

NEWSLETTER 140

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The Loughton I knew, 1912–1934

In our last Newsletter we published the first part of John W Flack's account of his early life in Loughton on Borders Farm; this second part describes more of the farm itself.

During 1918/19, many farms in the area had German prisoners to work in the fields. There was a POW camp at Chigwell, in a large house close to the church. It was a stipulation that the prisoners had to be escorted in their parties between camp and farm by someone, it did not seem to matter who! It fell to the lot of my twin brother and myself to be the escort for the men coming to Borders Farm. Of course, at that time of the war, they had no inclination to escape.

So, at 7 a.m., before going to school, we would meet a party of up to ten being escorted by a man with a gun, at Rolls Park Corner (the home of the Pankhurst family – of suffragette fame). This was at the top of Chigwell Lane. We had five prisoners for the day and had to escort them to our farms and then all the way back to their camp after school. That meant that at the age of eleven, we were walking (with our walks to and from school) something like 14 miles for five days of the week!

At this period, Loughton had two doctors – Dr Pendred whose surgery was at the head of Station Road, opposite the Police Station and Dr Harris who lived 300 yards further north on the High Road. It also had a laundry, which was on Church Hill opposite the bottom of Pump Hill; the proprietors I believe were called Freeman.

Living on a farm was a great experience. My father had married a farmer's daughter from Widdington in Essex and, following his earlier appointment as Farm Manager, came to live in a small cottage adjoining the farm buildings. These consisted of large barns for the storage of forage for conversion into chaff, chiefly for horse feed.

In those very early years of their occupation, the farms were suffering from arson attacks, particularly ricks of hay. Before returning to bed at night, my father always had a walk round the farm buildings and stock to ensure everything was all right. On one occasion, he was alerted to a sound in one of the buildings and mindful of the arsonist, he hid under a load of hay in the yard to await events. Without success, he returned to his cottage, but before he could get to bed, the load of hay was in flames. The guilty nearly caught? Thereafter the arson ceased!

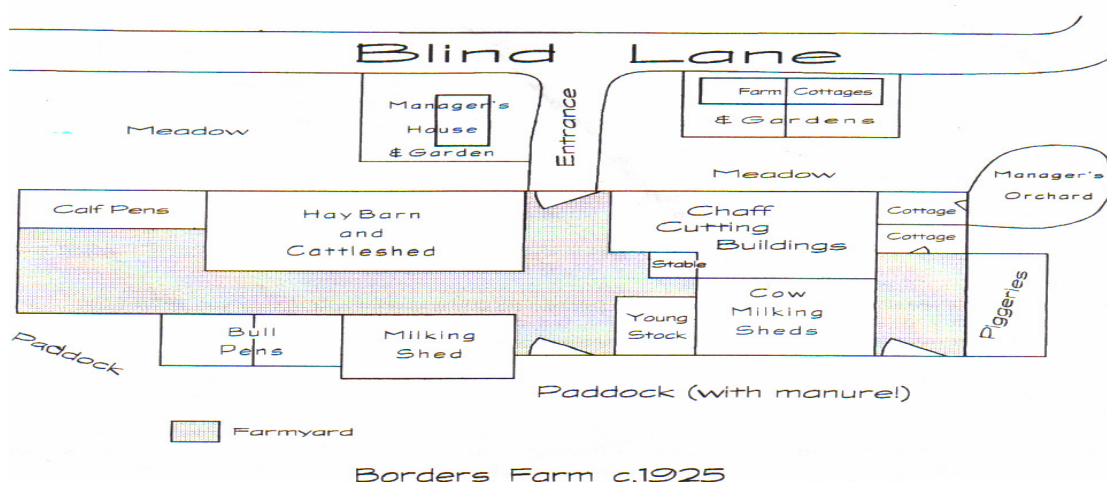
Hay and harvest times were very busy occasions, particularly for my mother. Her job was to make tea and skilly (oatmeal drinks) to be carried to the eight to ten men in the fields. The skilly was taken at 11 a.m., 3 p.m. and possibly at 7 p.m., while the tea was taken at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. From the age of twelve (in school holidays), the job of carrying these two gallon containers, by means of a yoke with a can from each shoulder, fell to my brother and me.

On Borders, Traps Hill and Hall Farms, hay was made annually from about 400 acres. All the work of cutting, turning and conveying to the elevator to build the stacks (always in the same field) was with the use of horses. The means of moving the hay across the meadow to the elevator for stacking was done with what was called a 'sweep'. It was about 8 ft wide and 6 ft deep and was carried on wheels at

the side and rear; the centre was adjustable and consisted of four or five 6 ft tines, which skirted the ground. With the help of a horse at each side and the horseman on a seat at the rear, the sweep pushed the hay to the elevator. In these days before the use of tractor propulsion, the elevator was worked by a horse drawing a shaft in a circle beside it.

Corn harvesting proceeded by cutting round the standing crop with a binder drawn by three horses. By a system of sails, the binder swept the crop through a mechanism which threw out at the side a tied sheaf of corn. This would be set up in stocks (5 or 6 sheaves stood together) to dry. All the corn when considered dry was then horse-drawn from the field to the stockyard at the farm to be stacked and await, some months later, the arrival of the travelling threshing machine.

