# A 1940s CHILDHOOD in BRECKLAND and NORWICH

B.D. ELLIOTT

## DEDICATION

To family present and future,
and in loving memory of
past members.

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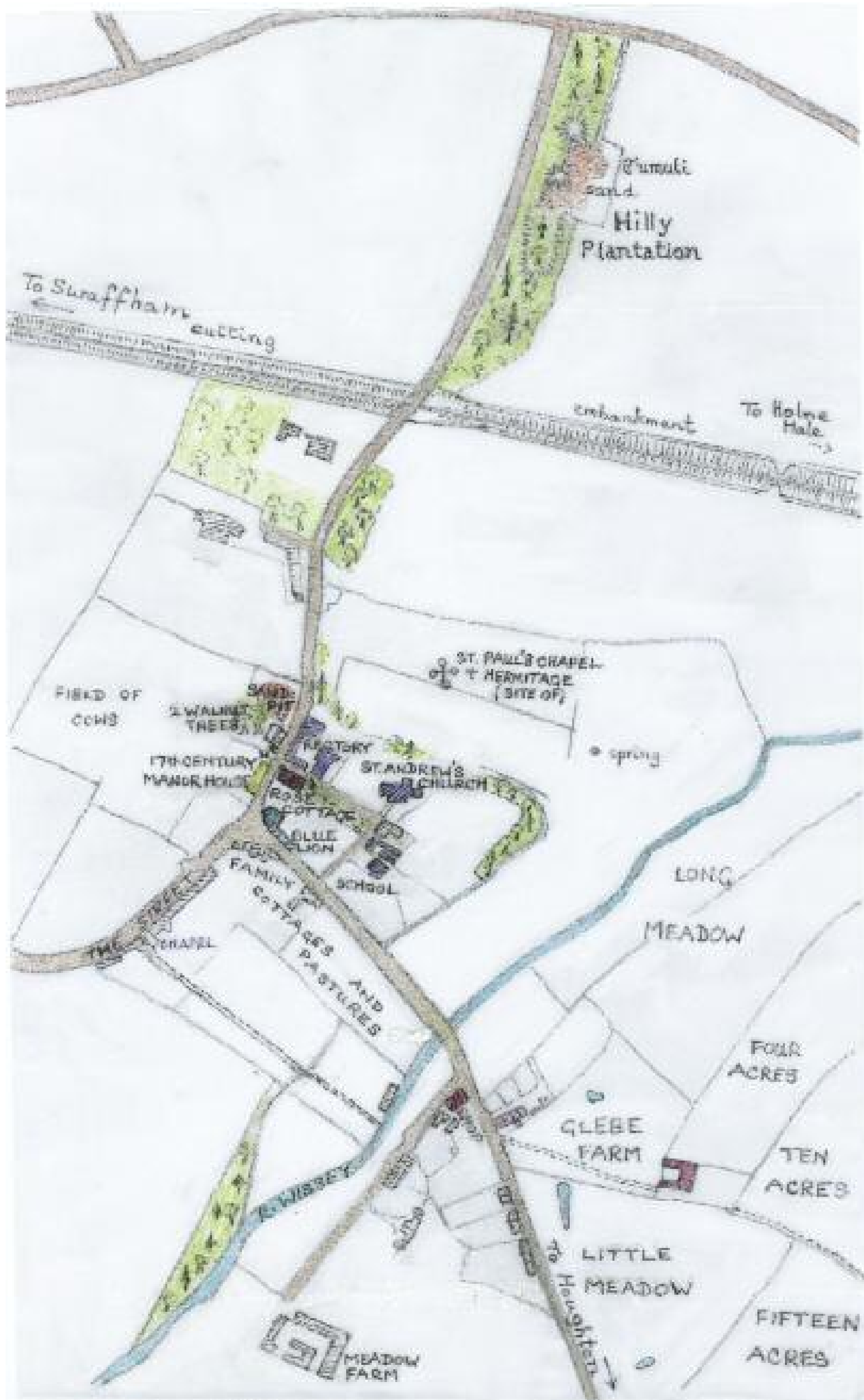



*Map of North Pickenham, Swaffham, as it was in the 1940s.*

## INTRODUCTION

I was running as fast as I could across a meadow towards the gate some distance away with three or four cows running behind me. I reached the five-barred gate, climbed over it and down the other side, ran along the sandy track under the two massive walnut trees, past the deep well, past the wooden village hut, down a slope, across the road, crept under the picket fence, ran along the box-lined path to the back doorstep. I was safely home, but I was out of breath and I had lost my shoe. At least I was safe from the cows. I was two years old.

In January 1941 my Aunt Margaret, my father's sister, Marg as we called her, came from Norwich to visit us at North Pickenham. She intended staying for a weekend carrying only a small suitcase, but instead she stayed for a lifetime. My mother had not been well for a number of years and needed to go to hospital. Sadly she did not return.

Marg was the youngest of five children. She had two older brothers, Richard and Sydney, and two older sisters, Sybil and Ida. Her brother Richard was the oldest sibling and was twelve years older than herself. She was born in 1912. At that time her father Richard Bowers senior was successful with his work at Trevor and Page, the prestigious furnishing and cabinet making firm in Norwich. In 1912 he was responsible for carrying out extensive work at Didlington Hall near Swaffham. He lived at the Hall for three months in order to complete the contract. This was the year when he was given a Directorship of the Company which was to last for a further forty years. The outlook was optimistic and there was more money available. The other four children had been born close together in poorer times and without so much individual attention.

Marg was good-looking with dark brown, beautiful eyes, wavy brown hair and was of average height and slim. She was loving but firm. She always dressed smartly, and bought good quality clothes and attractive hats, especially expensive ones with feather decorations. She wore a pale cream fox fur across her shoulders which was fashionable at the time.

She received a private education as did the other four children. Her main interest was playing the piano. She became an accomplished pianist, and was due to take her LRAM Diploma but the war prevented her from travelling to London. She thoroughly enjoyed the Philharmonic Concerts in St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich where she heard artists such as Dame Myra Hess. She remembered performances of The Elijah by Mendelssohn and The Dream of Gerontius by Elgar.

She was a person of great vitality, strength of character, and courage and people liked her. She was not afraid to speak out when she thought something was wrong. An example is when she was acting as an occasional companion to an elderly lady living nearby. One day a resident domestic servant was unwell and unable to answer the door. Marg said to the lady, "Couldn't you have answered the door?" The lady was horrified at this suggestion and called Marg a little jackanapes*.

**Jackanapes means a monkey, a coxcomb or an impertinent fellow.*

The lady reported the misdeed back to Marg's father who advised Marg that she must be careful how she spoke to the said lady in future. At that time the formal ritual of answering the front door, and who did, and did not go to the back door, assumed an importance out of all proportion beyond the understanding of ordinary people. Marg was prepared to challenge this established outlook.

When Marg visited that weekend she could see intuitively what she had to do. She would stay to help her brother and care for my brother Dick, twelve years old, and myself just three years old. A family crisis in wartime had been partially resolved.

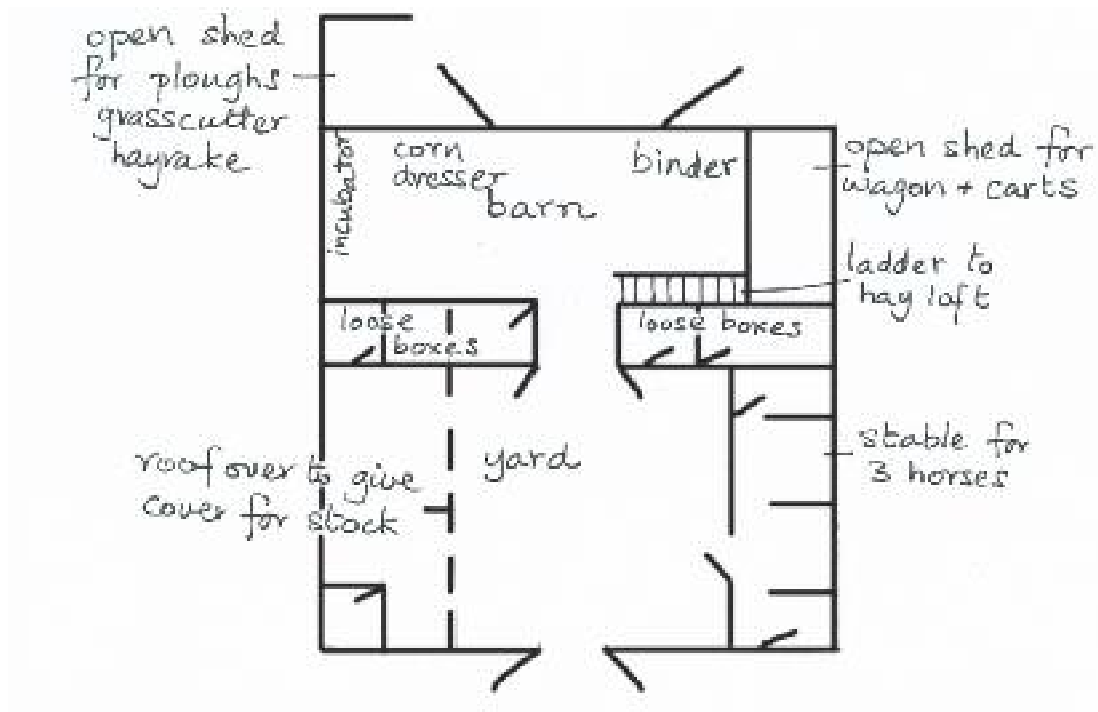
## GLEBE FARM

My father, Richard, became a tenant farmer of Glebe Farm, North Pickenham, near Swaffham in Norfolk in the 1920s. He had completed his engineering apprenticeship at Lawrence and Scott, Norwich, but following the Depression of the 1920s, and the cancellation of their project for the Queen Mary, it was inevitable that jobs would be lost. Two of my father's uncles were engine drivers, one on the Norwich Thorpe to Liverpool Street line, and the other on the Norwich, Cromer, Wells line. These uncles had my father's ideal job. Steam engines remained his hobby and interest all his life, and his collection of over 400 railway books and hundreds of railway magazines was a constant source of joy to him.

It was thought that farming would provide a living and income but to my father it was second best. The Glebe Farm was a farm of seventy-two acres. The fields were named after the number of acres in a field such as the "fifteen acres" and the "four acres". One meadow was called the "long meadow" and another was the "little meadow". Looking at some old documents concerning the Glebe such as an 1841 Tithe map some of the fields had the following names: Skippers, Pightle, Coney (meaning rabbit) Close, and Brick Kiln Close. In earlier times the parson had farmed the Glebe himself. It provided income for him and his family, but sometimes the parson did not have the interest or ability to be a farmer as well as a parish vicar. The farm was then tenanted out, and a rent was paid to the vicar as part of his income. There was no house built on the Glebe Farm and my parents lived first of all at Church House, next to the Church, for four or five years before moving to "Rose Cottage" which they rented.

