
The village hall - "The Hut" (part 2)

Let us now have a short rest from Work.

Fishing was a waste of time as only minnows or sticklebacks survived in any of the local brooks or streams, but there were "crazes" just the same.

Tadpoles also took their turn during the relevant season, which meant frogs everywhere after they had hatched out, but no one minded, frogs being looked on as beneficial creatures.

Mushrooms might also be found on these expeditions, but normally any decent ones had been collected very early in the morning and so it would be unlikely that you would find enough to be really practical.

Later in the year there would be blackberries for the taking and sometime during the week the blackberry-man would come round and buy them at a price decided by him.

He would always come round after dark and by the light of a lantern and with the aid of his assistant, weigh the proffered containers. If they were suitable for hanging on his scales, both full and empty, call out the price to be paid to the individual concerned and then tip the contents into large tubs. Due to the bad lighting conditions and the sometimes poor weather!, these weights did not always correspond with that weight previously decided on by the "Picker" at home. So some would feel a sense of being cheated, probably not the case at all, but human nature, being what it is there was always room for doubt.

This state of darkness allowed some of the older/bolder spirits to take it that he was "fair game" for a "bit of a fiddle" and something akin to half a brick, or a pint or two of water could find their way into some of the larger containers before weighing. This extra surge of juice or the loud thud of the brick when tipped into the tubs would alert him to the fact that all was not as it should be.

The water of course did not mix with the juice very well, so I doubt that he was very seldom caught out, if ever, but it made extra entertainment in an otherwise dull dark evening.

Some of these larger containers would be washing trays or other items difficult to weigh so problems did sometimes occur when the contents were being transferred to something easier to weigh.

The resulting profits made from these activities would most likely find themselves being used to buy winter shoes or some article of clothing otherwise out of reach of the normal budget.

He would also buy apples and sloes and I seem to recall that during the War he would buy "rosehips".

When engaged in this collecting there were several things to be taken into consideration, first the farmer might not be too friendly, although this may not be down to the farmer in person, but rather to a member of his staff. A state of affairs that would almost certainly change towards haymaking/harvesting time, as he could well need some very cheap labour.

Secondly not all animals were friendly and might decide to eject you, thus saving the farmer the time and trouble. The best fruit was always in the most inaccessible places, stinging nettles, very wet ground or some other reason, often preventing the easy raising of much needed funds.

I clearly remember finding two quite large snakes, of the grass variety, I have no doubts now, though not so certain at the time, winding their way through my chosen blackberry bush. That particular bush was left with its fruit untouched for some time to come, none of us were very brave when it came to such reptiles, as they were of course always "adders". In truth I doubt that they ever were, as the area consisted entirely of the so-called "Oxfordshire Clay", which I would think was much too cold for such creatures.

One animal I always found friendly was a large bull. I would be about five years old at the time and clearly didn't know any better, but he would allow me to go up to him and hold his head down while I rubbed it, I believe this to be due to my absolute lack of fear.

It was not unknown for him to decide sometime later to eject with authority those foolish enough to decide to play football or cricket in the same field.

I will interpose a second "bull" story here. Some years later, I would probably be about sixteen years old, long after I had left the farms, when the following happened. Myself and an elderly colleague were employed to fix a single strand of barbed wire fence supported on stakes round a field containing a very large bull. We had nearly finished when the animal decided to help and after much shouting and waving of sticks we persuaded him to go back to his grazing.

He had originally been fitted with a metal mask to obscure his vision because of his violent nature and had by now broken the main straps, so that the mask now hung round his rather ample neck like a necklace.

Suddenly I heard my colleague shouting and saw him disappearing behind a convenient building, I turn back to see about one ton of meat travelling towards me, head down, tail up, at very great speed and definitely with evil thoughts on his mind.

I am by now "rooted" to a spot some five or six feet from our new fence on the other side from him, but also on the wrong side of our tractor and trailer, there being no-where for me to run to.

My past life didn't flash before my eyes as it is supposed to do, but just as I had given up all hope he skidded to a halt, certainly within two feet of the fence, just looked at me, then with total disdain hooked several of our new stakes out with his horns and marched off.

