discharged into his face. My mother once suggested to me, that had his teeth been in better condition Uncle Robert might have survived.

At the time of his death, Robert was farming two farms near Highway, in Calne, Wiltshire. He was quite a successful breeder and supplier of horses to the Army during the 1914-1918 War. He had apparently told my father previously, "You are not going back to baking, Arthur. I will set you up farming when the war is over".

With Robert's death and my Father's return to reasonable health my parents thought they ought to stick to the baking trade. Father purchased a bakery and grocery business at 11 New Road, in Chiseldon. The shop is no longer there, but the family name lives on

insomuch as the street has been renamed 'The Curnicks'. Father, Mother and Brother Frank moved to the shop in the autumn of 1919. Much to their great surprise the little holiday in Bournemouth resulted in a conception and I arrived on the scene on 22nd May, 1920 - nine years after Frank was born - Father being 41 years of age and Mother 39.

In Robert's will, bequests were made to his nieces and nephews which amounted to £1000 to each family. Fanny, being childless, and Kellow being unmarried, received nothing; Tom's four sons each received £250; Harry's two daughters and his son each received £333; Frank and Arthur's sons received £1000 each and since I was not born until 1920, I was obviously not included in the will. My Mother, however, was determined to try and save £1000 for me, so that I should have the same financial start in life as my brother.

In the mid 1920's I would go home and tell Mother so and so wasn't at school that day and she would explain that they wouldn't be for a while because they had rickets and were in Bath Hospital. The school authorities then introduced cod liver oil; malt and free milk came later. This raw cod liver oil was so revolting that children would not take it - so father gave bottles of boiled sweets to help make the medicine go down. There was no free transport to school. Children from Burderop, Hodson, Badbury, Draycott Foliat, the outlying villages, often arrived wet and sat in wet shoes all day. Mr. Seward Archer, who kept a shoe and repair shop next to the school, kindly, supplied some slippers and a change of shoes which were kept at the school for those with wet feet. People really helped each other in those days.

My Mother was very friendly with Mrs. Ben Thompson, the wife of the Head Gardener at Burderop, I joined her on some of the conducted tours of the Burderop gardens. I think there were seven other gardeners employed, so the whole place looked magnificent. When father was shorthanded or very busy I helped him on his round. Burderop House had a large kitchen and while I delivered bread there one of the many bells tinkled high up on the kitchen wall. The cook, housekeeper, butler, and several maids, all looked up - "That is Miss Joan's bell - off you go Mary". It was just like the TV programme "Upstairs, Downstairs".

The same day I went to a farm worker's cottage close by. Electricity, sewage and mains water had not arrived in any of the villages, the best illumination in those days was from an Aladdin

Lamp which had a very fragile mantle. Care had to be taken not to jog it or put it down hard and draughts when a door was opened caused the mantle to flare up. The church, school, shops, pubs etc. all had hanging oil lamps - the next best thing was a candle in a candlestick. This family that I visited did not even have many candlesticks - there were about six children sitting around the table, many of them attended the village school with me. There was one candle stuck in a packet of Stork margarine with the candle fat dripping into the margarine and several hands reaching out to spread mixture of candle fat and margarine on to their bread!

Arthur Byng, born in 1881, married my mother's sister Edith, and they kept the Patriot's Arms in the early 1920's. Arthur's father was a head postmaster in Reading with quite a large family. Arthur ran away to sea when he was only 14 years old, serving under sail, steam and diesel he obtained his Master Mariner's Certificate. I'm afraid Captain Byng drank any profits the pub made and my aunt and uncle bought a plot of land from the Calley Estate and built a bungalow at 31 Draycott Road. He had survived two submarine attacks in the First World War and went back to sea as a Merchant Navy Captain. After his sea going career, he worked at the Moredon Electricity Works in Swindon. He was buried in Chiseldon Cemetery in Butts Road. I was most upset one day to learn that his grave had been vandalised and his headstone found in Old Town Gardens in Swindon in the late 1980's, but I was never able to find out how this had occurred.

I started piano lessons with Aunt Edith when she lived at Draycott Road. One day when I rode my bicycle to her house for a lesson, I had to pass the football ground in Norris Close. My bicycle had a complete mind of its own and turned sharp right where I then played football with my friends. I never managed to direct the bicycle past the football field again.

The Old Swindon Golf Club, today called Ogbourne Downs to avoid confusion with golf clubs nearer Swindon, started in Chiseldon on the Calley Estate; General Calley was the President. The golf club moved to Ogbourne St. George in 1929. As an eight year old, I well recall watching members play at Chiseldon and helping them to find golf balls, stamping on them, or pocketing them, when the player was not looking - so we village lads would have a ball to play with. We were frequently chased off the course. After the course was abandoned in 1929, we played as long as we could. The local farmer's sheep keeping the grass on the fairways and greens short still enabled

us to play, but in the end it became too overgrown to use.

The annual Chiseldon carnival was another great event in the village. We all joined in, as did all the tradesmen. At this carnival children and adult races were enjoyed. In 1937, just before I started my career in farming, I won the open mile at Chiseldon Carnival - Ralph Lucas was second and Cyril Marshall was third. The profits were divided between Victoria Hospital, Swindon and Savernake Hospital in Marlborough. I remember going to Savernake Hospital with my father where we endowed a bed. It was very sad to see some of the children with TB sleeping in an open hut opposite the main entrance.

General Calley was a contemporary of General Baden-Powell (later to become Lord Baden-Powell) in the Boer War. I well remember General Calley and his daughter Joan attending Chiseldon Church every Sunday. A Mr. Noon was the groom, sitting on top of the Brougham, with the General and his daughter inside. I can still hear the black horse going at a quick trot to and from the Church. General Calley was once Black Rod in Parliament, and his sister was married to the Vicar of Chiseldon, the Rev. Lawrence Waugh. My father and mother attended Church for 23 years. Father was a sidesman and I was in the Choir. The choir boys received one and a half pence per week - a penny for matins and evensong and a half penny for choir practice Wednesday evening. Mr. Whittaker, who though totally blind, (he lived in Butts Road), was the organist and sometimes we escorted him either to or back from the Church.

A travelling film projector used to show silent movies every Wednesday evening in the old village hall at 7.30pm. Choir practice finished at 7.30pm. Our feet hardly touched the ground and when we arrived at the village hall in Draycott Road; we were very red, very hot and very out of breath. After a week or two of this the projectionist did not start the show until 7.45pm, so we did not miss Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Tom Mix etc. What a day that was when the talkies arrived in the Swindon Cinema. Another first for me was watching colour television in Canada in 1960. Colour TV arrived in the UK shortly afterwards.

General Calley died in 1929. I well remember the funeral, and as a sixer in the Wolf Cubs, I dropped a flower on his grave. I enjoyed the Cubs and Scouts, camping in Burderop Park and a camp in Oxwich Bay on the Gower Peninsular in 1932. Ten days, including train fare, cost 27/6p. Some of the boys who could not afford this amount went

free, supplemented by concerts we put on in the village hall: "Bob a Job" had not started then. Around this time there was a Jamboree held on the Marlborough College cricket ground. A special train brought hundreds of cubs and scouts to Marlborough railway station where we disembarked and marched up to the College to take part in this great event, which was attended by Robert Baden-Powell. Sixty years later I was at a dinner party with a fellow guest, the late Dr. Dick Maurice. I knew his father Dr. Walter Maurice was very keen on the Scout Movement and ran the Marlborough Scouts. Dick said Baden-Powell was staying at Lloran House and Dick and several of the Marlborough Scouts carried Baden-Powell in a lofted armchair up to the College playing field.

Mother and Father sent Frank and me to Cirencester Grammar School as boarders. Walter Hammond was a pupil boarder at this school too and the school was very cricket orientated. I loved all sports, cricket, football, tennis, swimming and athletics; unfortunately, to the detriment of my studies!