The Great Depression made a big impact on my Father. He talked about going to bed one night with good prices for barley and waking up the next morning with a slump. This was due to the Government allowing cheap grain imports, which represented huge losses for our farmers. He was always interested in economics and read the George Swartz column in the Sunday Times. He liked to talk with other people in the village in their houses and gardens about economic problems, and I often heard his loud, easily recognizable laugh coming from somebody's garden chatting over the vegetable patch before I actually saw him, but I knew well beforehand that nobody else had a laugh like that.

The farm buildings were the heart of the farm and all activity centred round them. If the barn doors were shut nothing much was happening on the farm. The buildings were erected between 1807 and 1841 when they are shown for the first time on the Tithe map of 1841. They were built from clay lump, quite large chunks, and pieces of chalk and horse hair could be seen in the clay. It was always easy to find a piece of chalk for carrying out a few calculations on the barn floor. The outside of the walls were painted black and covered with tar and pitch to keep out the water. The tiles on the roof were the traditional Norfolk pantiles. The buildings were




*Floor plan of Glebe Farm buildings, North Pickenham.*

attractive and it did not enter our minds that they would all be pulled down after my father left the farm in January 1956. They were in full use while he was there. The yard was used for housing bullocks in the winter months. The bullocks were fine animals and the favourite breeds were Herefords, Red Polls and Devon cattle. There were two Suffolk horses names Kitty and Beauty. The Suffolks are a rare breed now. There had been three horses in earlier years. There were four loose boxes and these housed mainly sows, Large Whites, and their litters. Two open cart sheds were used for housing the tractor, a small Fordson tractor, the wagon, two carts, the grass cutter, cultivator and ploughs.

Inside the barn itself there was a large space where the binder used for cutting the corn stood when not in use, and a corn dresser for sorting the grain from other seeds such as poppy seeds, and an incubator for hatching baby chicks. Animal feed was stored in the barn near the yard and consisted of bags of barley meal, sugar beet pulp after the sugar has been extracted, and piles of swedes or mangolds. Two hand grinding machines called a root grinder and a chaff-cutter were used for slicing the food into smaller pieces. This grinding was done by my father and it was hard work. The bullocks would know when the grinding process was taking place and they would hang their heads into the barn to watch and wait and smell their food being prepared. They would start to bellow and steam from their breath filled the air. The food was all very wholesome comprising entirely vegetable matter. My father would put the sliced food into a basket skip and lift it into the yard where the bullocks would follow him to their troughs. He might take ten or more of these journeys to the troughs. This would happen twice a day and in between the bullocks would eat their straw bedding.

As soon as the grass began to grow in the springtime the bullocks would be released from their yard. Their tails would rise straight into the air, which never normally happened, and they would rush out into freedom, tearing round the meadows at great galumphing speed. Eventually they would settle down to eat the new growth of grass.

These bullocks had been bought as calves, and then reared for beef, and at two or three years old they would be sold at the market in Swaffham or Kings Lynn. We were always sorry to see them go but knew it was inevitable.

The sheep were pedigree black-faced Suffolks and the flock comprised about fifty ewes. These were bought at Fakenham or Swaffham sheep sales when the numbers needed to be increased. The rams came from special sales for pedigree Suffolk rams and trips by taxi (my father did not own a car), were required to places such as Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds where the sales were held. It meant an early start on a late summer morning and it was exciting to travel into another county. There was the anticipation of seeing all these marvellous rams, spending a lot of money, perhaps seventy pounds, and bringing home, not by taxi, but by an animal carrier, the ram that was decided upon. When he arrived back on the Glebe he was admired again for the shape of his head, for his good teeth, for his height off the ground, length of back and the size of the shoulder and leg joints. He would have been about eight months old, and he would be retained for a few years until it was felt that he was past his prime to service the ewes for the next crop of lambs.

The lambs were born sometimes as early as January when it was cold and frosty. A lambing pen was made from bales of straw and hurdles, and straw was laid on the ground to keep the animals as warm and comfortable as possible. Mostly the births were straightforward, single lambs, twins and occasionally triplets, but sometimes the births did not proceed well. Lambs could be still-born, mothers might not accept their lambs, and a mother could die and a valuable ewe could be lost. The orphan lambs, and sometimes lambs that had been born and became chilled were brought home, placed in front of an open fire to warm through and then bottle-fed by hand. The chilled lambs would be returned to their mothers as soon as possible in order that they should not be rejected. Once the mother had accepted the scent of her offspring the bond was established. It was always quite remarkable to see how the lambs knew their own mother, and would only feed from her, and the ewes would soon toss away any errant stray lamb. On rare occasions a mother would accept a lamb that was not hers. Once on their feet the strength of the lambs built up quickly on the rich ewe's milk. As they fed their long tails wriggled with pleasure, and as they grew too tall to stand underneath their mother they had to kneel down. Robust twins, a few months old, could almost lift the hind quarters of their mother off the ground when they both dived simultaneously for one of the teats on either side of the udder.

During the lambing season, January and February, my father checked the ewes and lambs every night at about midnight and then in the morning about four o'clock.

*Bridget Bowers holding new born lambs at Glebe Farm, North Pickenham 1953.*

This involved the use of a Tilley lamp which was fuelled with methylated spirit. The gas was pumped into a silken mantle protected inside the lamp-glass. The lamp popped and spluttered until it produced a bright, white light. Sometimes, when I was about ten years old, I was allowed to go with my father late at night. One frosty, moonlit night on 31st December I went with him. The worms were popping back into their dark holes to escape the dazzling light, and the numerous rats' eyes stared out from the stacks like cats' eyes in the road. On our way back home through the meadow the bells rang out across the fields from Necton Church several miles away welcoming in the New Year. The bells gave an uplifting mood of joy connecting the villages, and giving reassurance in the continuity between the past and future. This was a spiritual moment which I told myself I would always remember.

The lambs would be kept for about six months and then sent to market for meat and breeding purposes. Some female lambs might be kept to replenish the flock.

From the barn a steep ladder without a handrail but next to the clay-lump wall offering slender support, led to the hay loft. This was a soft sweet smelling grassy place where the farm cats had made their home. They were like wild animals and it was impossible to approach them. They would hiss loudly and spit out, and could not be held. Everyday we brought bread and milk for them which they always ate and they supplemented their diet with mice and rats round the farm buildings. Sometimes

a mother cat would be seen carrying her young in her mouth from one part of the building to another. Sometimes one of them would disappear for weeks on end and then return. There were always plenty of young rabbits for food and this was pre-myxomatosis days and the rabbits were very healthy food.

The hay was reserved for the two Suffolk horses. They were handled by Lenny or Jack, the only labourers employed, and they had to start work early feeding and watering the horses. Their food had to digest well before work started. The stables always felt warm and friendly, but it was important to keep well back from the horses' back feet in case they kicked out.

One horse was named Kitty, a lovely black shiny mare, and the other Beauty, a chestnut mare. They were good workers and reliable, and even tempered. Both lived to good ages. When Kitty began to develop breathing trouble when working she could only be used for light duties. The breathing grew heavier and noisier and the veterinary surgeon was called from Mundford. He said that there was nothing that he could do for her and the best thing was to relieve her from suffering. She had to be shot and taken away to the knackers. That was a very sad day, and we felt the loss for many weeks. She was never replaced with another horse and the tractor was used more and more.

During the war, gangs of prisoners of war billeted in camps in Norfolk would come to work on the farm under the control of a supervisor. Sometimes they were from the Ukraine or Italy, or Germany. The horses did not take to being handled by strangers and they would show it by biting or kicking or rearing up. Usually the gangs would be working in the fields doing work such as chopping out (thinning) the sugar beet, or cutting cabbages, harvesting the sugar beet and mangolds by hand, and getting them into a hale, a large long pile covered with straw and thick soil to prevent them from being frosted during the winter. The gangs were supervised by guards. However, sometimes just one or two prisoners of war were working on the farm for the Summer to help with the harvest. It was during the carting of the corn to make the stacks where they came into contact with the horses.

One of the prisoners from Calabria in Southern Italy named Luigi had done something which had annoyed my father, and there had been an altercation. Luigi then unexpectedly flung his arms round my father saying, "Do you love me boss?". My father was somewhat taken aback with such demonstrativeness but the rift was soon healed and we laughed about the incident a good deal. Luigi used to sing grand opera from the top of the stacks. No doubt the horses found this unusual, but my father did not mind because he liked grand opera especially when Gigli was singing it. The prisoners used to like to gather some plants for their salads such as nettles, dandelions, and camomile which surprised us because we would not have dreamt of eating them.

Some of the prisoners of war were very skilful at handicrafts and one of them made me an attractive little toy which I was very proud of. It consisted of four little chicks sitting on a round piece of wood with a handle. Strings were attached to the chicks through holes in the wood. The end of the strings were gathered together on

another piece of wood underneath which acted as a weight. When I held the handle and moved the toy around, the chicks pecked at the board in turn and made a noise. The toy was painted in bright colours and the hand carving was probably quite basic but that did not matter. It gave me hours of pleasure and I kept it for a long time.

My Aunt Margaret's main interest was for her chickens and turkeys. She kept mostly Light Sussex and Rhode Island Red chickens. She tried the Black Leghorns and the White Leghorns but their eggs were quite small and white. Their eggs were not as popular although they did lay more eggs. The hens were entirely free-range but fed with grain as well, and grit to make sure their egg shells were hard. At night they were shut up in their huts. When it was double-summer time* it was about ten o'clock before it was getting dark and sometimes it was difficult to get the last stragglers into their huts. It was important not to lose any to foxes. There was no sentimentality towards foxes but great distress caused if a fox had gained access to a chicken run, killed the chickens by biting off their heads, just leaving their dead bodies lying scattered about, the fox having killed for the sake of killing and having disappeared to wreck havoc somewhere else.