Had he been human and had hands, I can see him in my mind's eye making a rude gesture as he marched away, we finished the fence rather hurriedly, one keeping watch while the other worked.

Back to basics.

Bows and arrows came and went each year, all of the "bowmen" having their own ideas as to what materials made the best equipment. After much searching we would nearly always end up with poplar, elder wood or willow for the arrows, this because of its "straightness" and availability. It had the unwelcome property of breaking on hitting the ground so some would soon become rather short; they would often be bent anyway so it was never a precision shooting match.

The fins would most likely be folded "Woodbine" cigarette packets once again easy to obtain. Most anything that might bend would be brought into service as bows; hazelnut wood if available, but willow would suffice. The string used could well contain several knots and consist of as many different thicknesses.

The targets would most likely be any large tree or with luck a cardboard box, something at the time that was in very short supply, not much risk of doing any damage and not much of a threat was ever posed to any potential raiders I'm afraid to say.

Catapults also had their "crazes", in the same way and again the question of materials had much to do with the final design and building of such a weapon. First there was the "stick" to consider, hazel nut wood for preference, but often elder, the latter would often break with dire results, it could be painful when the elastic came towards you rather than go in the expected direction. The "pouch" would probably be a "tongue" taken from an old shoe. That word elastic was one to conjure with as you had to be "old enough", an age decided by the shopkeeper, or if you looked eighteen you could go into the shop and buy it. Our ambitions were not helped much by the hard fact that our local shop did not stock such dangerous material.

Perhaps because of it being required for the production of catapults should more properly be described as material. The required size would be either three-eighths or a quarter inch square and some eighteen inches long, the price of this could well make serious inroads into that hard earned blackberry money, if of course any actually remained. The problem of suitable ammunition then arose, pebbles being favourite but in somewhat short supply, although the Council gravel heap would be raided, any small stone would be used.

The targets also had to be considered; birds and rabbits were often chosen, but they either flew or ran too fast and I truly believe their lives were seldom in danger.

If someone had been lucky enough to go to the cinema then our version of Cowboys and Indians might take a turn, but mostly it would have a short life span as you would have to rely on the "lucky one" to gain any real inspiration or knowledge of the subject. The odd book or comic paper might set us off in the same way.

There were very occasionally film shows in a neighbouring village, Chilton Club, laid on for the benefit of the Evacuees; these would be of the "Popeye" variety, with the odd Cowboy thrown in for good measure. We, the locals, would normally be invited if there was spare room and a bus would be provided to transport us, always a bit of a noisy business.

The makings of a bicycle came our way at one time and these were soon put to good use, consisting of a frame, wheels without bearings, tyres and many of the spokes, no brakes or pedals, no saddle, so perhaps a Velocipede would be a more accurate description. However after fixing the wheels to the frame with plain metal bolts, it would certainly run down the steep hills of some of the fields without problems.

The problems began when you wanted to Steer or stop, and although we had Handlebars, without the wheels being fixed rigidly into the Frame, and the lack of Tyres, it sometimes develop a mind of it's own as to which direction it wanted to go. The other problem with steering was that it mostly had a Crew of two, who also were trying to steer in different directions at the same time, the grass would perhaps be wet, all adding to the "Fun". The lack of brakes was overcome by jumping or falling off, or as on many occasions the front Wheel would drop into a deep rut or hole bringing the journey to a sudden end. This Machine was in service for some considerable time, and I seem to recall it finished it's useful life when the Front Axle snapped through excessive wear, and we couldn't replace it, Bolts being very scarce.

Once again no serious injuries to anyone occurred, and considering the Terrain, the overall surfaces of the Fields and in particular the ruts through the gateways it must have been little short of a miracle.

The flying of Kites was of course prohibited, so our "skills", in this area were never really tested, I did make one based on a "Boys Own Paper", design but it didn't perform very well, certainly not due to a lack of wind, a commodity never in short supply.

Air Guns likewise had a short life, as only a couple of people had such weapons, and secondly there was no ammunition available. Any use of them consisted of firing into a cardboard box filled with straw or some other soft material to try and save each pellet for further use, sometimes it worked other times not.