In 1937 I left school, but by then my Brother had nine years of farming experience, first as a pupil, then cowman, foreman and eventually farm manager and was anxious to start his own farm. By 1937, he had, with his £1000 legacy and hard work, accumulated £1200 and a new Wolseley car. Mother had saved about £720 for me. She always said she would have made the £1000 if father had not given money to his brother Harry to try to save him from bankruptcy in the late 1920's.

Father had me lined up to be apprenticed to a chemist in Swindon, but as soon as I heard of my brother's plan I let it be firmly known that I too wished to farm. Although only contributing £720 to my brother's £1200 and a car, Frank generously accepted me as a full partner.

In the late spring of 1938, Father told me that Chiseldon and Wroughton both wanted me to play cricket for them that season. Oh! I was so low and downhearted. How could I play cricket for any team with morning and evening milking to be done every day? However I did get in some football afterwards, I played in the Swindon & District League up to 1948, and quite a few six aside tournaments besides.

Father approached his elder brother Tom at All Cannings, for help in finding a farm for my brother and me. Tom, who by 1937 had bought Southgrove Farm from the Aylesbury Estate for his eldest son William, had also rented Bowden Farm in Burbage for his second son Tom and was renting 1200 acres at Ramsbury and 409 acres at

Ogbourne Maisey. Tom's third son Jack was farming All Cannings with his father. The youngest son Fred was in London. The idea was that Bill at Southgrove, Tom at Bowden and Jack at All Cannings produced the milk and Fred sold it in London. The advent of the Milk Marketing Board changed all that. Until the MMB, milk sales were free for all.

Father's request to his brother bore fruit. Tom offered either the 1200 acres at Ramsbury or the 409 acres at Ogbourne Maisey, subject to the landlord's approval. My brother nearly fell flat on his face, he was thinking of a much smaller acreage. However we took the 409 acres at Ogbourne Maisey. Cousin Fred returned from London and farmed the 1200 acres at Ramsbury. On reading this account so far, I now realise what a close family they were and I am sure Grandmother Sarah Matilda Curnick, (nee Tucker) who died in 1912, would have been very proud of the way her sons and daughter helped each other.

On changing the tenancy at Drove Barn Farm (I changed the name to Maisey Farm in 1950. It was originally called Drove Barn Farm from the name of the barn in the Green Lane). Mrs Sherbrook, the landlady, increased the rent to 17 shillings per acre per annum. Unfortunately there was no farmhouse available, so Frank and I lived in lodgings, a council house in Crawlings Piece, for two years. Father to the rescue again - for £500 he bought East View, a small cottage on the main road by the war memorial in Ogbourne St Andrew. This was opposite our lodgings, and Frank and I moved in there at 10pm on the Saturday night as the Second World War started at 11am the next day. Mother's sister Mabel was widowed in August 1939 and she came to East View in September 1939 as our housekeeper. Mabel and her husband, who survived the First World War, had a twenty years courtship before they married in 1933. There were no children.

In 1937, after my brother had bought a second-hand outdoor milking bail (there were no suitable buildings on the farm to milk inside); 25 - 30 cows and heifers; one Fordson tractor, a shire horse, 100 breeding ewes, hay wagon, tractor and a car trailer, an elevator, a model T Ford with a hay sweep attachment, plus various essential bits and pieces we needed - we had 18 shillings left in the bank. The Model T was stolen the following winter.

On looking back I now realise that no-one with any sense would have taken on the tenancy of 409 acres with a little under £2000 in their bank account, but through sheer hard work we survived.

Uncle Tom had left a small herd of young cattle in the yard at

Drove Barn, which we agreed to feed for him until the spring of 1937. Unfortunately they caught ringworm from the previously contaminated old wooden buildings. Frank and I both had a scab on our heads. Jack Caplin, who worked on the farm for the four years that Uncle Tom had the tenancy, fortunately avoided contracting the virus but obviously took it home and his 5-year-old son developed ringworm. We were not very popular with Jack's wife. My scab soon cleared up but Frank was given a sulphur treatment at Savernake Hospital, which I now believe was not the correct treatment. He developed blood poisoning and was off work for 5 weeks. Mother had him home during this period.

Jack Caplin, our only employee, was good with the sheep and had an excellent dog, but Jack did not like milking. However, by then I had three months tuition from my brother under my belt and somehow managed to milk twice daily in the Hosier Milking Bail until Frank returned to work in the Spring of 1938 with permanent scars on his face. He was just in time to start lambing, chain harrowing, fencing, feeding etc.

In the spring of 1938, I said to Frank, "how about some pocket money?" Frank wanted to know what I needed money for and when I explained, trips to the cinema, haircut and the occasional visit to Swindon Town Football club etc. He said that he already paid for all of that. Father came to my rescue yet again and provided some cash to buy a second - hand hen house and some yearling hens from my cousin Bill at Southgrove. I, at last, had a way of making some money of my own

We increased the milking herd to 50 and the sheep to 130 and moved into our own house in September 1939. With the outbreak of the Second World War, we were instructed to grow cereals and a small acreage of potatoes. Local stable lads helped to harvest the potatoes. Really, our down land, grade 3 farm land, with all its flints and sarsen stones was not suitable for potatoes, but we had to grow a small acreage. The large fields were ideal for cereals and with the advent of the combination seed drill, where the seed and fertiliser were placed together, it gave good crops. One could also see a big difference where the milking plant had traversed the farm. The Hosier Bail was moved daily to clean ground so there was no muck carting. Our biggest problem was knotted, or onion couch.

One of the elderly carters in the village, who had previously worked on this farm, told us that after the First World War, cereal production

continued into the 1920's. The vast American grain States and Canadian Provinces were growing cereals on a much larger scale and shipping to UK and Europe cheaper than they could be grown here. The result was that much of England's acreage reverted to grass land. On our farm they did not plant grass seed, some of the fields just fell back to grass after the stubble of the last harvest, hence the spread of knotted couch. After the first crop of cereals we found we had to summer fallow to get rid of the couch (no chemical sprays during the 1940 - 1945 period). There were a few combine harvesters in Wiltshire in the war but not many. We cut all our cereals with a binder, stooked the sheaves and built corn ricks to be threshed in the winter months. This meant an increase in permanent staff to three men as well as Frank and me. Additionally, folk from the village and Marlborough came to help evenings and weekends.

The Wiltshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, known as the War Ag., had demanded more cereals, so the sheep were sold to be followed a year later by the cows. Nearly all the farm was arable except the few steep fields where we kept beef cattle. At first we had to rely on a contract threshing machine to thresh our corn ricks. We manage to buy our own First World War threshing machine and so were able to do our own 20 to 30 ricks when we wanted to. The War Ag. Soon realised we had a threshing drum and asked us to do work for other farmers. This was prolonged hard work. We would get our own cattle milked and fed, devour a quick breakfast and be at a nearby farm by 8am with Italian prisoners of war (North African Campaign) and land girls waiting to help us. The land girls and POW's returned to camp at 4.30pm, but we then went home to milk again. There was a maximum set charge by the War Ag. For contract threshing and most of the time we would have been better off not doing contract work, especially with the odd non-payer taken into account!

Interestingly, looking back through my old wages book, I see that the wage for a farm worker in 1942 was £240 10 9d (£240.54p) per annum. A cottage was also provided, as was fresh milk and an ample supply of wood for the fire. Farm cottages usually had large vegetable gardens and somewhere to keep hens, providing meat and eggs. There was also the opportunity to shoot rabbits to supplement income and provide for the table, so they enjoyed a reasonable standard of living compared to some town dwellers.

Before the war, businesses were allowed to keep 200 gallons of petrol in a tank above ground. We bought a 100 gallon tank and

placed it on some blocks, whereupon a firm called Stevco (from Marlborough Road Swindon) delivered petrol in 4 gallon drums (approx. 18 litres). The driver had to empty each drum into the tank by hand; quite a physical task by today's standards and all for the grand sum of 1 shilling and 2 pence a gallon (5½ pence in today's money) or about 1p a litre!!