Marg bought what were called day-old chicks from suppliers, about a hundred at a time. They came in a cardboard box by train and had to be collected at Holme Hale Station. The chicks were placed in the chicken sheds under lights to keep them warm until they were several weeks old and beginning to grow their feathers. They were fed with meal and given water in little troughs which refilled themselves. At this stage they were given more freedom outside and soon grew quickly in the fresh air and sunlight. An incubator was also used for hatching our own chicks. This was a very interesting process, turning the eggs, making sure the temperature was correct, giving moisture to the eggs, and eventually watching the chicks begin to chip through the shells and fall out wet onto the shelves where they quickly dried off. We also had what were called "setting hens". When the hens became broody, eggs would be put under them, most often turkey eggs, but sometimes duck eggs. The turkey eggs were about four inches long, quite pointed at one end, with pretty brown markings, some darker than others, on a creamy coloured background. Each hen would have about seven eggs under her. The duck eggs were a beautiful aquamarine colour and quite pointed at one end. They were smaller than the turkey eggs, and each hen would have about eight eggs to cover. The broody hens had special little boxes, formerly orange boxes, to sit in and twice a day they had to be lifted off the eggs to be fed and watered themselves. This was sometimes quite difficult because they did not want to leave their eggs and had to be pulled away. This task became my responsibility. The reward for all this hand care was the sight of the baby turkeys and ducklings hatching out, and later running round the farmyard in their little groups.

One night a disaster struck one of the chicken huts. The heaters in the huts were filled with oil and one had caught fire burning down the entire shed and killing

**When clocks were put forward by two hours in order to give more daylight for greater food production.*

all the chicks. Marg was shaken and devastated by this, and became very afraid of fires. Fortunately, the shed stood in the open and away from the barn.

Eggs were in great demand during the War, and provided a regular source of income except in the winter when the hens were not laying. Later on in life we heard of a neighbour during the war who queued in London for hours for one egg and when she reached the front of the queue was disappointed because none were left. The eggs were collected every week in grey cardboard trays by the Egg Marketing Board. We always had eggs to eat ourselves, and as a source of exchange with relatives and friends. Turkeys became more common during and after the war. The Americans supplied their own turkeys and ate them on Thanksgiving Day. People began to buy them for Christmas Day. Marg plucked and prepared her turkeys for Christmas and these proved to be popular and profitable.

Glebe Farm was one of the last mixed farms with animals, pastures and crops of various kinds. The soil was too poor to grow wheat. This was the Breckland area and heathland was common. It was possible to grow barley, the best crop allocated for brewing, and the poorer crop for animal feed according to the decision of the corn merchants.

During the war government agricultural advisers visited the farm to see what crops were being grown and advise concerning the need for greater productivity in order to feed the nation. Importation of food was very vulnerable due to the action of German torpedo boats on the merchant shipping. The advisers might say that more cereals needed to be grown, and suggest seed varieties suitable for the type of soil that would produce a higher yield.

The four pasture areas were still the same as those a hundred years earlier according to the 1841 Tithe Map. One of them which we called the "Little Meadow", on the old map was called "Brick Kiln Close", and the pits and uneven ground still existed displaying its earlier use.

The adviser, an agriculturalist trained at Cambridge University, had his eye on the "Long Meadow" called "Skippers Pightle" on the old maps. He wanted to plough up the higher, drier part and plant a more useful crop such as sugar-beet or barley. The lower part was a superb water-meadow and was frequently flooded when the River Wissey overflowed. It was my favourite place: an enchanting area of about two acres of wild, water-loving plants such as marsh orchids, cuckoo flower, water avens, milkwort and meadow-sweet. The animals did not disturb this area because it was boggy and they preferred the shorter grass on the higher ground. They would not eat the coarse rushes and grasses.

Snipe with their apparently seeming random, zig-zag flight frequented the water-meadows. The habitat was ideal for kingfishers, herons, swallows, martins and swifts. Another summer migrant which settled in a hedgerow near the barn was the nightjar. Its jarring call could be heard when it was getting dark, but its drab plumage made it impossible to see in the ancient thick hedgerows. Large flocks of sparrows, and also yellow hammers, barn owls, skylarks and cuckoos could be seen regularly.

*Soil Types, South-West Norfolk*

Running close by the River Wissey were ditches feeding into it. Every Spring the ditches were seething with mating frogs and frogspawn. Along the river bank were piles of soil from the dredging of the river, and by the water's edge were forget-me-nots, figwort, willowherb and brilliant golden king-cups. In the marshy areas either side of the river, small springs could be found blowing up the sandy soil. This water was the purest imaginable and just right for drinking from the cup of a hand on a hot day.

The adviser had his way. He had special wartime powers after all. The top of the meadow was ploughed up but the water-meadow was left. It never seemed as beautiful again because the one area led into the other, and the water-meadow had lost its setting. It also meant there was less grazing land for the animals. A bore-hole was sunk near this part of the Wissey long ago. The water-meadow disappeared and the numerous little springs.

Sugar-beet was an important crop, and to a lesser extent oats, swedes, mangolds, rye, cabbages, kale and lucerne. Some of the fields looked like the old medieval strip farming where four acres might be given to growing cabbages on the slightly richer and damper soil, and the rest of the field to barley. The planting was done in the spring unlike today when the wheat and rape seed are planted immediately after the harvest. There was no machine for harvesting the sugar-beet and root crops, and all this work was done by hand resulting in many back and hand strain injuries.

The corn harvest and threshing entailed the help of large numbers of men from the village. The corn was cut with the use of a binder pulled by a tractor.

A bundle of tied-up corn emerged in a sheaf. The sheaves were gathered up and stood up in shocks or stooks to allow them to dry out before they were gathered up into a wagon and taken to build a corn stack. Great pride was taken in the appearance of the stacks, and the quality of the thatch to keep out the winter rain and snow.

The high point of the corn cutting was when a small area of corn was left standing and the rabbits started to run out to escape. A few people from the village would gather with their dogs and they would try to catch these fast running, zig-zagging rabbits. Rabbit meat was good food during the war, and it was free! This was very exciting, and three or four rabbits could be running out in different directions. The small, young rabbits were easier to catch, but they were all very clever at escaping with their lives. A similar escape ensued during threshing, but this time it was rats running out from the stack. Again people with dogs gathered, but the aim this time was to kill the vermin that ate so much food on the farm and could spread disease as well. I can remember running fast round the farm buildings near a stack and the yard, when I nearly stepped on a large brown rat. The consequences could have been nasty had I done so.

During harvest the men did not want to stop working for long in order to complete the harvest as soon as possible. I used to help prepare the "fourses" consisting of bottles and flasks of hot tea, sandwiches and cakes which would be eaten in a hedgerow at a comfortable grassy place. This was a welcome break for everybody and often a very jolly time with laughter. My love of picnics continues to this day.

*The binder was still used for harvesting in the 1940s but it was pulled by a tractor.*
*L to R: Richard Bowers farmer, Bill Bly, Frank Bowers, ?, William Baldwin.*

*Stackyard at Glebe Farm, North Pickenham.*
*Richard Bowers gathering straw.*

When it was time to thresh the corn word would go round the village that the threshing tackle was on its way and we were next. These huge steam engines made heavy, clanking noises coming down the streets, and they ploughed up the soft grassland with their large iron wheels. The steam engine pulled the threshing-machine and provided the power for it to operate with the use of a large belt linking the two machines. The threshing-machine was a large drum which separated the corn from the straw. A man bagged-up the corn while an elevator took the loose straw to another level where men waited to receive it, to spread it out, and shape it into a new straw stack. The bagged-up corn was taken by horse and cart to be stored in the barn ready for sale. Threshing days were hard-working days and fine weather was always hoped for.

After the threshing tackle had departed, a silence fell over the farm. The birds started to sing again after the disturbance and life returned to its normal routine. It would not put in an appearance again until another year had passed.

## HOME LIFE AT ROSE COTTAGE

Rose Cottage was built in 1860 by the Reverend Ewing in the centre of the village. The house had remained unchanged for eighty years. It was built as a pair of semi-detached Victorian Gothic houses constructed to look like one large house. It was far superior to the two cottages which it replaced on the same site. It was built for my great, great grandmother and her son George who had been living in the cottages. I was born in this house in 1937 and my family left it in 1955. Family connections were retained with this house for nearly a century after its construction. The Revered Ewing cared about the appearance of his buildings and Rose Cottage was no exception. It was constructed with an attractive red brick. Bricks were made locally where a plateau of boulder clay can be found.

The exterior of the house was decorative. It was a two-storied building with windows framed by white bricks set into two tall gable-ends. A small dormer window was built into the grey, slate roof. Attractive, scalloped white bargeboards hung from the roof, and over the entrance porch which was set back from the front of the house. The chimney stacks stood at the gable-end. The attic windows always seemed very high and it was possible to touch the curly bargeboards, which were beginning to go rotten, from the open window. The views were exhilarating to look down upon.

*Rose Cottage/Glebe Farm/Glebe House was built for Rebecca Bowers and her son George in 1860. The home of Richard Bowers (jnr.) for 20 years approx. Bridget was born here 15th December 1937.*

*Margaret Bowers lived at Rose Cottage and cared for her brother Richard, nephew Dick and niece Bridget. She was the Good Samaritan.*

To the south front, the village street ran with its row of labourers' cottages and the small Methodist Chapel. To the north stood the vicarage and the stately dark pine trees lining the uphill road leading out of the village. It was a thrilling viewpoint from which to observe our ordinary and not so ordinary lives. The symmetry of the building was pleasing, and the architecture interesting with some eye-catching details which stood out and were meant to be noticed.

A gravel, sandy path led to the front door and on either side were the gardens surrounded by the Victorian box hedges about one foot in height. The garden nearest the road was kept as a vegetable garden and the other as a flower and fruit garden. It was a typical cottage garden with a large variety of flowers: delphiniums, dahlias, gladioli, bulbs of all kinds and gooseberry bushes, rhubarb, and a Victoria plum tree. The colours of the flowers were glowing, and when cut and brought inside were a delight to arrange with greenery from the farm such as sprays of larch

or holly. Vases were chosen carefully to accommodate the size of the arrangement. A favourite was an Italian majolica vase with geometrical designs painted in bright primary colours. Small pom-pom dahlias looked especially appealing in this vase. Early spring bunches of violets and primroses needed anything from egg-cups to silver rose bowls. At the bottom of the garden the outhouses were situated, the lavatory and sheds. There was no running water in the village until after the war when metal pipes could be obtained again, and when there was the labour to carry out the necessary work.

Our drinking water supply was from our well which seemed very deep. The pail would rattle down with an echo, and water would splash out of the pail coming up. The water was very cold and fresh. In unusually hot summers our well would dry up. Kind neighbours living opposite in the old Elizabethan manor house, then divided into three cottages, allowed us to use their deeper well. Sometimes, a pail would become unhooked at the bottom of the well and a long, hooked pole had to be used to rescue it. We used soft rain water collected in water butts for bathing in a long tin bath in front of the kitchen fire.