A very strange "Craze", came, and went quite quickly, this consisted of making Bomb like Missiles, and seeing who could throw them the farthest. They were made of wood, and had Cigarette Packet type fins, very much differing in their size, and weight, but some evenings would find us all standing in a line throwing with all out might.

I can't begin to even think where this one originated, but it must have come from Bombs and bombing as now it would be around the time of the "Blitz", or perhaps a follow up to the Spanish Civil War. This one probably ended because the same people always won due their size, and strength, it's not really much fun always being a loser.

A second strange "Craze", that springs to mind was that of digging holes. Again, I have no real idea where this one sprang from, except that it could have been from a book being read in School at the time, but the fact remains that many gardens suddenly had deep holes dug in them by the older Boys of the family, presumably the object of the exercise was to go deeper than anyone else. There were both square, and round ones, all seemingly without a purpose; they were eventually filled in, having exposed more of the "Dreaded Clay", this not making our respective Fathers too happy if I recall correctly.

During the winter, the Brook which was basically the Boundary between Ashendon, and Dorton would flood in a rather big way. This meant Acres of shallow water which froze into a solid block, the only dividing line being the Brook itself. You could never be quite sure where the load bearing Ice began, although the colour was a give away, but as there was plenty of available space we would mostly run up on the Ice itself, it might also be covered in Snow which could mask the edge. I say run up because the only option open to us was that of "Sliding", as very few people had access to states. Of course you could not control the direction that anyone wanted to travel in, which did sometimes cause collisions to occur.

One great advantage of these floods was their lack of depth, probably only some three feet or so at their deepest, unless you were foolish or brave enough to try the Brook itself. Here the water ran continuously under the Ice therefore the thickness of it was uncertain, as was the depth of the water, otherwise the safety aspect appealed to most, not least to Parents. The only problem with Parents was that in their opinion it was too far to go at night, and so it was mostly restricted to Saturday or Sunday, this would of course change as we grew older but then the desire to go would most likely recede.

A form of Ice Hockey was sometimes played, to rules made up at the time, and with "Sticks", formed from anything that came to hand.

The Puck would be a round of Wood, and the resulting "Carnage", would end with many bruises, and cuts tied up with the ubiquitous handkerchief, but nothing too serious, certainly not in my time.

The alternative to these Areas were the local Ponds, these could be both "Tricky", and dangerous as often the depths were uncertain, the steep banks spoiling the approach, and not least because of their sometimes sheltered sites the thickness of the Ice being anybody's guess.

Tobogganing became a regular winter sport from about nineteen-thirty-eight, and this lasted for many years as a major entertainment. As with sliding, many cuts and bruises would be collected, crashes and collisions occurring regularly. It always seemed that no one wanted to get out of the way at the bottom of the Hill or they insisted on walking up the prescribed downward run.

The route of the run was often dictated by the depth of the Snow, and so would be formed by the Toboggans being run repeatedly in the same track to form a miniature "Cresta type run". As it was quite difficult to keep up on the ridge of the "Ridge", and Furrow", that most fields consisted of, the track would drift into the deeper area of the furrow that caused most if not all of our problems. This system normally worked quite well when the runners were made to the same gauge, but left much to be desired when they were not.

Many strange devices were pressed into service as Toboggans, some had crude steering systems, others were just a sheet of Galvanised Iron bent up at the front as far as possible to let it slide at all. These were not a great success as they tended to go forwards, backwards or sideways, much depending on where you sat, and as there was nothing to hold on to, it could mean you soon found yourself sitting in the snow.

Many had the Metal Slats taken from old Bedsteads, and rescued from the Rubbish Dump, (the Stonepits), nailed to the runners which got honed to a fine cutting edge during the action. The fact that it could be pitch dark for most of the time did not help the safety aspect much. As some of the furrows were quite deep, and sheltered from the direct sun, on the north side of the hill tobogganing, and the under mentioned large snowball making could go on for some considerable time after the main snow had melted

The R.A.F. Personnel from Westcott joined us in this activity for a short time but their device was too well engineered to work, it having not enough runner area to support the load, and they gave up when it finally broke in half.