Visiting my parents in Chiseldon one evening, when the evacuation of our troops from Dunkirk was taking place in May 1940, I was just about to go back to our farm at around 10pm when there was a loud bang on the door. Upon opening it, we found several soldiers on the doorstep looking very dishevelled and needing a shave. They said that the army had got them back to Chiseldon Camp but there was no food for them there. They noticed father was a baker and wondered if he had some food to give them. Mother and Father quickly fed them and gave them some bread to take back to the camp.

Shortly after Anthony Eden, the Minister for War, announced they were forming the LDV - "THE LOCAL DEFENCE VOLUNTEER ARMY" and wanted all able-bodied men to resist an imminent invasion, for which Frank and I had volunteered. We were quickly dubbed "THE LOOK, DUCK AND VANISH BOYS". We turned up at a meeting place with our 12 bore shot guns. Most of the army equipment was left in France. After a few weeks, rifles and uniforms were supplied and stout boots, which most of the local farm workers promptly used for work. One day an officer addressed us, wanting to know if any of us had attended a Public School and had OCTU army training. Since there was no response to his question he then enquired if any of us had been to a Grammar School. Frank and I replied in the affirmative. This revelation meant that we received instruction on the care and use of a machine gun. This was a World War 1 Lewis machine gun, rather heavy and needed two men to carry it.

The army had taken over our village hut, which in those days stood next to the halt sign at the junction of the Rockley Road and the Swindon road. The village school was used Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings to instruct other members of the "Look Duck and Vanish Boys". They were now named "THE HOME GUARD" and they were taught such things as rifle care, map reading, throwing hand grenades, etc. Due to the shortage of facilities, it was arranged that Frank and I would be instructed for at least seven lessons in the village pub at 10am on a Sunday morning. After milking, washing up, sterilising, and feeding livestock and having our breakfast, it was

difficult to get there by 10am.

Saturday night was by far the busiest night of the week for the local pub. After serving beer and cigarettes, right up to 10.30pm, the landlord and his wife were far too tired to do any cleaning up. I cannot begin to describe how revolting the saloon bar was at 10am on a Sunday morning. The floor, tables and chairs awash with stale beer and cigarette stubs, no doors or windows open, curtains and blackout curtains still in place and reeking of stale tobacco smoke. We had to lie down on the floor and were instructed on how to cope with the machine gun when it jammed. Although the danger of cancer from smoking was not known then, it really put me off smoking and beer drinking. I can fully recommend two hours work in a stale saloon bar to put one off smoking and excessive drinking for life.

Four miles north of Marlborough stands a plantation of trees called FOUR MILE CLUMP. It was adjacent to here that in the spring and autumn we did our Home Guard duty: looking out for any signs of invasion such as gliders or airborne German troops. We did shifts of four hours on and four hours off. There was an old shepherd's hut equipped with two palliasses for the two off duty watchmen, but the palliasses were soon infected with fleas so I preferred to sleep in my car or on a nice summer night on the grass. It was fascinating to see and hear the owls and the dim light of the glow-worms. In the winter, we were in a saddle room of the shutdown stables adjacent to our bungalow. I remember one night, towards the end of winter, Jack Caplin our shepherd, who was lambing quite close by, and was also a member of the Home Guard, came over saying that he needed my help quickly. He had several ewes lambing all at the same time and could not cope. I deserted my post and went to help - I hope I wouldn't have been shot for that!

The Home Guard continued from 1940 - 1945. We were not disbanded straight away, as the Americans had petrol stored in jerry cans all along the side of a farm road near Ogbourne St George. We had to try and stop them being stolen for another month or so.

I did so enjoy the television programme 'Dad's Army' and often felt I could have contributed to the scripts when I recalled some of the antics we got up to. For instance, one day an officer told Frank to take his platoon and march in an orderly manner. Upon the command "Halt", Frank had to halt his platoon and quickly disperse as if evading a surprise enemy attack. With the noise of our nailed boots on the road, Frank leading his platoon from the front didn't hear the officer

shout Halt. Jack, our shepherd who was at the rear of the platoon, did hear the order and shouted out to Frank “Whoa Boss we’ve got to whoa” - Frank shouted “Platoon whoa”. We all collapsed laughing loudly. At the end of the exercise Frank, very red faced, asked if he could hand his stripes back, as he no longer wished to be a non-commissioned officer.

Sunday mornings was rifle and machine gun inspection – “Platoon, fall in, attention, present arms”. The officer then came and inspected rifles and the machine gun. When he saw the dust on the machine gun he told us that if we didn’t keep the gun cleaner, it would be taken from us. The light dawned - I made sure we didn’t clean it before the next inspection and were promptly relieved of it. By then, the smaller Sten machine guns had arrived and were much lighter to carry.

One night, German bombers, flying overhead towards Bristol, were caught in our searchlights, one battery near my wife’s home in Mildenhall and another searchlight near Manton Down stables. I presume the German pilot got fed up with these searchlights handing him on from one to another and decided to drop two bombs. One landed at an isolated farm near Mildenhall Woodland and another in the middle of the Marlborough/Rockley road, about 200 yards from the Old Eagle Cottages in Rockley on the Marlborough side. Most of the rubble from the bomb crater went out into the field. At the same time, a man from Wootton Bassett was driving home in his small Austin Ruby car and being unable to stop, drove straight into this crater which was about 10 ft. Deep. The driver survived, but required a day or two in hospital to recover.

In the summer of 1942 American Army and Air force personnel arrived in Wiltshire. Many were stationed in Ogbourne St. George military camp, some on Marlborough Common, Dakota aircraft and gliders at Ramsbury Airfield. The Marlborough Golf Course closed down during the war but the Ogbourne St George Club stayed open. We were all asked to make the Americans welcome. One day some Americans were playing golf at Ogbourne, one was a coloured sergeant who kept going into the club house kitchen. The lady in charge of the catering, Edith Copplestone, told him to get out of her kitchen and that she would take the food to him. The man was slow moving, so Edith helped him on his way. The other Americans smiled and asked her if she knew who he was. Edith replied that she neither knew nor cared, whoever he was, he was not allowed in her kitchen. ‘He’, was Joe Louis, the Heavy Weight Boxing Champion of the

World”.

We helped to make the American forces as welcome as possible in our own small way and with our limited facilities. Some GI's enjoyed ferreting the wild rabbits and shooting rabbits and pigeons, and in return gave us chocolate and candy, which was in very short supply.

When the American Forces left for France and the D. Day landings in 1944, they told me that if I wanted any timber, to help myself since many of the Nissan huts were being demolished. By 1944 there was nothing left in builder's yards. I needed planking to repair the old Drove Road Barn, so I duly arrived with tractor and trailer at the American campsite on the Rockley - Broad Hinton Road to find dozens of people with tractors and trailers, horses and carts, cars and trailers, even prams. Everyone, it seems had heard of the American Forces departure.

By the following day the British Army had arrived and tried to stop this appropriation, but by then it was too late and quite a lot of lumber had gone. I quickly started to repair the side of the barn and was very amused to read on one plank: “I was 16 years old before I realised there were other States in the Union besides Pennsylvania: I thought everywhere else was occupied by coloureds and Indians”. In different hand writing on the plank underneath, the reply - “Very intelligent, most Pennsylvanians are usually much older before they can even name the days of the week”.

Jean's mother had died in 1942 at their retirement bungalow in South Wonston, near Winchester. Her father Jack was devastated after his wife's death and didn't take much part in the running of their 60-acre dairy farm, part of which was rented from the Savernake Estate in Mildenhall. Jean ran this farm on her own with one land army girl, until her brother Ray Sinden was discharged from the Army at the end of the war in 1945. Ray was born on 2nd September 1913 and died from lung cancer on 28th May 1978. He was a trained motor mechanic whose hobby was motorcycling. He had no desire to farm. Ray joined the army in September 1939 (he said, “in case it's all over by Christmas”). He survived Dunkirk in May 1940, was bundled on to a train in Dover where he and other survivors promptly fell asleep, completely exhausted. When the train shuddered to a halt, the soldiers woke up and someone asked where they were. One fellow said it was a place he had never heard of - Devizes. “I have”, shouted Ray, and he promptly left the train and hitch hiked to Marlborough and home: much to the astonishment and delight of his parents and Jean.