The kitchen had remained just as it was built apart from one intrusion, an iron flat-topped, table-like air raid Morrison shelter which covered a large area. A shallow sink was situated in one corner, and a kitchen table under the window. Along one wall was an open fireplace, an oven in the wall for baking, and a copper with a fireplace underneath for heating the water in the copper for washing sheets and clothes. There was also an oil stove with two burners which heated up a small oven for baking smaller dishes such as sausage batters. Work in the kitchen was hard with much handling involved. When the washing was taken out of the copper, it was pressed through a wringer before hanging it on the washing line to dry. On Mondays when my aunt was washing she was so busy that she did not seem to have her usual time and fun for me, and I took myself off to the next door shrubbery and climbed the yew tree, from where I could look down on her hanging out the clothes in the garden. I was always glad when washing day was over.

We were very dependent on open fires for our sitting-room, kitchen, oven and copper. Coal was stored in the shed and we had a plentiful supply of dry wood on the farm. Everybody was very skilled at lighting fires quickly.

Our milk was delivered every day by a local farmer using a pony and cart, and our bread, baked in Ashill in a large oven in the wall, was delivered by the baker twice a week. The quality of the bread was exceptional and can not be bettered today.

Our food was almost entirely baked by my aunt. She made quantities of pastry to bake into fruit tarts, and cakes and puddings of all kinds. She bottled about a hundred Kilner Jars of fruit every year. She made all jams, and marmalade when on the rare occasion she could buy oranges. She made excellent oatmeal biscuits and sponge fingers. When she cared for me at first, I would eat only red jam tarts and they had to be red. Perhaps that is why I still love red as a colour. Quickly, she managed to introduce me to other foods and I gradually enjoyed her cooking.

During the war people working on farms were allowed meat pies every week. These had to be collected from the Manor House. I can remember collecting them, warm and smelling of pastry and meat, and my father enjoyed eating them. The meat ration was very small especially for people carrying out heavy manual work and it was for this reason that it was decided to kill one of our smaller pigs for several years running. The meat ration was forfeited to the butcher, and it was the butcher who took the pig away to the slaughter house and cut up the carcass into suitable small joints. There were numerous brawns made, many helpings served of mixed grills from the offal, boiled hams, and roasted pork. The sausage-meat tasted excellent in large sausage rolls.

My aunt spent much time knitting jumpers, pullovers, cardigans and socks for my father to wear in his heavy boots. Turning the heel of the sock was the tricky part, and the sock was knitted as a tube on three of four knitting needles. Much mending was done on torn or worn garments. The hand sewing-machine was in constant use.

Worn sheets were stitched down the middle, when the sides, which were not worn so much, were joined together. The worn middle section was then on the outside of the sheet. This process was called "sides to middle". Alternatively, the less worn areas of the sheets could be made into pillow-cases. Some of my aunts' dresses were made into smaller dresses and clothes for me. Sometimes parachute silk would appear and be shared out in the village and this would be made into petticoats mainly, but also underwear and blouses. One of my aunts, Aunt Sybil, was able to crochet beautifully and she made table runners, dressing table sets, little mats, and crochet ends for pillow-cases, many of which I still have and take great pride and pleasure in using. She must have found a calmness from the handicraft in the midst of such bombing devastation in Norwich and especially after ARP duties (Air Raid Precaution). However, sometimes it was impossible to buy the crochet threads, and all haberdashery could be difficult to obtain.

The Morrison shelter in the kitchen took up a lot of space and was very ugly. We were fortunate in that we did not have to use it. I tried it out by crawling into it but it felt uncomfortable and alien. My husband, Pieter, tells me that he and his brother slept in a similar shelter every night when his family lived at Hampton, Middlesex. I also used to try on my gas-mask. This was kept in the attic in a cardboard box. It was stiff, rubbery-smelling, and tight-fitting to pull on to my head. I felt cut-off from the world when wearing it and my voice sounded far away if I spoke.

One year seemed to go on for ever and it was 1944. It was always 1944! We listened to the radio whenever there was a news broadcast because it was the build-up to D. Day and the invasion of the French beaches. I can remember thinking in 1944 that after the war there would not be any news. I could not imagine a time when there would be no war and what it would be like. Living opposite us in one of the cottages was Mr Ram who charged up the accumulators for wirelesses in the village that were not connected to the mains electricity. His wife

was a softly-spoken, smiling, and charming person who was always willing to help us with housework, especially scrubbing the flagged kitchen floor or with washing clothes.

My father was very keen to listen to organ music especially the sound of large cinema organs such as the one at Blackpool. My aunt liked classical music and church music, and she maintained her piano playing to a high standard. She had reached the LRAM level and was a gifted pianist. Her repertoire consisted mainly of Beethoven Sonatas, Bach's Preludes and Fugues, Waltzes, and Polanaises by Chopin and some more modern music such as that by Debussy and Ravel. I was expected to be able to sit still and listen to long sections of the Messiah sitting on the Victorian couch in front of the open fire.

*Nobby, the Old English Sheepdog.*
*Photo by Bridget Bowers*

Every Wednesday Matthew's bus used to travel to Norwich collecting passengers from various villages, travelling via Dereham, to the Cattle Market near Norwich Castle. From Pickenham my Aunt used to send a medium sized cardboard box full of vegetables, eggs, fruit and butter to relatives in Norwich, and in return they sent back a box often containing currant loaves or ginger cake baked by my grandmother, probably some hardware goods such as nails or wire or wire-netting which were hard to buy. My Aunt Ida worked as a senior clerk in a hardware shop Johnson, Burton and Theobalds and she was able to buy these goods for use on the farm.

Included in the box there was often a mutton-bone or some dog biscuits for our Old English sheepdog called Nobby. He was my favourite dog. He was a large, strong, shaggy black and white dog and he learnt that there was something for him arriving in this box on a Wednesday. He listened for the sound of the bus which stopped just outside our house, and as soon as the back door was opened, he rushed down the path to the bus, clambered up the steps of the bus his whole body in convulsions of "S" bends and his large feet stamping the floor of the bus and on the correct box. The passengers all laughed at his antics. They were very patient and realised they could not get off the bus until Nobby and the wonderful box had been removed. After lifting the box off the bus and up the path with Nobby's nose securely attached to the box it was taken into the house. The thing was to find the bone for Nobby. There would be no peace until it was found. He would then take it gratefully and settle down after this excessive excitement, and the rest of the box could then be unpacked. This sending to and fro of boxes lasted for the years of the rationing and food shortages, and it was to the mutual benefit of both families. These boxes were sent between relatives and friends all over Europe during the war.

We had an entrance porch where the solid front door was set back from the front of the house. There was a low bench at each end of the porch where pots of plants often stood. Trellis on either side stretched from the floor to the roof of the porch. This made an ideal play area for me as a child. When the pots were removed the benches made seats of the right height where I could play my fantasy games either by myself or with my friend Brian who lived opposite in part of the 17th century Manor House. I had two dolls and one was a black doll bought for me by my Aunt Ida. This was the first experience that I had that dolls, and therefore by deduction people, could be of a different colour to ourselves. This was probably quite advanced thinking for its time. I had a little blue enamel dolls' tea service with its own teapot, jug, plates and cups and saucers, and here in the porch I served tea, (that is water) and proper cakes.

I was very keen on making mud pies. These consisted of soil and water mixed to the right consistency in the lid of a jam jar, and then decorated with little flowers, leaves, moss and small stones. These could be very pretty and gave me much satisfaction.

Much time was spent outside walking beside and searching the hedgerows for birds' nests, flowers and animals. I was taught by my brother how to preserve a whole egg shell by piercing each end of the egg with a pin and then blowing the white and yolk out of one hole while blowing through the other hole. I was told to take just one egg only in order that the female would not notice. Frequently I just felt in nests to see how many eggs there were but took none at all. I was particularly pleased one year to find a small mossy nest of a robin in an old kettle in one of the dry pits which could have been dug out for clay for brick making at an earlier time. The eggs were about the size of a man's small finger nail and the colour of coral agates. I was thrilled to find them, but I did not touch them.

On another occasion I was taught by my brother how to collect methane from a wet pit. The water was covered with low branches and quantities of leaves had decayed there. By using a strong pole to dig into the muddy bottom, bubbles of methane gas rose to the top of the water. This gas could be collected in a pail and then set alight with a match. We carried out this procedure a number of times. My task was to carry out the prodding while my brother collected the methane gas and lit it making a large broad flame. This was science in action and I knew all about methane gas when it came to my later lessons in the science laboratories at school.

Dick had a powerful influence in my development. He was strong, physically and in character. He could stand near the barn and throw a stone across the meadow, about 200 yards, and make it land accurately in the duck pond. His cricketing skills were already developing! I thought this was very clever. He liked to chop down trees for firewood, and then saw the trunk and branches into manageable sizes. He learnt first-hand about the different farm machines and worked with Father to repair them when necessary. They had much in common with a love of engineering. He had great energy, initiative, and a driving spirit to make progress with modern methods of farming.

## ANCIENT HISTORY

The village of North Pickenham where we lived is situated in South-West Norfolk three miles south-east of Swaffham in the area known as Breckland. This term was introduced by a Thetford historian and naturalist, William George Clarke, writing in the Naturalist's Journal in 1894. "Breck" means a breaking away from the heathland habitat towards small cultivated fields. When the fields are neglected they revert back to heathland. The soil is sandy and the rain washes away the nutrients quickly. Gorse and broom bushes, heather and dry-loving plants predominate this habitat. Flints can be seen across the fields and heathland, and have been the main building material for centuries.

Flint-mining on an industrial scale took place at Grimes Graves about twelve miles to the south of North Pickenham in what is now called Thetford Forest. The Neolithic people worked these mines from about 10,000 BC to 600 BC. They used antlers from deer to extricate the flints from galleries deep in the chalk. The shafts of the mines are marked now by more than three hundred depressions where the in-fill has sunken. The experience of descending a shaft, climbing down a steep ladder, viewing the chalky passages with poor light and ventilation, and imagining how these people worked is unique. The flints were shaped into tools and weapons and traded and transported along ancient routes such as the Peddars Way which was later on adopted and improved by the Romans.

The Bronze Age people established many settlements throughout south-west Norfolk. The climate at that time and the soil conditions must have suited them. They settled near rivers and springs where they had a plentiful supply of running water for themselves, their domesticated animals, and their crops. They were farmers, potters, weavers, basket makers and they were trading goods. They used metal tools, bows and arrows, traps for catching animals and they could make small boats. It is quite easy to imagine such a community as this, living near the River Wissey and the many springs of water.