A further activity at this time of year was making very large snowballs. For this you needed a long run of Snow, usually a furrow would be best, a steep field, plenty of willing hands and you were off. These either would melt very fast indeed or would hang on for days after the other Snow had melted, there never seemed to be much consistency to this, but one thing is sure, and that is that where the snowball had melted there would now be a small heap of dead long grass, this having been picked up on it's journey.

We did on many occasions attempt to build Igloos, but as the temperature was not really low enough, and the snow not being deep enough to allow us to compact it they failed miserably.

The local Police Sergeant in his car, or the Constable on his bicycle, (now looking a bit Red Faced from his exertions, and as a consequence known to some as "Beetrootface", both from nearby Villages (Brill, and Kingswood Respectively) might pay us a visit.

This would mostly pass off with a caution, not aimed at anyone, or anything in particular, but just to show us that the Law existed, and had to be upheld. There were occasions when they came to the School, and this would usually mean some specific accusations of "Scrumping", "Unlawful Trespass", or some other heinous crime of which we were naturally totally innocent. At other times the Police had to check the Sheep-Dipping, Dog Licences or more possibly lack of the same, and so they were often in the area.

At such times their likely possible presence was well known to us, and as a result we could make ourselves scarce, or when confronted it cost nothing to show a respectful attitude whatever the reason for their visit. During my Motorcycling days, one Policeman would always stop me at night, on the same stretch of road, and roughly at the same time of night. He would step out of a gateway, hold up his hand, ask for my Driving Licence, where I was heading, and any other question that would delay me.

Of course when riding such a machine, and swathed in the appropriate dress, it is difficult to reach said Licence so it did nothing for my temper particularly on wet nights, and as he knew quite well who I was, and where I lived, it seemed to me to be a totally pointless exercise, but looking back I now think he was just lonely, and anyone to speak too was better than no-one, but having said that, he at no time tried to make conversation, but kept it strictly to business. Perhaps he kept a league table of those stopped? On occasions there would be exercises held to look for imaginary escapees from the local Prison at Grendon Underwood, this would almost always result in me having to stop, and go through roughly the same routine.

Very occasionally the accusations regarding Sheep worrying would arise, but of course no-ones Dog was ever responsible, and it would all soon die down.

Once a whole group (Ten or so) of Sheep were Killed when Lightning struck a barbed wire fence, those actually touching the wire being affected. It was not unknown for Trees to be struck killing any Animal sheltering underneath. We Children received varying advice as to whether we should stay under trees or head for the open; it's difficult to know what to do for the best under such circumstances.

The Vexed Question of Farm Animals straying onto the Public road, arose occasionally, but this was mostly a waste of Police time as the Magistrate would almost certainly be a fellow Farmer, and almost always "Someone had left the gate open", despite the fact that a pane of railings was missing or there was a large hole in the nearby hedge. If anyone had the misfortune to collide with such an Animal it was mostly a case of "You shouldn't have been driving on the Road anyway". This was not really a problem in Ashendon as of course there was very little through traffic, although I do remember on one occasion stopping the motor bike with the front wheel under the belly of a stationary cow, that was neatly parked in the middle of a very muddy? piece of the road, which somewhat increased my braking distance.

Holidays and Weekends might find us "Working ", on the Farms, or at least making a nuisance of ourselves, in some way. There was quite a lot that we could do on those Farms, which of course could not be done today because of modern Regulations.

One Saturday morning job was often "Grinding", "Cow Cake". This material either came in quite large slabs, and had to be broken down, or came in sacks of large "Pellets". The slabs were fed into a Chute on a machine not unlike a Mangle that had teeth on the rollers; it was turned by hand with the result that the slabs were cracked down into small pieces which fell through a second chute into a container. Tricks played consisted mostly of pushing more than one slab at a time through the intake, or closing down the adjustment to its minimum setting, either would increase the effort required to turn the "Manage" handle.

Horses were the only source of Motive Power in those days, but later the Tractor would arrive, a much more interesting state of affairs, altogether less work involved in looking after them.

These Horses in my later days at School would have to be taken some five miles or so to the then nearest Blacksmith, our own Village one by now having retired, and not been replaced.