After six years in the army and now married to Elizabeth Anne Matthews (Born 3rd March 1918) with a son John, born in April 1945, his father was pleased that Ray had had a change of heart and now wished to take over Durnsford Mill Farm, Mildenhall. Elizabeth, or Betty as she was known in the family, died on 11th April 1999. Both she and Ray are buried together in the cemetery on Marlborough Common. John and his wife Ethel continue to farm Durnsford Mill today. They have two sons, Michael and Richard.

Having to summer fallow quite a lot of the fields, the loss of dairy and sheep, we found ourselves in a poor financial situation, we were actually losing money. So, we re-started the dairy with a new Hosier Bail in 1944. After four years of cereal growing we were beginning to find where we could grow heavier crops of wheat in good fields and good malting samples of barley on the lighter land.

We started a Marlborough Group of Young Farmers' Club (YFC) in 1942. A very small group to start with including farmers' sons and daughters, land girls etc. Mr Frank Swanton and Dr Edwin Wheeler helped and were some of our first speakers. Marlborough College had their own YFC but the City of London School, which was evacuated to Marlborough College, joined Marlborough YFC and soon swelled our numbers at the meetings in the Town Hall. When the war was nearly over the City of London School returned to London, the land girls left and our numbers fell rapidly.

I met my wife, Jean Sinden, through the YFC. I was Club Leader and Jean was the secretary. We married in July 1946 and the club closed down, but I am happy to say in started up again after a year or so.

The Wiltshire Association of Dairy Students (W.A.D.S.) was another keen group with branches all over the county. WADS was known as a Matrimonial Agency for the farming community! The Marlborough branch was started in April 1948. Mrs Ida Bull from Sutton near Warminster was County Chairman. She was quite a forceful character, but did an excellent job. After a few years some of the Marlborough members wished to break away, this was done and the Marlborough branch became the Marlborough Farming Club and is still active today.

In the spring of 1942, Father's health had deteriorated, the effects of the mustard gas poisoning he had suffered, pneumonia, and the flour dust from baking had left him struggling for breath. He sold the shop at Chiseldon. At that time we had the chance to rent a bungalow in the middle of the farm, belonging to Mrs. Hartigan. She was a racehorse

trainer and sister to Mrs. Sherbrook our landlord. The Bonita Racing Stables had closed for the duration of the war. The head lad and his wife, who were residents of the bungalow, swapped accommodation with our cottage in Ogbourne St Andrew, to the mutual satisfaction of both parties. Sir Gordon Richards had once lived in the bungalow. It had its own septic tank, a generating plant for electricity, four bedrooms and a sun parlour, a solid fuel cooker and a garage, we were delighted. Father, Mother and mother's sister, who was our housekeeper for three years at Ogbourne St Andrew, Frank and myself all moved into the bungalow.

In December 1943 Frank married Norah Keating, a local girl. By then the head lad and his wife had left our cottage in Ogbourne St Andrew and taken a similar position with JV Rank, the miller at Druids Lodge near Stonehenge. Frank and Norah moved into the cottage again, and on the 17th July 1946 I married Jean Sinden, a farmer's daughter from Mildenhall near Marlborough, and we continued to live in the bungalow.

In 1948 our landlord, Mrs. Sherbrook, informed us that she and her son David Sherbrook, the local veterinary surgeon, had decided to live in the Manor House in Ogbourne Maisey, which had been occupied by the Army during the last few years. She offered us her house for Frank and Norah, called 'The Cottage', in Ogbourne Maisey together with the farm for a very good price. Frank was very pleased. Mrs Sherbrook had another tenant on a smaller farm of 130 acres who was also given the chance to buy his farm, Manor Farm, in Ogbourne Maisey. Although a much smaller farm than ours, he had better buildings, a farmhouse and four cottages. When the whole idea was put to Mrs. Sherbrook's Estate Agent, the principle of the firm, whose housekeeper was the sister to the tenant of Manor Farm, he put forward the proposal that both farm houses and cottages were sold to the smaller farm and only bare land to our much larger farm. Frank and Norah were bitterly disappointed and we refused the offer. Frank was so upset he started looking elsewhere for another farm to rent.

Mrs. Sherbrook then decided to remain in her house. In 1948 she sold both farms, the Manor House, the racing stables, gallops and other cottages in the village to Alfred Cooper of Cooper's Metals, Marshgate, Swindon. Mr Cooper immediately gave us notice to quit.

Now, the 1947-1948 Agricultural Holdings Act stated that, if you were farming to a certain standard the tenancy could not be terminated other than by death of the tenant or failure to pay rent. So we appealed



His Indenture Writetheth

That Arthur Curwick aged fourteen years or thereabouts on the first day of June 1871 in the County of Middlesex doth put himself Apprentice to William Henry Arthur of Macdonough in the County of Middlesex Pastrycook and Confectioner

to learn his Art and with him after the manner of an Apprentice to serve from the day of this date hereof unto the full End and Term of seven Years from hence next following to be fully complete and ended During which Term the said Apprentice his Heirs faithfully shall serve his said Master his lawful assigns and assigns whereof he shall do no damage to his said Master nor so to his assigns others but to his said Master shall be or perform any owing to his said Master of the same fee shall not waste the goods of his said Master nor lend them unduly to any he shall not contract matrimony within the said Term nor play at Cards or Dice Tables or any other unlawful games whereby his said Master may have any loss with his own goods or others during the said Term without leave of his said Master he shall neither buy nor sell towhitill not himself Taverners or Alehouses nor absent himself from his said Master's service day or night unduly But in all things as a faithful Apprentice he shall behave himself towards his said Master and all his during the said Term And the said William Henry Arthur his Heirs assigns and assigns shall be bound to pay to the said Arthur Curwick his Heirs assigns and assigns the sum of Seven shillings per week by way of premiums to him by the said Arthur Curwick his Heirs assigns and assigns in manner following that is to say the sum of Six pence at the beginning of these presents and the remaining Ten pence on the first day of May 1871 both yearly payments with the said Arthur Curwick his Heirs assigns and assigns



his said Apprentice in the Art or Business of a Pastrycook and Confectioner which he with by the last means that he can shall teach and instruct or cause to be taught and instructed Teaching into the said Apprentice sufficient that he can well pay with the said apprentice by way of wages the sum of one shilling by the week during the first three years of the said term and the sum of two shillings and sixpence by the week during the fourth and last year of the said term

And for the true performance of all and every the said Covenants and Agreements within of the said Parties Touching the said Apprentice by these saids Indentures whereby the said Parties indichungely have put their Hands and Seals the 1st day of May 1871 and in the City of London Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria by the Grace of God of the united Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen of the said and in the Year of our Lord One thousand Eight hundred and seventy three

Witness my Hand and Seal this 1st day of May 1871
Arthur Curwick
Witness my Hand and Seal this 1st day of May 1871
William Henry Arthur
Witness my Hand and Seal this 1st day of May 1871
Arthur Curwick

The amount of the Money or the value of any other matter or thing given or approved to be given with the above Indenture to the said Apprentice shall be paid to him at the time of the signing of the Indenture and the said Money or the value of any other matter or thing shall be paid to him at the time of the signing of the Indenture and the said Money or the value of any other matter or thing shall be paid to him at the time of the signing of the Indenture

Copy of my Father's articles of Indenture to one William Henry Arthur "in the Art or Business of a Pastrycook and Confectioner." The text is printed on the following page