North Pickenham was one of the most prominent of the Bronze Age burial sites. My contemporaries and myself can remember mounds of earth or barrows surrounded by raised levels of grassy banks shaded by mature beech and oak trees. It was a place of retreat, beauty and mystery, the atmosphere of which would be impossible to create without the ancient history. Ordnance Survey maps of 1905 and 1928 mark two tumuli on this two to three acre site and it was called "Hilly Plantation". We called it "The Three Hills".

From the Anglo-Saxon period until the 17th Century the Hilly Plantation was the meeting place of the Greenhoe Hundred.* Meetings were held in the open air and local government concerning matters such as taxation, laws, disputes, crime, and stray animals would have been discussed. In Norfolk there were 38 Hundreds and

**A "hoe" is a barrow and may have given its name to the hundred. A hundred consisted of a 100 "hides" and a "hide" was equal to 120 acres.*

*This picture was taken near Hilly Planation and the Bronze Age Burial Ground.*

their geographical importance remained in place until the 1960s. In 1972 a Local Government Act was passed making alterations to many boundaries.

In 1942, three years from the start of the war, an exceptional hoard of silver in outstanding condition was uncovered during ploughing at Mildenhall. It consisted of a large dish two feet in diameter adorned with the face of Neptune, dancing figures in flowing robes, and sea creatures. There were also spoons, goblets, ladles and bowls. It was not until July 1st 1946 that the Mildenhall silver was declared treasure trove and became Crown property and was to have its showcase at the British Museum. It was dated to the fourth century and it was thought that the silver work could have been executed in Europe. We knew nothing about this discovery until after the war when the revelation was made to the public with much acclaim. There was a spirit of great interest and joy in the unfolding of the secret story of the find, in its untold value and the age of the objects. Mildenhall was one of the largest of the Second World War airfields and of contemporary historical strategic importance. Simultaneously, precious silver objects from the fourth century were being unearthed in a nearby field in the same village. The juxtaposition of these two events is hard to comprehend.

The small church of St Mary at Houghton-on-the-Hill is about a mile from North Pickenham as the crow flies. It seats about fifty people and has the atmosphere of a private chapel. In 1304 it became a chantry with two priests. The parishes of North Pickenham and Houghton-on-the-Hill were combined and the clergyman's living was consolidated on Feb. 27th 1747. In 1901 there were 46

inhabitants living in Houghton, but in the 1940s there were only a few people living in two cottages.

Services were still held in the church in the 1940s during wartime. In the summer my aunt played the harmonium for a few services at St. Mary's, and I went along with her from an early age. My father Richard had earlier taken my great-aunt Lizzie's harmonium up to St. Mary's with his horse and tumbrel. Some of the American servicemen wanted to attend the services at St. Mary's but the church was so small that they had to stand outside.

The church was beginning to be neglected and falling into a state of disrepair. It became very overgrown with ivy and large trees. For a group of us children it was always a mysterious adventure to take a walk up to Houghton Church. It was isolated and lonely. On the nearby Common there was a fine wild cherry tree and the cherries were very sweet.

Houghton is mentioned in The Domesday Book as "Houtuna" meaning a walled or fortified place. It describes how the Saxons built the nave of the church and it formed part of the royal hunting estates of Edward the Confessor (1002-1066). In the sixteenth century Henry VIII married Catherine Parr who had already been married to John Lord Latimer. Some bartering took place, and John Lord Latimer received many manors and lands as far north as Yorkshire, including Houghton and North Pickenham in the east, in exchange for his wife.

It is clear that the churches, manors and land in the area of Houghton-on-the-Hill and North Pickenham were held at various times by some of the most important titled people in the country. They controlled vast swathes of land, exerted great power, and their enduring influence is present today. In 1895 St. Mary's was protected by the Reverend Champion with the installation of a new roof at a cost of £43 thus preserving the precious interior for future generations.

In the 1990s a new roof was constructed on St. Mary's Church at Houghton-on-the-Hill funded by Norfolk County Council. At that time important wall paintings were discovered and conservation experts from the Courtauld Institute of Art were engaged. Representatives from English Heritage, the County Council, the Council for the Care of Churches, and the Friends of St. Mary's formed a Steering Group, and with the help in 2006 of a substantial Heritage Lottery Fund grant the conservation work was able to proceed.

There were several layers of wall paintings of different dates from the 17th Century to the earliest period dated about 9th Century. These were the oldest frescoes to have been discovered in Britain, and were considered to be works of international importance. The drapery on the figures identified the figures as very early Romanesque. The paintings make a powerful impression with their strongly drawn lines and vivid depictions of religious themes from the Bible. These outlines would have been coloured in with bright colours such as vermillion, red lead, green earth and lime white, colours found during conservation work. The small, dark church would have been lit by candlelight. The atmosphere created by this

*The Last Trump, a 9th century fresco at St. Mary's Church, Houghton-on-the-Hill. Photo by Caroline Elliott*

*Photo from 'Norwich Mercury', February 14th 1903.*

*St. Andrew's Church, North Pickenham, was rebuilt in 1863.*

wonderful work of art and the darkness of the church with its small windows, and the contrast when it was lit by candlelight, must have had a dramatic effect upon the beholders.

The extensive subject matter of the frescoes include the Holy Trinity with God seated with Christ and the Holy Ghost as a dove, the Creation of Eve, and the Wheel of Fortune depicting the progression of life. Further scenes show a series of faces gazing up to Heaven, busts of saints in roundels, figures rising out of coffins at the Resurrection, an angel blowing the Last Trump, and a saint holding a dead snake representing the triumph of good over evil. Skilful artists were engaged to paint these dramatic scenes by people who would have valued the subject matter and who could afford to pay for the work. These were people with land, money and influence. They have left us an impressive legacy. Little did we realise the significance of St. Mary's Church with its hidden pictures when we were worshipping there in the 1940s.

Close by St. Mary's Church lie the remains of a Roman villa. The Peddars Way, an ancient route, used and updated by the Romans passed through the nearby Houghton Farm. The original route followed a straight line and crossed Norfolk and Suffolk in a south-easterly direction from the coast at Holme-next-the-Sea to Castle Acre, down through the valley of the River Wissey towards Suffolk. The section of Peddars Way close to North Pickenham was called Sessions Lane, and was possibly derived from its other name Procession Lane when the parishioners beat the bounds of the parish in a procession in order to check that the correct boundaries were being maintained. It was a mysterious place from which emanated

a feeling of the unknown. There was a high railway bridge passing overhead with lofty brick walls either side of the leafy, grassy land. Sometimes there was an encampment of gypsies near the bridge for several weeks at a time. The village children possessed a sense of apprehension in this lane, and were told to keep away from the area.

This ancient history surrounded us but our pressing interests during World War II were entirely in the present. Sites of interest were closed to visitors, and the whole area was under the surveillance of troops and the Home Guard. Numerous airfields were built throughout East Anglia. We could not visit the seaside because the beaches were mined and cordoned off with barbed-wire for fear of invasion by the Germans. This was a time of immense fear. Life and death, and the will to survive were uppermost in the thoughts of the adults. The children sensed this anxiety but could not understand what was happening in the adult world.

## NORTH PICKENHAM VILLAGE

The Reverend William Ewing held the living at North Pickenham and Houghton-on-the-Hill from 1855-1891. He was a typical Victorian. His family owned a fifty-acre nursery in Norwich, which later became Daniels, and then Notcutts. It was supplying fashionable plants, trees, shrubs, and related garden paraphernalia to those with large gardens, estates and moneyed people. The Rev. Ewing was very enthusiastic about construction and set about it with great energy.

Ordnance Survey Maps show that the Church of St. Andrew formerly had a Chapel and Hermitage dedicated to St. Paul. Nearby an ancient well is marked. There were pilgrim links to the village and Catherine of Aragon is said to have paused here on her pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine at Walsingham.

The Rev. Ewing firstly rebuilt the old Rectory House. He landscaped fine rectory gardens, planted a shrubbery, and thousands of snowdrops leading to the water meadows with their splendid willow trees and osier beds. The osier beds were pollarded willow trees which produced long, lithe, thin branches suitable for basket making, and hurdles for enclosing animals. These would have been of commercial value, and used in local trade. In 1856 he built the school with residence attached, in the Victorian Gothic style. In 1860 he built two semi-detached houses (now called Glebe House) in the same elaborate style. This is where we lived at Rose Cottage.

In 1861 the Rev. Ewing set about restoring the church. The tower was completely rebuilt, and the rest of the edifice in 1863 at a total cost of £2700, the greater part of which was contributed by the Rector. The building is constructed in the decorated style. The evangelical tenor has always been low church with no candles, incense, or statues. The commandments hung in the chancel and remain there to this day.

In the 1940s Sunday School was held at the Rectory in a low-ceilinged, dark, bare room with benches at the sides, and one window overlooking the churchyard. Miss Mather, the clergyman's daughter, was responsible for the Junior Sunday School. She often rested on a couch while she was talking to us. She could not have been in good health. A group of twelve children, and I was one of them, received instruction about the Bible and learnt the commandments. The commandments were very important and we had to learn them off by heart. On one occasion when the Senior and Junior Sunday Schools were together in the Church, and the Rev. Mather was in the pulpit talking to us he suddenly asked me what a particular commandment was. He had noticed that I was not paying attention and it was his way of giving me a shock. I do not remember if my answer was correct of not, but I do remember a sense of relief afterwards. The Sabbath was kept as Holy as possible. The animals had to be fed and watered on the farms, but it was regarded as a day of rest and men were not labouring or working with machines. My Great-Aunt Elizabeth played the organ for the Morning Prayer Services and my Aunt Margaret for the Evening Services.

Most of the cottages in the village were built in the early part of the nineteenth century. The ambitious building programme of the Rev. Ewing later in the century

*The school and St Andrew's Church can be seen.*

*The shop is on the right hand side of the road. Glebe Farm is behind the cottages on the left. River Wissey in flood 1912. A road bridge was built later.*

must have invigorated the life of the people. It would certainly have provided good work for local people: building, landscaping, carrying materials, making bricks, and using local skills to the maximum. At this time there were 287 inhabitants with 1590 acres of land. In the 1940s there would have been a population of about 350 because a few council houses had been built before the war.

*George Bowers stands outside his shop with his son Walter Bowers, and his grandchildren Frank and Lucy Bowers, the children of Charles Bowers. The pony's name was 'Dawson Bell'. Early 20th Century in North Pickenham.*

*The shop in North Pickenham converted into a private house. Photo by James Bowers 2010.*

The village shop was built in the early nineteenth century. It was a cottage with the shop at the front. In the 1940s it was owned by my Uncle Jim and had remained in the family for the best part of a century. My grandfather, Richard Bowers, was born there in 1876 and was the fifth of nine children. In the 1940s the shop was a general store and was a lifeline for the villagers. It was a very fraught time, keeping records of all the coupons for the different food stuffs.