First catch your Horse of course, could be easy, or hard much depending on everyone's (Including the Horses), mood. Mostly this would entail a trip to the relevant field complete with halters, then with much calling, some good luck, or chasing about you might just be lucky enough to get the halter on at the first attempt, with that accomplished the business of the day could start.

These trips to the Blacksmith entailed the fitting of a riding saddle, and reins to the most docile of those to be taken, whilst the more lively ones were led on halters. If you didn't have a saddle, then legs clad only in short trousers could get very sore indeed, particularly if the Horse worked up a sweat. A heavy Carhorse is quite wide across its pack, and so although the ride was not too uncomfortable it could be a bit of a strain to sit for an hour or more for this somewhat difficult journey, with the other Horses having minds of their own and wishing to go in different directions.

The other main difficulty was that should you lose one of the halters or have some other reason for dismounting, it was almost impossible to get back in the saddle unaided. Although there would be two of us involved.

Problems did occur however, and I particularly remember a Steam lorry causing one such when the Horses on meeting it, decided to take matters into their own hands, and the halters out of ours, running off after the Vehicle, but this being our lucky day the driver slowed down, and with much arm waving managed to send them back in our direction. We would as far as possible travel on the banks, and here again you could suddenly be confronted by a deep ditch or some other obstacle lying across your path.

By the time we reached the Blacksmith Shop we could have well done without his remarks, as made on one occasion, when after looking at the Animals involved, (One was just a bit "Fractious"), never having had its back feet shod for this very reason, he told us to take them all back Home, even though he had previously been told by telephone that we were on our Way, and what Horses were involved.

After some long discussion using words that due to our sheltered upbringing we had not heard before he finally agreed to shoe the others, plus the front feet of our difficult one.

Our next job was then to hold the front end of the Horse being shod very tightly indeed, so that it could not turn its head round, and take a quick bite of his rear end, or move in any direction.

This was not always an easy task and we could never quite get it right, but eventually after much cussing, and swearing, the work would be completed, and we would be sent off in the Homewards direction.

The problems encountered on the return journey would be normally no more or less than those on the outward, except that the Horses would now know they were going Home, and as a consequence would be in a bigger hurry.

The smell of the burning Hoof during the shoeing always returns on my not too frequent trips to the Dentist, where the smell of the drilled tooth is similar.

Harnessing the heavy Horses would normally require two of us, both the collar, which was put on upside down, and turned on the Horses neck, and the saddle being very heavy, the height involved would normally be above our heads. The girth strap would be easier as the friendly ones would let you walk underneath them to pass the strap under. The tightening up of this strap could be difficult if the Animal decided to be uncooperative, a quick dig with the hand would have the offender draw it's stomach in so that the tightening could be completed, it was important to get it tight otherwise all sorts of problems could arise.

The fitting of the collar, and bridle could be made more difficult if 'he Animal decided to toss its head, this lack of height on our part could a well find one of us trying to balance on t he manger, holding on with one

hand while at the same time trying to persuade the offender to accept the "Bit", and let us fit the bridle over its head.

The next action would be to get it between the shafts of whatever "

Implement was to be used. Basically there were two ways of doing this, you could first lift the shafts so that they remained above the Horse, and lower them when the Horse was in position, or do it the more normal way for us, and that was to reverse the Horse between the shafts, and then lift them up to the required height, the second way was favourite for us because of the difficulty of lifting this heavy weight above our heads. Once again here was a task that required two of us to raise the shafts, and fasten the chain, one important point to remember when hooking up the trace Horse chains was that the hooks had to be entered open end up, a failure to do this would almost certainly result in one or more of these chains becoming unhooked when the Horse suddenly "Backed Up", or just plain stopped.

This would most likely cause the chain to "Whip", and throw the hook out of the staple, you can imagine the shock it gave both Horse, and handler when taking the strain in a great rush, and only fresh air intervened, you could very easily get trampled on if the break was on the far side, meaning that the Horse came rather quickly in your direction. We

had our own saying as children locally "Always Ook an Ook uphill"

I have read that Buckinghamshire is probably the only County that always runs its teams of Horses in single file, whether this was the case or not I really don't know,

but it certainly was the practice locally. There was the odd occasion when someone would try to run two trace Horses side by side, but as the Horses were not used to it, it probably caused more problems than it solved. The one real exception apart from Mowing, and Binding which doesn't really count because of the pole, was Harrowing, both chain, and tine (or Drag), harrows were worked with Horses side by side.