This Indenture Witnesseth That Arthur Curnick aged fourteen years or thereabouts as well of his own free will and consent as by and with the consent of his Mother Sarah Matilda Curnick of Manor Farm in the Parish of Hinton Parva in the County of Wilts Widow doth put himself Apprentice to William Henry Arthur of Marlborough in the County of Wilts Pastrycook and Confectioner to learn his Art and with him after the manner of an Apprentice to serve from the day of the date hereof unto the full End and Term of four Years from thence next following to be fully complete and ended. During which term the said Apprentice his Master faithfully shall serve his secrets keep his lawful commands everywhere gladly do he shall do no damage to his said Master nor see to be done of others but to his Power shall tell or forthwith give warning to his Master of the same he shall not waste the Goods of his said Master nor lend them unlawfully to any he shall not contract Matrimony within the said Term nor play at Cards or Dice Tables or any other unlawful Games whereby his said Master may have any loss with his own goods or others during the said Term without licence of his said Master he shall neither buy nor sell he shall not haunt Taverns or Playhouses nor absent himself from his said Masters service day or night unlawfully But in all things as a faithful Apprentice he shall behave himself towards his said Master and all his during the said Term And the said William Henry Arthur in consideration of the sum of Twenty pounds by way of premium paid to him by the said Sarah Matilda Curnick in manner following that is to say the sum of Ten pounds at the signing of these presents and the remaining Ten pounds on the first day of May 1894 doth hereby covenant with the said Sarah Matilda Curnick that his said Apprentice in the Art or Business of a Pastrycook and Confectioner which he useth by the best means that he can shall teach and Instruct or cause to be taught and instructed Finding unto the said Apprentice sufficient Meat Drink Lodging and all other necefaries during the said Term and shall and will pay unto the said Apprentice by way of wages of one shilling by the week during the first three years of the said term and the sum of two shillings and sixpence by the week during the forth and last year of the said term

And for the true performance of all and every the said Covenants and Agreements the said Parties respectively bind themselves unto the other by these Presents In Withnets whereof the Parties above named to these Indentures interchangeably have put their Hands and Seals the first day of May and in the fifty-fifth Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria by the Grace of God of the united Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland QUEEN Defender of the Faith and in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and ninety three

(signed)

Arthur Curnick

Sarah Matilda Curnick

William Henry Arthur



Uncle Kellow, my Father's brother.



Wedding of Arthur Curnick & Elizabeth Kate Deane (my parents) Front row left to right Harry, Arthur & William Deane (Brides brothers) Middle row left to right Bride's sister Mable, Sarah Matilda Curnick (Groom's Mother who died in 1912), Groom & Bride, Harry Deane (Bride's Father), & Edith Louise (Bride's sister who married Arthur Byng.) Back row Left to right 2 ladies unknown, Kellow Curnick, Fanny Curnick, Robert Curnick,



Left: Mother, Father and Frank

Below: The great little surprise. The result of a Bournemouth holiday!



Above and right:

11 New Road
Chiseldon.

The shop and
house where I
was born.





Me in my "Woolly Pully"

Below: Father and me



Chiseldon's own David Beckham of the day!



Father and Mother



Jack Robinson with the aeroplane he made around a tri-cycle and yours truly in the pilot's seat. Jack was married to Doris Moulding in 1927. Doris brought me up from birth.



Muriel & Audrey Wildern



Maude Deane (Mother's cousin), Mother & me at Hampton Court, early 1930.



Brother Frank and me with swimming in mind



Cirencester Grammar School 1st XI Football Team.

1935-36

Back row left to right

Robert Curnick Frank Jones Brian Hanks Peter Beard James Barnfield ? Parsons Owen Tranter

Front row left to right:

Unknown Anaurian Jones ?Uzzell Mike Clarke Ted Arnold



Brother Frank and me literally burning the midnight oil getting the paperwork up together by the light from an oil lamp. We didn't have electricity on the farm until 1956



Building a rick

Loose hay was tossed onto the elevator by one man and another had to be atop the rick to spread it. All very labour intensive in those days.



June 1942





Top: The Hosier milking bale. The first automated milking parlour. This was moved regularly around the farm



The Hosier Bale consisted of a caravan with an engine and boiler in one half and the milk cooler and churn storage in the other. In tandem with the van was another shed with six cow stalls. The whole caboodle was moved daily so there was no mess to clear up. This also enriched the land very well. The milking system, which has now practically died out, was marvellous in the spring and summer, but so cold and miserable in winter.





Pit stop to grease up the tractor - August 1941

Fordson tractor and binder cutting 'Scandia' variety wheat. The sheaves of corn were gathered into stooks to dry in the sun before being collected up and built into a rick to await threshing.





Mr. Frank Curnick and his bride Miss Norah Keating (My brother and new sister in law) on their wedding day, December 1943. Nellie Masters was Maid of Honour. They were married in the Roman Catholic Church at Ogbourne Maisey which was demolished in the 1970's and became the site for "New House" where Elfriede and Brian Graham now live.



Above: the lych gate leading to the Church in South Wonston (below) as it is today, where Jean's parents are buried and Jean and I were married.





Jean, escorted by her father, John Sinden, on her way into the Church at South Wonston, near Winchester on our wedding day, 17 July 1946

South Wanston Church and our wedding. Left to right are my Father, Mother and Frank. To the right of the Bride, her Father, John (Jack Sinden), holding his grandson John and on the extreme right is Jean's elder sister Nell (Ashworth), with her children in the foreground. Left to right Jean, John & Mark





July 29th 1944. - Jean's sister, Nell and three of her four children, John, Mark and Jean. Her fourth daughter, Mary, was born later.



Jean in front of the bungalow on the gallops where we lived for 14 years.



L to R Svante, Joey Haine, Ingrid, me, Jean & Pete Haine at the bungalow in July 1953. Svante and Ingrid were Swedish friends.



Jean and new baby Sue



1948 - Elder daughter Susan christened. L to R - Jean, me, Edith Byng, Phyllis King, Betty Sinden, Father & Mother, Herbert & Rene Pitt



My father and mother



Above right -Sue with 'Pop', her grandfather Jack Sinden and right with Jean and me at the seaside, most probably Bournemouth or Sandbanks.



Left -Jack Caplin, who was with Frank and me when we started farming and who stayed with me until he retired. This must be the only time he was seen without his pipe in his mouth! Jack and his family lived in one of the cottages we built, shown in the background of the photograph.



An early Massey Harris combine harvester. The first I had with onboard bulk tank facilities for grain collection. Prior to this, the corn had to be put into sacks and manually handled.

Village outing to
Weymouth late 1950s.



Above left: the cottages we built & moved into after leaving the bungalow. Left & above: Our own farmhouse at last. We moved in just before Christmas 1960.



Tea time! New Holland combine, a far cry from what I started with, a sealed cab for driver/operator comfort and fan providing filtered, cool air, but it was still a dirty, dusty job.

In the dim days of my youth, most kids were sent to Sunday School, where we learned bible stories etc. My mother's sister Mabel was married to one Frank Povey who taught me this amusing if mischevious little ditty:

*Black folk, white folk, everybody come
Join the darkies Sunday School and make yourself at home.
Bring your sticks of chewing gum and sit upon the floor
And we'll tell you Bible Stories like you've never heard before.*

Goliath was a Philistine, a most enormous man
And Israelites who fought him were among the also ran.
With his shield and sword he felt himself so slick
'Til David, son of Jessie, put his lights out with a brick.

Chorus.

I cannot remember the other verses, which, some might think, fortuitous!



July 1986 - Jean and I celebrating our 40th Wedding Anniversary with our grandchildren. Outside left and right respectively are Jill's two boys, Jethro and Kian. Centre left and right, Sue's girls, Naomi and Sarah, whilst Lesley's children are Joby kneeling and Marion in my arms.



In Summer 2000, Nora and I had a party to celebrate our combined birthdays, 150 years between us. I being 80 and she being somewhat less! The photograph shows from L to R Nora's daughters, Pam and Anne and my daughters Sue, Jill and Lesley

to the Tribunal in Trowbridge and fortunately won the day. Alfred Cooper then approached us and said that as he could not get us out would we consider purchasing? Frank declined, but I was keen to do so.

Father had a stroke and died in Savernake Hospital in February 1949. As soon as Uncle Kellow heard I wanted to buy the farm he warned Mother and me against doing so, believing it would be a millstone around my neck. He was concerned that as had happened after the First World War, the price of land would drop rapidly with the fall of prosperity in agriculture in general. In actual fact, quite the reverse has happened since the Second World War. Despite all the warnings, I bought the farm in 1950 for just under £30 per acre.