The Public House was an old building named The Blue Lion. There are very few Blue Lions in England. My father did not frequent Public Houses and the Blue Lion was no exception. We seldom went inside, but we could smell the beer when we walked past the open doorway. We were friendly with the publican, a lady, and she gave us quantities of her rhubarb. The rooms were small and dark with low ceilings, and the passages were narrow. Some villagers were regular customers and the pub was a popular meeting place.

My Great-Aunt Elizabeth was the postmistress at the post-office next door to us and I called her Aunty Stamp. It was often a bustling place with people, parcels, post bags, and a counter at a high level where books of stamps and money were kept. Aunt Liz, in her seventies, was one of a family of nine children, with two girls and seven boys. Her sister Nellie had emigrated to Saskatchewan, Canada, as a pioneer. Nellie had a hard time building somewhere to live and cultivating virgin farmland. Aunt Nellie gave birth to seven sons who each eventually owned their own farms round the original property. Some of the Canadian cousins were conscripted during the war and when off duty were able to visit their relations in North Pickenham and Norwich.

In contrast, Aunt Liz stayed in the village all her life. She became an infant school-teacher at North Pickenham School. Her handwriting was firm and shapely, and she expressed herself clearly. She was about five feet tall, slightly stout, and had quite a deep voice with a distinctive chuckle and sense of humour. She helped her parents in the village shop where she was born, and cared for them when they were old. Her husband Will rented a smallholding and owned a few cows. He also was responsible for the churchyards of St. Andrew's and St. Mary's, cutting the grass and keeping them tidy. Her brother Walter lived with her too. He was a carpenter and owned some cottages opposite The Blue Lion. During the war Aunt Liz housed some cousins as evacuees, but this was not altogether successful because the young boy broke his leg and also suffered a nasty fall. They were probably glad to return to Norwich.

One day Aunt Liz was going to cook jugged hare. I had never eaten hare. Marg was not keen to cook rabbits and hares because she could not bring herself to skin them. It reminded her of skinning cats. I said that I would like to taste the hare and I was invited to lunch. It was a new, unusual taste with a strong, gamey flavour.

Sydney, the postman, was cheerful and always had a friendly word with everybody in spite of a noticeable lisp. He had become shell-shocked but this did not

*Elizabeth Baldwin (née Bowers) infant school-teacher,*
*church organist, and postmistress.*
*She kept the church records as secretary.*

deter him from his work until he had a heavy bag of circulars to deliver. It was all too much for him, and he flung the post-bag over a fence into a field and left it there. It must have seemed a good way to be rid of this onerous task! Needless to say it caused considerable amusement.

The farms in the village were small family run farms. Several were Council owned. The Manor Farm was very old, and much of the land was appropriated for the new aerodrome. There were some large estates surrounding North Pickenham and on one of them which was managed by a Company, possibly European, a massive Dutch barn was erected. This caused consternation because nobody had seen anything like it and it was not understood why it was being built. It was rumoured that it could be used by German invaders as a hanger for German aircraft. Everybody felt uneasy about it. In recent years I heard that another Dutch barn had been built in Norfolk at the same time, and a similar conspiracy theory existed concerning the reason for its construction.

There was a wooden village hall called "The Hut" built on stilts and this was used for entertainment, whist drives, dances, church fêtes and Home Guard training. It was possible for children, and I was one of them, to crawl under the hut to play and later emerge covered in cobwebs.

Games of hockey were played in the street outside the shop. This was very exciting. I did not own a hockey stick and so my brother cut one out of a hedge for me. It had a big knot of wood at the end and served its purpose very well. Hide and seek was played in a group, and "home" was a seat by the shop window where the shop shutters were kept. There were donkey or pony rides at the Manor for the village fête and these were a highlight for me. I spent all my money (three pence) on these rides. There were races like a mini-sports day, and Marg competed in a running race and won a prize for me. The fête was a brief interlude of relaxation and happiness.

Swaffham was the nearest town three miles away, and in the 40s the "pictures" (the cinema), was the place to be for entertainment. Some people went twice a week to see mostly Hollywood films, such as cowboy, cartoon, comedy and love story films. Long queues formed for tickets, and the cinemas were so popular that often the seats had sold out, and people were turned away. The fair was a major attraction with crowds of people enjoying the fun. It was hardly possible to move about and the noise and music added to the frenzy. On one occasion my cousin Faith and myself missed the only bus home, but some kind boys from the village gave us lifts back on their crossbars. My aunt was very relieved to see us safely back home although somewhat taken aback by the mode of transport.

The school was a Church of England School built in the centre of the village. There were two classrooms, a small one for the infants, and a large classroom for the seniors. The windows as in all Victorian schools, were built high up the walls above eye level to stop children's and teachers' eyes straying outside. The windows were elaborate in style and attractive to look at. The lavatories were in outhouses across a yard. The playground was a large grassy area with a flint wall along one side and hedges and trees along two sides. One of my friends had a mother who was a nurse, and she was very skilled at organizing the "doctors and nurses" game underneath the sycamore tree. She later worked at one of the big London Hospitals in a senior nursing position. Her early medical interest was definitely present.

In the senior class there were about three evacuees for a short time. They looked like sisters, and were probably from the same family in the East End of London. We were puzzled by them and wanted to know more about them. They stayed with Polly Groves and her husband in a small, detached cottage with a typical country, front-garden filled with quantities of different flowers haphazardly planted and seeded. There were rows of vegetables in the back garden. In addition there were bee-hives. We used to exchange our cabbages and swedes for Polly's honey, and sometimes for a bowl of flowing honey with the waxy comb. My grandfather bought her beeswax for the furniture shop in Norwich. Beeswax was difficult to obtain and it was said that the Pickenham wax was excellent for polishing. The

evacuees must have found the conditions quite primitive with no running water or bathrooms in the village.

Polly worked as a cook in the "big houses". A story goes that a Rolls Royce drove up outside her cottage one day because she was needed urgently and unexpectedly as a cook for numerous visitors at one of the nearby Halls. She refused to ride in the car but cycled behind instead in her usual upright manner. Once a year before the war Polly would travel to London, visit Harrods and buy all her requirements for the kitchen: spices, herbs, colourings, cake decorations and new equipment. She was a person of few words and kept herself to herself. She always looked a bit shabby.

After the war when icing sugar became available she iced several cakes for us for special occasions. We had not seen anything like them. They were professionally decorated with pretty sugar roses and rose-buds, sugar violets, silver leaves, green angelica and golden and silver balls. The cakes were bound round with elaborate bands of every hue often with fluffy fringes at the tops and bottoms. This represented real luxury.

In the infant classroom we were allowed to choose something to play with on certain days and the dolls' house was my favourite toy. I can remember us being given small squares of cloth to fray, but I could not understand the point of this exercise. It was probably to encourage hand-control, recognition of colours or the technique of weaving. Perhaps it was to develop patience and to keep us occupied and quiet. I left the infant class when I was eight years old and attended Lonsdale House School in Norwich. I seemed to be up to the standard of the other children and able to understand the three Rs. The teaching must have been good at the village school.

The same can not be said for my brother Dick. He failed to win his 11+ scholarship because it was said he spent too much time cultivating the headteacher's vegetable garden at which he was an expert. After this, our grandfather paid for him to attend Hamonds Grammar School at Swaffham, the school where our great-grandfather had been a pupil in the nineteenth century. The headmaster thought Dick looked a bright boy and offered him a place. He never looked back. He played cricket for the junior Norfolk team, and was captain of the school cricket team. At university he obtained a BSc and MSc, and worked all his life abroad in the field of Agricultural Engineering, mostly in Nigeria and Tanzania.

The family associations with the village school were numerous because of the large families. There were still eighteen members of our family living in the village in the 40s in four different properties, some of which had been in the family since 1750 and under the ownership of William Bowers at that time. Our roots in North Pickenham lasted for 260 years at least. It is improbable that such long connections will be retained with one village in the future.

Our nearest railway station was two miles away at Holme Hale. It connected Thetford and Swaffham, and the Watton to Swaffham section opened in 1875, a year before my grandfather was born. It was affectionately known as the "Crab and Winkle" line. A number of children travelled to their schools in Swaffham and

*Holme Hale Station. This is where the Americans arrived before marching to their base in North Pickenham. The Swaffham to Watton railway line closed 19th April 1965 as part of the Beeching cuts.*

Thetford by train, but for those living in North Pickenham village they had a two mile walk or cycle ride before reaching the station. This often made it a long day for them.

Holme Hale station was kept in an immaculate condition. The flowerbeds were always neat and colourful with bright marigolds and red salvias side by side, with not a weed in sight. The waiting room and platform were clean and well-painted, and the wooden benches and table inside brightly polished. In winter time there was an open fire in the grate. It was said that on one occasion when the train was approaching the level crossing the gates were not open. The train had to stop and the engine driver blow the whistle to get the station master out of the nearby public house.

My father working on Glebe Farm stopped what he was doing and watched every train that ran on the line. He took his pocket watch out of his waistcoat pocket and checked the time of each train. During the 40s the line was heavily used for troop movements and for goods. Often there were between fifty and a hundred or more trucks being pulled by steam engines, "double headers", carrying coal, grain, milk, sugar-beet and quantities of wartime equipment. I remember counting the trucks time and time again. The sugar-beet from the farm were piled up on the field nearest to the station, taken by horse and cart to the allocated truck at the station. Many journeys were required to fill a truck. When full the truck was taken to Wissington Sugar Beet Factory built in 1925 and taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture as a wartime measure in 1941.

*The route of the Thetford to Swaffham railway.*

There were just two cars in the village, one at the Manor Farm, and the other owned by a man who ran a taxi-service. The village men were employed mostly as agricultural workers and they cycled to their places of work. Because of the shortage of metal at this time it was impossible to buy new bicycles. The older ones were kept in running order and there was a constant demand for spare parts.

People were self-reliant, practical and innovative, but when more specialist services were needed it was necessary to travel to Swaffham. Plowrights were the major agricultural engineers and ironmongers who carried out repair work on all farm machinery. The Banks were there, a saddlery, wheelwrights, Boots the Chemist, clothiers for men and women, and hairdressers. The blacksmith's forge was in Necton and shoeing the horses entailed a five mile walk with them.

This was the life that we knew. There was no such thing as unemployment. Some men had been called up into the Army, while the farmers and agricultural workers at home were vitally important for food production and self-sufficiency. People worked hard and for long hours, many in labouring work which would be carried out by machines after the war. The hard washing day for women would be done by washing-machines. The harvesting with the cutting, carting, and threshing would be replaced by the combine harvester. We were stepping from one pastoral age to another mechanical technological age, but we could not fully understand the reality of this revolution at the time.