My father was always meticulous concerning the health of his farm animals and his responsibility for Goulds' 80 horses. We actually had a veterinary surgeon by the name of Upton call every Tuesday to deal with any necessities.



Talking of the care of the horses, I remember that there joined Loughton Police Force a PC Knight, who seemed to target Goulds' horses and brought several prosecutions for sore shoulders and lameness. Father felt these prosecutions were usually quite unjustified, so when summoned to the Stratford Court, he decided to fight the case and employed a solicitor. When the case was dismissed, he urged the solicitor to ask for expenses against the Police, which were granted. From there on PC Knight brought no more cases and my father and he became the best of friends!

The local newspaper at this time was *The West Essex Gazette*, which had a printing works in the middle of Epping High Street. Goulds at that time had a retail corn and seed shop as part of those premises. I was assisting them in (I think) 1923, when Winston Churchill, the MP for that constituency, addressed the farmers in the market from a balcony above. I remember someone from the crowd taunting him about the Dardanelles.

I can recall certain personalities in the community at the time. My Headmaster at Staples Road was Mr Williams and Horace White was the Town Clerk, assisted by Maurice Palfrey, a form colleague of mine at Staples Road. Mr Wakeham was the Head Post Master and the Rev Gell was the Vicar of St Mary's. Then there were Mr and Mrs Hutchens the Chemists, the two Misses Ramsey, who kept a toy shop next to the Police Station, and Mr Carter, the foreman of the road sweepers (the roads were swept manually in those days). Of course, the most distinguished resident at that time was the sculptor, Epstein, who had a property in Baldwins Hill overlooking the Forest.

In addition, there was my boss! I had a very happy thirteen years working for Goulds, moving from shop boy to travelling salesman. I found Bernard Gould a very good employer and after I moved from Loughton to Worcestershire, when returning to visit my parents I usually called to see him.

My years in Loughton were very happy ones, but it was sad to see the green fields submerged by housing for London's overspill.

JOHN W. FLACK

[Since writing the above, John Flack has told us more about some of the people he knew as a boy on the farm. In the cottages (which are still there) near the farm entrance lived the cowmen Fred Lodge and Harry Smith. Fred had a son Bert about the same age as John. In Church Lane, next to the cemetery, were the two cottages which are also still there (but not shown on the sketch map) and in the one nearest the cemetery lived a Mr Angel. The family next door (whose name escapes him) had two lodgers, Gwen and Freda, who went to school with John, while the Flacks had as lodgers a family from Leytonstone – Mrs Wayland and her three daughters.

It so happens that Loughton Library has a copy of *Kelly's Local Directory* for 1923, which gives the names of the occupiers of almost every house. John Flack's father Joshua is there of course, as farm bailiff, and Mr Angel's neighbour was Arthur Charles White. Personal memories are a fascinating link with the past, but other records such as *Kelly's* do help to fill in some of the gaps. So . . .]

Where do I find information on our local history

Much of our *Newsletter* content comes from personal reminiscences, but this can only take us back so far. Human memory is also notoriously fickle – we remember some things very well but others only vaguely. To supplement this it is helpful if documentary records can be located, but where to look?

A good place to start is the local library. Loughton has quite a good collection of material covering our local area and beyond, including the volumes of the *Victoria County History of Essex* (the *VCH*) and other works on Essex on the open shelves. The extract from the *VCH* Volume IV covering Loughton is on sale in the library for less than a pound; although compiled before 1956 it contains much which is still relevant. There is, unfortunately, no member of staff specifically responsible for the local collections of newspapers, photographs, etc. which are held out of sight so finding particular items can take a little while sometimes; some of the material is on microfilm or microfiche. Other local libraries have smaller selections of relevant publications.

The main library in Essex for local collections is Colchester, while Saffron Walden holds much Victorian period material and Southend has a large reserve collection of useful books. If lending copies are available, they can be ordered through any library in the usual way.

The Epping Forest District Museum has a collection of artefacts and other records which are mostly kept in storage but are used to create displays from time to time.

Continuing with Essex, the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford has an enormous archive (dating back several centuries in some cases) which is often referred to in the *VCH* as source material. To view these documents you must have a Reader's Ticket, obtainable free of charge at the ERO by filling in an application form and providing personal identification. There are also indexes by various classifications to help find information.

Many people came to this area from London, some having made considerable sums of money in the City, and there is of course the involvement of the City Corporation with Epping Forest. It is not surprising, then, that the Guildhall Library is another place worth looking in. Their Manuscripts Section is the local record office for the City of London, and reader's tickets are *not* required.

For the former County of London, the London Metropolitan Archive (formerly the GLRO) is also a repository of records open to anyone. Our neighbouring London Boroughs of Waltham Forest, Redbridge and Havering also have local history collections in libraries or museums.

Last, but by no means least, the National archives. The British Library (including the Newspaper Library at Colindale) and the Public Record Office (Kew) require Reader's Tickets for access, while the Family Records Centre, although part of the PRO, is unrestricted.

Information on location, opening times and access arrangements (at the least a contact address or telephone number) should be obtainable via local libraries.

IAN STRUGNELL

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