The War Ag. Still needed all the grain we could grow to save US dollars. Indeed we were encouraged by grants to remove awkward hedges, level off old chalk pits and grade steep banks so cereals could be sown and ripened easier. I used to supplement my income by 'lamping', shooting rabbits at night. We used a 1939 Austin Cambridge car which father had bought new and put on blocks from 1942-1945. The windscreen wound outwards, no four wheel drive, my wife would drive and I sat in the passenger seat with a 4.10 shotgun, a 12 bore would have blasted them too much. We received 6d, (2½ new pence) for each carcass from the butcher. If we ran over a rabbit on the road we never stopped, but if it was a hare, then sometimes the butcher would give a shilling for it. The bag would vary from 5 – 25 rabbits/hares a night. During the winter 1947-1948 Jean became pregnant and could not stand the smell of the cordite from the gun any longer, so Jack Caplin, then rode shotgun and I drove the car. He was a better shot than I and our bag improved.

Marlborough Cinema used to stand on the site where Waitrose is today. The programmes were changed twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday. I often took the shotgun when we went to the cinema, in case there was a chance of a rabbit on our farm road on the way in. Very appropriate if there was a cowboy film showing!

There was free car parking and many empty places in the High Street. I know people flinch if you slam a car door nowadays, but doors on pre-war cars had to be slammed. When we came out of the Cinema, I would always look behind to see if there were four dollops of mud in the road where the wheels had been standing.

Our partnership dissolved, I purchased the farm in 1950. Frank and Norah, who sadly lost their first baby but later had two daughters -

Jane in 1946 and Sally 1949, had taken the tenancy of a farm in Petworth, in Sussex and Jean and I struck out on our own.

The first priority was the erection of two cottages for farm staff. In 1950 the Labour Government had set a ceiling cost of £1500 on the price of new houses. We decided to build a pair of three bed-roomed semi-detached cottages, with Rayburn cookers and septic tanks within that price limit.

Kennet Council gave permission but when they knew we were not on the mains water supply they wanted a sample of our farm supply. A bottle of water was duly sent off for analysis and when the result came back it had an extremely low bacteriological content. At the end of the report it stated "This is the purest water we have ever tested" - I should have abandoned farming there and then and taken up a bottled water project

Although rather isolated, I had loved living in the bungalow on the racecourse gallops for fourteen years. Susan and Gillian were both born whilst we were there, on 18th April and 4th November respectively. We also had a daughter, Janet, in August 1951; sadly she lived only one week and is buried in the tiny churchyard in Rockley. We finally left the bungalow in May 1954, to live in one of the cottages which we had built at Maisey.

We still used oil lamps for lighting, since we didn't have mains electricity until the summer of 1956, when I had to pay the cost of routing it from Rockley. On 10th December 1955, whilst living in the cottage, Lesley was born.

We eventually built our own farmhouse and moved into it in December 1961 - 24 years after starting here in September 1937. Jean was marvellous. I had wanted to build the house earlier, but she insisted that I had to have a good milking parlour, cowsheds and a grain dryer with bulk loading facilities before we thought about the house. In 1964 after 14 years of hard work, we had settled our debts with the bank and along with the farmhouse and cottages had completed our aims for the farm buildings. We needed accommodation for extra staff in due course and so around 1967, we erected a Woolaway bungalow below the cottages. We built additional barns and a new drier facility in the fullness of time.

When we moved from the bungalow to the cottage, Mother bought a small house in Marlborough and spent a lot of her time visiting Frank and Norah in Petworth.

About this time the village shop in Ogbourne St George converted

an old single decked bus into a mobile shop. This used to trundle round the villages twice a week. This was quite a treat for Sue and Jill since they were allowed one bottle of fizzy drink, usually Tizer, each week.

In the 1950's Myxomatosis arrived. The roads and fields were littered with dead and dying rabbits. Even we farmers never quite realised how much grass and cereals the rabbits consumed. It was extraordinary to see grass growing on the headlands and near the trees where the old rabbit warrens were. When the rabbits started to colonise there were "Rabbit Clearance Societies" formed all over the UK. I quickly joined and for a small payment per acre we employed a man to gas the rabbits covering an area Marlborough, Chiseldon and Avebury. We also provided him with telescopic poles to push out pigeon nests and squirrel drays, well worth the money. My wife always said we drowned the rabbits with drink when we had a rabbit clearance meeting, but after the machine gun tuition in the pub in 1940, I drank very little alcohol.

In 1921, Paddy Hartigan, who was then training at Bonita Stables, Ogbourne Maisey, was killed in Liverpool on Grand National night.

In the 1920's, racing licences were not issued to women. In due course, Mrs Hartigan, who wished to become a Trainer, married Paddy's brother, Martin Hartigan, who was a trainer for Jimmy White at Foxhill, Wanborough. Martin arrived at Ogbourne Maisey bringing, among others, Gordon Richards. At that time there was great rivalry between the racing stables, both boxing and football. The story goes that Bonita Stables were playing football against Fred Darling's stable at Beckhampton. Hartigan is reputed to have told young Gordon Richards that if he scored a goal, he would give him a ride. Gordon did score, got a ride, and a winner. "From small acorns great oak trees grow".

When Gordon Richards finished riding he came back to Ogbourne Maisey to train; the very place where his career had started.

Mrs. Hartigan married three times in all. Her third husband, Group Captain Laye was a pilot in the First World War. He was shot, losing an eye, just before the Armistice was announced. Mrs. Laye's only son Michael was a tank commander in Africa during the Second World War. He was ambushed by the Italians, was shot and killed as he attempted to leave his tank and was buried nearby. (Coincidentally, Dick Curnick passed the tank soon after the incident.) Mrs. Laye and her three husbands are buried in their family cemetery at the side of

the race horse training gallops. There is a delightful epitaph on Paddy's grave-stone, which is as follows:

*“Beneath the clear and spacious sky,
Here let the sleeping horseman lie,
Nor from his darlings sunder,
And as the thoroughbreds flash by,
This dust may quicken suddenly,
To hear the gallops thunder.”*

Mrs. Laye and Mrs. Sherbrook were sisters, their father was George Edwardes, (1852—1950). He was born in Clee, Lincolnshire, the son of a customs officer. He was known as the Father of Musical Comedy. He was the impresario of the Gaiety Theatre in London and was at the Savoy from 1881 to 1885. Amongst the famous musicals he put on were Chu Chin Chow and Maid of the Mountains. Josie Collins was one of his stars. His son, Major Darcy Edwardes, was killed in the First World War.

In the early 1960's Sir Gordon approached me and offered me some Norwegian hay free of charge which he had bought and wanted removed. It was useless for horse feed or milking cows, but I agreed to take it and feed it to some dry cattle. I was reluctant to take the hay for nothing and racked my brains as to how to offer something in return for it. Sir Gordon was reputed to have the best cellar in Southern England, and I certainly was not a connoisseur to offer him wine. I knew he was fond of shooting and ran a shoot in Savernake Forest. I hit on the idea of inviting him to one of my shoots. We would have about four shoots during the season. Jack Caplin kept and fed the birds and when any pheasant hens or mallard ducks were disturbed by the forage harvester or mowing machine, Jack would put the eggs under a broody hen. We never got more than 30-50 birds in one shoot but it was all very enjoyable. David Sherbrook, my ex-landlord's son and nephew of Mrs Hartigan, combined the acreage of Bonita Stables on our shooting days making the shoot just over 600 acres. Sir Gordon was delighted and came to most of my shoots until he retired and went to live in Kintbury. Indeed, with his gun dogs, his keeper from the Forest and his chauffeur, who brought the lunchtime drinks, he virtually took over my shoot, and certainly improved the hospitality. Captain Guy Holland, of Holland's Gin who was the occupier, neighbour and farmer of Rockley Manor, was with us one

day when the chauffeur opened the drinks - he said - "Well, I've never had 1929 port at a shoot before". Evidently a very good year, but with my knowledge of drink it was all rather wasted on me.