## THE WAR

War against Germany was declared on 3rd September 1939, and this altered our lives in a major way. Everything was affected, including our personal family lives, village life, food and supplies. Our sense of well-being was non-existent for six years, and even beyond, because of the hardships, and the blight of war.

In the Spring of 1940 War Minister Eden made a BBC broadcast appealing for the foundation of a civilian army to help defend the Home Front. The LDV, Local Defence Volunteers, was formed and later known as the Home Guard. The initial purpose was to report any suspicious or subversive activities, to set up makeshift road-blocks outside towns and villages, to be alert for the landing of enemy parachutists and to check the identity of all passers-by, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. It was thought that road-blocks would delay the German tanks should there be a German invasion until the regular forces could take over.

A Home Guard was formed in North Pickenham and my father was a member. He wore a rough, course, khaki uniform, heavy noisy boots and a khaki coloured cap. He was issued with a rifle which stood at the bottom of the stairs in the hall. The Home Guard met once a week in the village hall, "The Hut". They were fortunate in having some veterans from World War I who gave them instructions, and discipline, and could provide some leadership. No church bells were rung during the war, but the signal warning of an invasion was to be the ringing of the church bells. The church tower provided an excellent look-out post.

There were four roads leading into the village. Two of them had bridges passing over the railway line situated in a cutting. These bridges would have been guarded by the Home Guard, and also the land either side of the cutting. The railway system had their own guards patrolling the tracks and stations. There was a bridge over the River Wissey which was not deep enough to carry river traffic. If this bridge was damaged the site would have become a ford again.

In the Spring of 1944 the airfield base at North Pickenham was handed over to the Commanding Officer of the 492nd Bomb Group U.S.A. It marked the arrival of the last B-24 Bomb Group to serve in Norfolk, and it was the final installation to the Eighth Air Force in the United Kingdom.

The arrival of the Americans affected the Home Guard because the Americans had their own road-blocks at entrances to the base, and sometimes roads were closed round the base. The Home Guard were then able to concentrate their efforts on the other two roads into the village, and on manning observation posts.

My father had a great sense of humour and I can remember him telling the story about somebody who asked a question in the Home Guard, "What happens if we can't stop the enemy in this village?". A weak reply came, "If we can't stop them then the next village must".

On 14th May 1943 in a speech in Washington, Prime Minister Churchill praised the Home Guard as a vital part of the forces fighting the enemy. He said,

"You are specially adapted to meet that most modern form of overseas attack - the mass descent of parachute troops".

On 14th May 1944, the anniversary date, King George VI described the duties of the Home Guard as of very real importance. In the second half of 1944 it was still thought that a local invasion with the possibility of sabotage or raids could take place in south-east England. Finally, after four years the Home Guard stood down in November 1944.

Rationing affected our lives in a substantial way. It was with us constantly in one form or another from September 1939 when petrol rationing started, until 1954 when meat rationing ended. In January 1940 food rationing started, and in June 1941 clothes rationing was introduced. In July 1942 sweets were rationed to 2oz (50g) per person per week. It is surprising that in July 1946 after the war had ended Britain was forced to introduce rationing for bread and potatoes. In June 1943 special children's clothes rations began. Some form of rationing lasted for fifteen years. I was seventeen years old then.

The reason for these restrictions was that in 1939, when Britain had the largest merchant fleet in the world, two-thirds of our food, and many raw materials such as oil and various metals came from abroad. These supplies were attacked by German U-boats between 1939 and 1943 in what was called "The Battle of the Atlantic". Altogether, during the war 5150 of our ships were lost.

Products in short supply were substituted with others. Margarine was used instead of butter, powdered eggs in tins instead of fresh eggs. Petrol was rationed until 1942 and after this date was available only for essential use such as for ambulances, the police and doctors.

Two ration books were issued, one for food and one for clothing. It was illegal to use someone else's ration book. For food it was necessary to register with particular shops – the grocer, butcher and dairy (this was before the time of our supermarkets) and the coupons had to be used for designated weeks.

Examples of rations. These changed according to the supply and season.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1940 | bacon/ham | 4oz (100g) per week |
| 1940 | tea | 2oz (50g) per week |
| 1940 | sugar | 12oz (300g) per week |
| 1940 | butter | 4oz (100g) per week |
| 1941 | soap | 1lb (400g) per 4 weeks |
| 1941 | cheese | 1oz (25g) per week |
| 1942 | sugar | 8oz (200g) per week |
| 1943 | butter | 2oz (50g) per week |
| 1943 | eggs | 4 per month |
| 1943 | margarine | 4oz (100g) per week |
| 1943 | cooking fat | 2 oz (50g) per week |

There were no fat children in the village and no sign of obesity in the population. The diet with less meat, sugar and fat meant that people were healthier than before the war. A points system was introduced in December 1941 for foods such as spam (spiced ham from America) and tinned fish or dried peas. Spam was pink, spongy and bouncy and quite salty. We were grateful for it, but grew tired of it.

On the farm each year we picked thousands of rose hips. These were collected by the Women's Institutes for the production of rose hip syrup, rich in vitamin C, especially for children. Children were issued with jars of malt which was a sticky brown substance and quite agreeable to take. Cod live oil and orange juice were available for children. Other hedgerow fruits, such as blackberries (blackberry and apples tarts were a favourite), crab apples and elderberries were used for jam and bottling purposes. Extra sugar was made available in the autumn as advertised in the Daily Express 14th August 1940. "Sugar coupon no. 6 is available this week, for an extra 2lbs (1kg) of sugar for jam-making. Ask your grocer for yours straight away". Unfortunately 2lbs of extra sugar did not go very far for jam-making.

From our grocer we used to buy a bag of loose mixed biscuits which were taken from a large metal tin. At tea-time these would be placed on the table on the cake-stand. They would be left till last by my father, and then he would say to me "Would you like to have that last biscuit?" My reply was always in the affirmative. I can not remember seeing any bananas, but I was told that when I did have my first one that I did not like it.

Clothes were rationed with a points system and amounted to 66 points per year per person and in 1942 were reduced to 48 points. In 1941 a utility mark was introduced and this appeared on clothes, furniture and soft furnishings. The aim was to economize on materials and labour. Men were allowed: 1 pair of boots or shoes; 6 pairs of socks; 1 suit (without a waistcoat); 1 overcoat; a few ties, handkerchiefs and detachable collars.

Women were allowed: 1 pair of shoes; 6 pairs of stockings; 1 suit; 10oz (250g) of wool or 2½ yards (2.3m) of material; 1 overcoat; 2 slips; 1 blouse. Clothes rationing ended in 1949. My clothes were usually made from cut-downs from my aunts' dresses, and my grandmother who was a very good seamstress, made me a woollen coat with a velvet collar from other people's clothes. I had a pretty silk dress with a yellow skirt and a floral bodice which she made. I went for a ride on a swing wearing this dress and put my knee through the skirt. It had a long tear and could not be worn again. I was really sorry about this. I had not thought about the problem of being on a swing in a silk dress. Nobody was angry with me.

Paper was in short supply and the yellowing, poor quality pages of books published in the 40s and 50s can be seen in these old books today. Exercise books at school were checked by teachers to make sure every line was used, and if there were spaces, pupils were sent back to fill them before a new book was issued. By 1943 half the country's paper was being recycled and fifty million unwanted books were collected and recycled. Many newspapers and magazines were difficult to buy, and when available were highly prized and circulated to other people.

*Bridget Bowers standing outside the porch at Rose Cottage. Her dress was made from 'cut-downs' from her aunt's dresses. The skirt was yellow silk and the bodice was floral silk. It was made by her grandmother. Clothes were rationed during the war.*

Individual and family circumstances varied across the country, and between city, town and village. There must have been older people, young children, and pregnant women who were not receiving the necessary food and nutrients that they needed. In the mid 50s there were some children attending an infant school in Fulham Palace Road, London, where I was doing my first teaching practice, who had no shoes of their own and were wearing summer clothes in winter. This was due to poverty and in some cases because fathers were in prison. This came as a shock to me. The immense difficulties of wartime lasted year after year. Money was short and there were no luxuries.

During the war windows at night had to be covered to prevent light shining out thus indicating places of habitation to the enemy. We had good shutters to pull

over the windows and heavy curtains as well. On certain nights we could hear the bombing in Norwich twenty-seven miles away. We would climb onto a chair and look out from a high bedroom window in the direction of Norwich and see the flares from the burning fires in the sky. My aunt would say "Norwich is getting it", to my Father. We were worried. We knew that our family in Norwich were suffering, and would be in a state of fear and distress, and could all be dead.

*Peggy, the Sealyham rounded up the family in Norwich, to hurry into the air raid shelter.*

The Norwich blitz was every bit as real to the people of Norwich as were the London, Liverpool and Coventry and other large city blitzes to their residents and businesses. My grandparents lived in the Heigham District of Norwich. Many bombs were dropped in the nearby residential streets. It was thought that the Luftwaffe were off-loading their bombs after raids on the factory area where the boots and shoes were made (my Aunt Sybil worked at the Howlett and White shoe factory), and Harmer's silk factory where the parachute silk was spun. The nearest bombs dropped were about 100 yards in two directions from my grandparents' house. Their little Sealyham dog Peggy, always heard the drone of the German bombers before the air raid siren sounded. She would whine and run from one member of the family to another, and hasten them into the Anderson shelter in the garden. There had already been twenty-seven earlier raids on the city before the Baedecker raids took place on 27/28 and 29/30 April 1942 (Monday and Wednesday nights). These raids were named after the German Tourist Guide which listed historical and cultural cities such as York, Bath and Norwich. It was thought that these attacks would break the morale of the people. The raids were in retaliation for the British bombing of the medieval port of Lubeck. Those nights the bombing was so bad that the family all kissed each other good-bye in the dug-out, as it was called, because they thought their end had come. When they emerged finally, the terrified relief must have been indescribable. The stench of smoke and dust, the sight and heat from buildings ablaze, and the knowledge of numerous deaths would have been devastating. Their house was still standing but all the windows were blown out.

The Anderson shelter was made from curved corrugated metal, and placed in a hole in the ground. There were steps each side of the entrance descending into it, one side from the neighbours, and the other steps nearest to our house. The area inside was very small. There were benches each side with room for eight people. Torches, candles and basic foods would have been stored under the benches. When the door closed, and I remember going inside during the day, it felt stuffy and

claustrophobic. On top of the metal roof, earth and grass was piled high, the excess from what had been extracted. The shelter was situated in a place on the lawn where no neighbouring property, and there were three of them, could fall on top of it.