To digress a bit, chain harrows were used on fields being prepared for mowing, these fields are "Shut Up", and in the old days the gates would actually be fastened, even to the extent of nailing a piece of wood across, and all fallen Trees or other obstacles, low branches, or indeed anything within reason being cleared.

Tine harrows are used to break down the cultivated soil for seed planting, and will later be used to cover the seed after the drilling, in which case they may be attached to the rear of the seed drill.

Harrowing was a tiring business as they didn't have seats, and the horses could keep up a good pace with ease.

A further machine used to break down the ploughed field was the "Scuffle", or cultivator, this to its credit did have a seat.

To return to the Story.

I have been involved with a string of six (Just to get them home, when bringing the last load of the day up those very steep Hills, and always in this formation, this of course being the easy way to bring all the Horses up in one single go. On a normal team of three Horses it was seldom necessary to have anyone guiding the leading one as the calls of "Come Ere", and "Gee Off" along with the horse's name would normally suffice, these commands meaning come left, go right respectively.

As you can imagine the length of three Horses plus the Wagon is considerable, so the last thing that you wanted was for that lead Horse to take any short cuts across the corners. It was very important to go through the gates in a controlled way as the width of a Wagon, as for most other implements was close to the width of the gate.

In the Horses' defence it has to be said that only a few would be regularly used during the winter months so each spring some would be very out of practice, and would more or less have to be "Broken In", as would a new recruit. This meant that for the first few days at the start of the season life could be somewhat "Hectic", with trace chains breaking, and some wild rides particularly on some of the lighter implements.

A further factor to consider at this time was that the machines had also been "Laid Up", for the best part of a year or so, and could as a result also prove to be somewhat temperamental, and would only come "Good" with use.

A wide variety of machines were called for, depending on the season, but all would require the use of force by the operator at some time or other.

We were all reasonably strong, but nearly always if possible worked in pairs with both machines or Horses, although I do recall at the age of ten, taking loads of hay from the field to the elevator at the rickyard site across level ground with one Horse unsupervised, although there would be someone at both ends of the journey to take over if anything untoward had happened, and to do the close manoeuvring at each end. Every second or so many loads would call for a bottle of beer to be sent back on the empty wagon for consumption by the loaders.

I was not included in this last action, just having to make sure I didn't forget to deliver it, my ability to control the Horses might well have become impaired had I have been allowed to join in, the loaders of course sweated it out, and it had very little effect on them apart from quenching their thirst, it could be very dry, and dusty on hot days.

From the age of about ten (Me that is) it became a mixture of Tractors, and Horses this could make life harder or easier much depending on the job, or part of the job, that you were concerned with.

A case in point that of loading hay, at night when everyone was tired, so were the horses, unfortunately the Tractors didn't suffer in the same way, OK for the driver, but not so good for the loaders.

It was the usual practise to share the work of loading, and driving, but quite a number of the older men didn't take to the driving too well and so it didn't always work in their favour.

One advantage that the Tractor had in this kind of job was that it did not stop, and start suddenly snatch forwards, take a step backwards, or bolt when upset, as the Horses were prone to do, this of course, gave a much better ride for the loaders or operators of any other machines.

The sometimes slow transition made by some of the newcomers to the Tractor age did not always result in good steady driving so the difference was perhaps not always as great as it should have been. There were many stories circulating about the Tractor that failed to stop when the driver called "Whoa", but I never actually saw any such happening myself.

One haymaking job that required much staying power, if little skill, was raking the "Back Swathe", always pronounced "Swarth". This was carried out with a wooden rake, and consisted of doing a complete lap of the mown area while raking the Hay/Grass into line but away from the "Heel"

(Driving Mechanism) of the cutter, it was not unknown for a number of teeth to be missing, a fact that did not help to make the task any easier.