David Sherbrook was a practising Veterinary Surgeon in Marlborough and during the war his horse "Poet Prince" won the Cheltenham Gold Cup at the wonderful March Festival. A local farmer friend, Doug Groves and I went many times to Cheltenham, as there was so much local interest. Captain Bomford, who farmed at Snap Estate, had a winning horse, "Colonel Bagwash" and later Bob Turnell, who trained at Maisey Manor Stables, had many winners. All very exciting.

One other racing anecdote I will share. I still kept in touch with Herbert Pitt. He was Mrs Hartigan's head lad before the war, and he was the man we swapped houses with in May 1942. He worked for a short time in a munitions factory in Bristol, but later he obtained a job as head lad with Noel Cannon who trained for JV Rank the flour magnate at Druid's Lodge. You dare not use your car during the war for pleasure, so, in 1943, I cycled over to Druid's Lodge, about three miles past Stonehenge, which took over three hours. After being shown round the stables we piled into the horsebox carrying "Why Hurry" a young filly to be ridden by an apprentice jockey at Salisbury races. Bert Pitt told us to back it heavily, as it was bound to win. I only put a few pounds on and it romped home very easily at a good price. Gordon Richards won the Oaks on "Why Hurry" later on that year.

As I mentioned before, you dare not use a car to go racing. Ivor Novello and Dorothy Paget (who owned many horses) were both caught. Ivor Novello went to prison for three weeks though not so Miss Paget. When the day's racing was over, other people who lived at Druid's Lodge and worked in Salisbury in the morning also went to see and back "Why Hurry". We all piled in the horsebox and were packed like sardines. After a short journey to Druid's Lodge we all fell out of this small horsebox, I counted seventeen people. "Why Hurry" was so hot and in a white lather. The journey home had distressed the filly far more than the race. When Noel Cannon, the Trainer, heard this he was furious and free rides in the box never took place again.

Since 1990 I have played many times at the Salisbury Golf Course, which adjoins the racecourse, and when racing is taking place some of the golf course is not used. The view overlooking Salisbury from both

race and golf courses is breath taking and I never tire of seeing the majestic spire of the Cathedral - quite the best place to view.

In the 1920's Mother had a solid tyre Trojan car and it was the usual thing to take relatives and friends to Stonehenge and Salisbury Cathedral. Mother said I took my first unaided steps in the Cathedral Close in 1921.

In the 1990's Bishop Jimmy Adams, who had retired, became the vicar of the Ogbourne's and Rockley Parishes. He took a party to Salisbury Cathedral, where, with a Bishop in attendance we were given VIP treatment and taken into the vault and shown the original Magna Carta; there are only two others in the UK. Southgrove Wood, Burbage, where my cousin Bill and now his son Tim farms, is mentioned in the Doomsday Book.

We began intensive commercial egg production in 1960. By 1967 we were producing up to 300 gallons of milk daily. The Milk Marketing Board wished to stop all milk collection in churns and all producers had to supply bulk tanks. I had worked nearly 30 years with cows so decided to stop milk production and increase poultry unit to 16,000 birds. This worked very well with Thames Valley Eggs marketing all the eggs I could produce. After a while Thames Valley Eggs started paying less and became much stricter in their grading process, so we decided to get our own automatic grader and obtain our own licence as a registered grader and packer. We had to increase staff to two more part time ladies to grade and I had to find a market for all our own eggs. By now we had six quite large poultry houses, plus a grader and egg store. The poultry excrement had a detrimental effect on the metal cages and by 1980 the plant needed replacing and upgrading. To recover the investment costs of this would have meant staying in the egg business for another decade. Jean wisely asked me if I still wanted to be in eggs for that length of time. The work involved was already taking more time and effort than milking a 100 head of cows when taking into account greater labour requirements to grade, sell and deliver eggs locally.

I sold the cows in 1967 and the hens in 1981. I was now farming 400 acres of cereals and 100 acres of grassland for the beef unit, having purchased more land adjoining Maisey Farm in 1960. I kept the egg sales to local shops, restaurants, hotels etc. Buying in only as many as I could sell was highly satisfactory involving very little work. I ran the grain, beef and egg sales with only one man and additional help at harvest time.

With the advent of new short straw, improved varieties of grain, new chemical sprays and modern farm machinery we were able to grow heavier and cleaner crops. There was always a demand for straw both locally for the racehorses and in the West Country and Wales. Until the big bales arrived, lorries were loaded with traditional lighter bales of straw, 8-9 rows high. Care had to be taken to ensure they were not too high to go under the motorway bridges. I recall one lorry driver returning for a load, to whom I pointed out the damage he had done to telephone wires in the village. He just shrugged his shoulders and said that what had really upset him was that the last load he had taken, had brought down his own telephone cables.

Mushroom growers found horse muckle ideal for cultivating mushrooms, and then scientists brought out a new spray, a growth regulator for wheat crops which reduced the length of the straw and enabled farmers to apply more nitrogen without the fear of the crop going flat in a thunderstorm just before harvest. It also achieved a crop return of four tonnes of wheat per acre in some areas. Our grade three land averaged three tonnes per acre. Unfortunately a residue left in the straw from the growth regulator, was detrimental to the mushrooms, so horse manure could no longer be used for mushroom growing. Horses are cleaned out once or twice daily and their dung has far too much straw content to be spread on the land. Hence the continual fires you may see near any equine establishment.

In 1960 my friend and cereal advisor, John Harding, of Dunn's Seeds Salisbury, told me his company was arranging a visit to the Province of Ontario, and asked if I would care to join them. I hesitated for a while but Doug Grove persuaded me that this was an opportunity not to be missed. So in May 1960, Doug, Jimmy Pocock, (whose wife was one time Mayor of Marlborough and whose younger daughter Sue, is married to Tim Curnick at Southgrove Farm), and a crowd of other Wiltshire Farmers took off on a chartered flight to Canada. We stayed in Toronto and many other hotels and motels. The Agricultural Minister received us in the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa. We were shown over the building and given a talk about the problems of Canadian Farmers. We visited Niagara Falls, with the large ice flows in May, a wonderful sight, also the completed American/Canadian Hydro Electric Power Plant at Cornwall on the diverted St Lawrence River.

I had taken on a pupil farmer for a year in 1941, whom I knew had left farming and was a cameraman in film and TV studios in Canada. I

browsed through the telephone book in the hotel bedroom and sure enough, I found Alan Cullimore to be living in Toronto. He was astounded when I telephoned. He and his wife Myra, who was his girlfriend in 1941, arrived with their son Julian. I entertained them and in return was invited to their house the next day, before our party moved on.

On our return journey to the UK we encountered a strong head wind. The piston engine aircraft had to land at Shannon to refuel. The one Irish farmer on board was very pleased and left the plane at Shannon and did not have to make a return flight from Heathrow. I doubt he would have been able to do that nowadays. Our wives waiting at Heathrow were not so thrilled at the delay. I enjoyed this holiday so much that every year since 1960 we have travelled abroad.

My eldest daughter Sue and husband David Jefferies, were married on 30th March 1968 in Manton Parish Church. They had two daughters, Sarah and Naomi. Sarah was born on 16 August 1976 and Naomi on 22nd June 1978. Having travelled widely in the course of work, Sue and David eventually settled in Somerset where they started a successful training consultancy business primarily for agriculture, arboriculture and horticulture.

Lesley, our youngest daughter, married Stewart Cole in May 1980 in the Parish Church of St. Andrew, Ogbourne. They left the UK to live and work in Tübingen, in Germany. We had many enjoyable holidays there, with the Black Forest nearby and views of the Swiss Alps in the distance. Tübingen is a delightful University town, near Stuttgart where Stewart worked at the Max Plank Institute and Lesley worked on Cancer Research at a University. Joby, their son, was born in Germany in January 1983. In the summer of 1983 Stewart joined the Louis Pasteur Institute and they moved to Paris where their daughter Marion was born in September 1984. Lesley is now a university lecturer in English in Paris, so we continue our jaunts abroad to visit her and the family regularly. Stewart is now a Professor of Microbiology and a Director of the Pasteur Institute. He was part of a team, whose work led to the isolation of the Aids virus. He was introduced to Princess Diana when she visited Pasteur.