The object of all this hard work was to allow the mower to run in the reverse direction to that previously, without grass jamming problems, so that all of the field up to the hedge (The Headland) would be cut. Once again it was a job that required little thought but it was certainly easy to work up some first class blisters.

Nothing would be wasted in those days, and certainly the outside of cornfields would be cut by hand so that the Binder would not lay the outer ring or headland down, making it almost impossible to reclaim that part of the crop. With the coming of the Tractor many of these practises stopped or gradually faded away, as speed became the order of the day, and of course in the longer term the machines became more efficient, and the tractors probably laid down less of the uncut grass than a pair of Horses.

After the mowing came the haymaking proper, jobs for us, much again, depending very much on your age, could range from driving or loading to taking the tea to the workers. This tea carrying routine would involve carrying a Milk can of tea, plus a basket of food for a considerable distance over fences ditches, not forgetting the barbed wire, and at the same time remembering the latest cricket test score, this last item being very important, as radios were not very portable in those days. A number of items would be carefully packed in large red handkerchiefs with white spots these would then be used as "Tablecloths", and either spread out on the ground or used to cover knees.

The tea at the end of the journey, and the accompanying, (Hopefully for me), raspberry sandwiches would have to be tasted to be believed, there was just something special about either the actual food or perhaps the venue.

The rest of the Haymaking would go roughly as follows, -

As mentioned before, the grass, is cut, into swathes, again "Swarths", to us, and after some drying, "Put In", and then is either "Fluffed" to further speed up the drying process with a haymaker ("Tedder", Locally, then "Put in", again to rows with a siderake, for the wagon, and hayloader, ("Pitcher", Locally), to pick up. This teddering could, of course, be done before the first "Putting in" much depending on the thickness of the grass.

The loads are now taken to the rickyard site for the elevator to lift it onto the rick. The base of the rick would be carefully pegged out, and a bed of straw laid, before the actual building could begin. They would mostly be built with a double-pitched roof, roughly in the shape of a House, and later will be thatched.

People had different ideas as to what constituted the "Proper", rick; some even building round ones, the size was usually, down to personal taste.

A Penalty for not allowing the hay to dry sufficiently was that it could heat up, and if left long enough could actually catch fire. The action to stop this was to drill a hole down the centre of the Rick, and insert a wooden chimney to allow the heat to dissipate. Some rick builders even went to the trouble of pulling a sack of straw up the middle of the Rick as they built thereby leaving a hole to prevent such overheating.

These Ricks had to be built to a high standard to survive. If not done right they could suddenly bow out at the sides, and a form of avalanche would occur, of course they naturally sank as the hay compressed, and some would have to be built up to restore the pitched top before thatching. Sometimes ricks were built in fields that would later have grazing animals in, and being only surrounded by a strand of

barbed wire it was not unknown for the two to get together. This resulted in the Cows eating into the rick until it took on the proportions of a large mushroom before finally collapsing in an unseemly heap.

The thatching was done by men skilled in the work, it was a wet cold job at the best of times, as it would be done long after the end of haymaking to allow the rick to settle, some making good in the form of reshaping would normally take place.

The straw had to be pulled out, straightened, and wetted, (Known as Yealming) though normally Pronounced "Yolming", locally, it would then be carried to the Thatcher already on the rick.

When the time for use of the hay came, it would be carved into manageable lumps (Rough Bales) with, (At least to me), a strange hand propelled knife.

Sometimes ricks would be cut by the "Haytier" - he brought a baler or Tying machine - and this hay would most likely be sold.

The long and very heavy one-piece wooden ladders used to reach the tops of the ricks were both difficult to raise up, and to transport. The raising usually required "All hands to the pump", and the transporting to the site would normally require the use of a wagon in the case of the longer ones, or perhaps would be tied on to a two wheeled cart with plenty of overhang at both ends. These ladders were as difficult to lower as they were to raise up, if not more so.

To finish the Haymaking-

The final job in the hayfield would be to rake up any hay remaining into rows, with the "Horse Rake", and then pick up as before. It was almost a point of honour to rake the rows into such good order so as not to require a second use of the siderake.

I will try and describe the various machines:-