I enjoyed a conducted tour of the Pasteur Institute and never realized it was so large. The great man himself is buried in a vault in

the Institute, though not quite as impressive as Napoleon's tomb in the Place des Invalides, or Lenin's body in the Kremlin. Having visited Moscow a few years ago, we queued for nearly an hour waiting to see Lenin's tomb in Red Square. Lenin's body was embalmed following his death in 1927, but he looked so peaceful, as if he had died only yesterday.

Many of our holidays abroad have had a farming flavour. I have made two visits to Kibbutz in Israel. I saw large herds of Friesian cattle, high yielding milk cows fed on banana leaves (keep well back when they cough) and also good crops of avocado pears growing out of solid rock on steep hillsides. The irrigation was not wasted with a spray, when turned on, the water dripped through small holes in a narrow plastic pipe all round each tree. One Kibbutz was not far from the Golan Heights. When the Palestinians decided to shell, every one scuttled like rabbits down chutes into shelters.

When work on farms became too much for the older residents, one of the activities they moved on to was making plastic spectacle frames. We were told that once you had the mould, these frames cost about 25p. each. On my return to the UK I had to have a new pair of glasses. The optician offered me frames costing £75 - they looked identical to the ones being made in Israel. When I told him where I had just seen them being made for 25p, he quickly changed the offer and said he could re-glaze my existing frames!

On a trip to Hong Kong, I visited an experimental farm created by two successful business men, who used their good fortune to help local Hong Kong farmers to improve their lot in life. Different crops were grown and farming activities undertaken at various heights on a hillside' One experiment I recall involved pig husbandry, which stemmed from the fact that Prisoners of War captured by the Japanese never contracted pneumonia, despite being kept in close proximity, being poorly fed and housed and suffering from the cold in the winters. I was extremely proud to pick a mandarin orange and eat it straight from the tree there too.

In 2003 we took a cruise to the Caribbean, which included a thousand mile trip up the Amazon as far as Manus in Brazil. On one of the day trips we transferred to a smaller launch and saw the spectacular sight of "The Meeting of the Waters". Here one river is very brown with enriched nutrients; the other side is normal black

river water. An analogy would be a glass of Guinness, the black coloured body, with the creamy head. These different coloured waters ran side-by-side for several miles without integrating, a quite remarkable sight. We then transferred to a five seater boat, with outboard motor, where we went right into the jungle. The Cayman crocodiles and exotic coloured birds were fantastic. Local Indian children, in very small boats, were quick to see the possibility of cashing in on the tourist trade by posing with two-toed sloths, parrots, and enormous snakes - one picture one US dollar.

At Jean's suggestion, we took up golf. Lo and behold, I became hooked on it and more keen than she was. I have played regularly ever since, joining both Marlborough and Ogbourne Downs Golf Clubs. I little realised at the time how it would introduce me to new friends and give me such support and a sense of purpose following Jean's passing after 41 years of happy marriage.

Jill, our middle daughter, was married to Nigel Wookey in 1976 and they had two sons, Kian in January 1979 (100 years after his great-grandfather, Arthur Curnick's birthday), and Jethro in January 1980. This marriage sadly ended in divorce and Jill brought up her two young sons as a single mother. She married again in 1997, on May 22nd, (her dear old Dad's birthday), to Ken Carter, and is now living at Manton Grange, Marlborough. Jill has an active horse enterprise, livery and breeding. One of her most successful horses was bought by the American International Three Day Event Team.

We still have animals on the farm, sheep and beef and though now in my 84th year, I still enjoy getting involved, giving advice and helping with the lambing whenever possible.

Jean died on 10th June 1987 from cancer and was buried in the little Churchyard of Ogbourne St. Andrew Church, where she had been a regular worshipper. I married Nora Brown on 22nd September 1990. Nora also lost her husband Bob to cancer. We all knew each other from having played golf together and Jean and Nora were both keen members of the Women's Institute, of which they had both been Presidents. Not many old farmers can say they have slept with two Presidents! Nora has two daughters and three granddaughters. I have three daughters and six grand-children, three girls and three boys. We don't manage family get togethers very frequently, but on the occasions that we do, we get on well together. Nora and I are very happy together, which must be a relief to our respective daughters. We both enjoy fairly good health which allows us to keep golfing and

enjoy travelling. We play golf several times a week. I find it quite unbearable that Nora can outdrive me and usually wins every time we play together. It is the same with scrabble, damn it: despite the fact that my spelling is much better than hers!

When I look back, I have had a very happy and enjoyable 67 years of life on the farm, and have good memories of some real characters. One such person was Jim Messenger from Rockley. When he retired after a lifetime spent on a farm in Rockley he worked part-time tending our garden. He had some wonderful tales to tell. When he was a boy in the time of the First World War, Jim picked up a detonator. Boys, being what they are, he banged it a bit and it exploded, blowing off several fingers on one hand. He was transported to Savernake Hospital from Rockley by horse and cart. He once told me that he walked and drove a few cattle to Swindon market one Monday. His boss was disappointed with the price and Jim walked them back to Rockley again; round trip of about 20 miles. On the Thursday of the same week he drove the same cattle to Devizes market, a distance of about 15 miles. They were sold there for a little less than he was offered in Swindon.

Another amusing incident I recall happened in the 1950s. A man was running a piggery on the corner of Marlborough Common. It is now the site for the ground staff complex of the Marlborough Golf course. He bought some small pigs in Swindon Market. When the haulier delivered them to the piggery two of them escaped and raced over the golf links, across our fields and on to the racehorse gallops. We were living in the bungalow at the time, after running for about one and half hours the pigs and owner finally arrived at our house. We gave all three shelter and when my wife asked where he had come from, the owner gasped "Christ! Marlborough" and promptly collapsed.

After a lifetime in farming, it grieves me to see the state of British agriculture today - no one likes working so hard only to lose money. City money is buying farms and estates now, just as they did in the 1920-30's. One difference is that many of the new owners have more sense and do not try to farm. Instead they rent their land to local farmers, while they enjoy the country life. Shooting is a popular pastime, but a good shoot needs constant control over predators. Perhaps this will encourage more control of crows, magpies, squirrels (I wish they would call them tree rats) and badgers. The badger population has not increased, it has exploded. In France they have

dropped bait from helicopters to inoculate foxes against rabies, with some success. This method proved ineffectual in trials against the immunisation of badgers, who, instead preferred to find their own food. My son-in-law Stewart, points out that it is not all one sided, cattle can infect badgers with TB too. Not many years ago cattle in this country were free from TB. We have just tested (March 2004) our 60 head herd of single suckle cattle for a clean bill of health - but for how much longer?

As a youngster I was always keen on bird nesting and then later, when my daughters were old enough, I enjoyed showing them nests that I would find on the farm. Jean and I once attended an evening class many years ago about birds, which we found of immense interest. Today, I still get tremendous enjoyment from watching the birds that visit our bird table. The greater spotted woodpecker rewards us by bringing her young back to the nuts when they mature. We also get the green woodpecker; always very busy pecking out ants on the lawn with her extra-long beak. Buzzards have been nesting on the farm for four or five years now. When the buzzard hovers, the pigeons fly in all directions, but the buzzard is too slow for a wild pigeon. A different story at Simmonds Yat, well worth a visit to see peregrine falcons taking numerous wild pigeon, on the wing, to feed their young on the inaccessible cliffs.

I have been fortunate enough to have been on Safari style holidays in Africa four times now and one tour with a very keen ornithologist - we logged nearly fifty different species including the large African eagle and the grotesque Secretary Bird. When I depart this world I should like to return as a bird.

I am very proud of my family and their children. They have all done well for themselves. I am so pleased that Jean lived to see all six of our Grand-children, but I just wish she could have lived longer to see how they have matured. Sarah was married to James Smallridge in August 2002. They were married in Churchstanton Parish Church, the Parish in which Sarah was born and spent most of her life until her marriage. I am looking forward to more weddings and hopefully some great grand-children to enjoy.