A tragic event took place involving Mrs Saunders the baker's son in the back street called Belvoir Street. He had already lost his first wife in childbirth, and was returning home after an air raid only to find his second wife dead in the street outside, and their unborn baby dead beside her. The blast had thrown them into the street. This great loss and many others equally tragic had a bad, long-term effect on local people.

Bombs were dropped in West Parade destroying two houses completely, and causing extensive damage to others. A huge crater was made in the middle of the road cutting off supplies of water, electricity and gas, and people were forced to use paraffin cooking stoves. Mercifully, nobody was killed in this street. Earlham Road suffered badly. St. Thomas's Church was gutted by fire and at the corner with Belvoir Street a direct hit destroyed properties making massive holes in the ground.

In Somerleyton Street, my grandfather's aunt Rebecca Blackwood had lived. She owned six properties in the late 19th century. My grandfather had lived with her when he attended the High School for Boys in St. Giles. The street suffered severe damage. Twenty-one houses had to be declared unsafe, three remained habitable but in a bad state, and the public house, the Somerleyton Tavern was destroyed. Somerleyton Street has been transformed by modern property development with no trace of my great-aunt's Victorian houses.

My grandparents decided to remove their Sheraton furniture and valuables from their house, and it was taken into storage in the old stables and outhouses at The Rectory in North Pickenham. The windows were all boarded up and the house was only visited at lunchtimes. Just basic necessities were there. My grandfather and two aunts evacuated themselves to Hethersett, a village close to Norwich, where they lived very happily with a Primary School teacher for many months. My grandmother and little Peggy came to live with us at North Pickenham. Peggy suffered from a severe attack of jaundice brought about by the stress of the bombing. Our farm veterinary surgeon called and he managed to cure her after considerable rest.

My grandfather was the Managing Director of the luxurious furniture store Trevor Page which had in earlier times been fine cabinet makers to Royalty and the stately houses in East Anglia. Goods from Liberty, Heals and Sanderson were stocked with splendid carpets, fabrics, glassware and china, beds and bedding of the best quality. My Grandfather worked for this firm for sixty years, and forty years as a Director. He never retired and worked until he was seventy-six years old. On the Friday night of 1st May 1942, alert at 1.35am, it was a night of fires when the main shopping centre of Norwich was so nearly ruined. The raid began with several enemy aircraft challenging the City's ground defences. One enemy plane penetrated the barrage and dropped an E-type container which opened throwing 700 incendiary explosive bombs in all directions along St. Andrew's Street, Duke Street, Heigham

Street and the back of London Street. Fires broke out rapidly helped by a strong wind. Unfortunately, the Trevor Page shop in Exchange Street was badly damaged by fire on 1st and 2nd August 1942, as well as two furniture stores in Muspole Street and Calvert Street on 27th June 1942. After this severe blow my grandfather was faced with trying to find premises from which to continue trading, and for a time the firm was sharing a property with Martin's Bank until he was able to secure a proper establishment in Queen Street. He then built the business up again with postwar and contemporary furniture displaying strong Scandinavian designs. The shop continued to trade until the 1970s as an independent company. The archive material from the firm surprisingly survived, including Mr Trevor's cashbook dating from 29th August 1842. My grandfather was immensely proud of this cashbook and kept it safely in his desk. The entire archive is now deposited at the Norfolk Record Office.

My Aunt Sybil volunteered to act as an ARP Warden (Air Raid Precaution). She wore special arm badges marked REPORT and CONTROL and a round badge marked CD-Civil Defence. She carried a special green card identifying her as a member of the ARP. The wardens had to be ready for any emergency, and were usually the first on the scene. They reported incidents and communicated by way of a two-way telephone system to a control centre which then alerted the various agencies for assistance; the Rescue Parties to recover the casualties from dangerous buildings and situations, ambulances to transport casualties, gas specialists in the event of a gas attack, and the Mortuary Service had to be prepared. She would have received training in First Aid, in handling fire hoses and tackling incendiary bombs with a long handled shovel, a dustbin lid, and buckets of sand and earth. She must have found the duties very stressful. She was a small, nervous person and not tough physically. At the end of the war she received The Defence Medal with the dates 1939-1945. She did not speak about her experiences, and people said that she was never the same after the war. She had to live with the scar of what she had seen and done.

The damage to the City of Norwich was immense. When we travelled to Norwich by bus each week we could see buildings that were there one week, the next week had become heaps of rubble and craters in the ground. It has been estimated that 30,000 houses and nearly 1000 offices and factories were damaged or destroyed. The large number of public houses damaged was 139, and of these 29 were destroyed or severely damaged. Three of the medieval churches were destroyed.

Miraculously, through all this destruction the cathedral remained, standing, not untouched, but enduring, the place where my grandfather worshipped every Sunday morning.

## THE AMERICANS

North Pickenham aerodrome was built on what was once, according to Faden's Map of Norfolk, first printed in 1797, North Pickenham Heath, and in 1943 was poor farmland. We used to talk about taking walks "round the Heath" where patches of scrubland with gorse and broom bushes still remained. Huge quantities of building materials were brought to this remote area. A massive building project was taking place with the construction of runways, a control tower, hangers, numerous Nissen Huts, bomb storage facilities, canteens, cinema, repair service quarters, and domestic service quarters. The Americans were largely self-sufficient bringing with them their own Army Service Forces. In 1942 it took 32000 tons of shipping to transport the equipment of each infantry division, and in 1943 two million infantrymen were supported by 2.7 million Army Service Forces personnel.

Before the Americans arrived in North Pickenham in May 1944 the Home Guard was functioning in the village, and Norwich had suffered the Blitz in the Baedeker raids of April 1942. Aircraft and their trails of vapour making extraordinary patterns in the sky were constantly in the air, and sometimes convoys of tanks or trucks or jeeps would rush noisily through the village street. I was about 4 years old, walking in an open field near a mangold hale one clear day. My father and aunt were ahead of me when from nowhere a spitfire dived down skimming the top of a tree and flew off. I was terrified by this experience and ran to catch up with the adults, but fell flat down in the muddy soil. The pilot was showing off. No doubt he waved as all the pilots did, and we used to wave back and always noted the markings on the different types of aircraft. We became very good aircraft spotters.

The people of the village were astounded by the scale of the construction of the aerodrome, and the influx of thousands of troops and personnel. The Americans had their own entertainment on site, but they still liked to visit the village pub called "The Blue Lion" which was filled to overflowing. They cycled into Swaffham and had buses to take them to larger towns such as Kings Lynn and Cambridge. Some of them took their washing to be done in the village rather than having it done on the camp. This provided much needed extra money for those doing the washing.

My Aunt Margaret was cycling home from Swaffham in the middle of the day with a friend bringing back a basket full of groceries. They were cycling along the road near the perimeter of the aerodrome when suddenly an aircraft veered off the runway, carried on through the fence, and finished stationary on the road in front of my aunt with her hand able to touch the wing. The emergency services were called out and treated my aunt very well. She was asked if she wanted any treatment and whether she was able to carry on with her cycling. She was a strong person in mind and body and carried on with her journey. Afterwards, the family were all very anxious because she had so nearly lost her life. There were so many near misses of every kind, and in every way, constantly, for the whole population, including the Americans.

## American Airfields of the 1940s

*From 'The Reunion 1942-1992' © The East Anglian Tourist Board*

North Pickenham was the 77th and final British base to be handed over to the USAAF during World War II on 27th May 1944. This was the base of the 492nd Bomb Group. It suffered severe losses although the Americans did not talk about them at the time. Heavy daytime bombing was taking place over Germany, and we could count the number of planes in the squadron flying off, and then count them on their return. Frequently their numbers were down, and they were limping back with failed engines and damaged aircraft. It made the villagers very sad indeed. On 18th May 1944 the Group took part in a raid over Brunswick. Four aircraft were lost before reaching the target, a fifth exploded on its bombing run, and three more were shot down on their return flight. On 28th June the Eighth AF flew 1400 bombers to attack twelve oil refineries throughout Germany and the 492nd took part in this mission. In spite of an escort of 700 fighters the only B-24 Liberator to return to North Pickenham was one that failed to take part due to engine difficulties. The losses were shocking. On 7th July the 492nd lost twelve bombers due to enemy fighters. During 64 missions 57 aircraft were lost and over 540 airmen were missing in action. Because of the heavy losses it was decided to disband the 492nd and the surviving members were placed within other Bomb Groups.

In their place the 491st arrived with a good operational record of just ten losses in three months. They were able to conduct 187 missions with great success until the end of the war in Europe. However, their luck ran out on 26th November 1944 when attacking oil refineries near Hanover. Fifteen aircraft were lost from a squadron of 27 when approaching the target. The remaining aircraft managed to re-assemble and press the attack. Only eleven B-24s managed to return to North Pickenham. As a result of this brave action a Distinguished Unit Citation was awarded to the 491st Group.

At the time people in the village knew nothing about the operations. Information became available decades later when documents were released for publication. Sometimes the Americans brought misfortune upon themselves unnecessarily through bad planning and organisation. On one occasion returning planes were brought in to land too quickly. This led to crashes on the runways and planes running into buildings. Then planes and men had to be taken out of action when they were most needed.

The Americans were stationed at North Pickenham for a very short time during intense fighting in Europe. We liked them and my father was always pleased to talk to them about America, where they came from and what conditions were like back home. Many of them were children of the Great Depression and came from very remote areas and had not travelled in their own country. Military service gave them a job, a wage and opportunities to travel.

Word went round the village school that there were monkeys* at the base, and sure enough a group of children, myself one of them, gathered in a field to see a small, light brown, pet monkey about eighteen inches high, with its handler, take chewing gum out of a packet, chew it, and then stick it behind its ear. It put it in its

**see e-mail 2 Appendix*

mouth and stuck it behind its ear several times. It could also take a cigarette out of a packet, pretend to light it and smoke it, and tuck it behind its ear. We were captivated at seeing our first monkey and it made us laugh.

Children were warned never to pick up anything because it was possible that we could be harmed. There were frequently leaflet drops from aeroplanes bearing messages of various kinds. We were supposed to leave them alone. Just outside the village the Americans had a refuse dump and we children used to go scavenging there particularly looking for bars of chocolate, Mars bars, some unopened, and the boys were especially interested in finding pieces of military equipment, bicycles, radios and batteries, that could be recycled or reused. The amount of waste was phenomenal and we were grateful for the stuff that they were throwing away.

In 1944 the British cabinet was concerned about the "excessive" U.S meat ration and the demands made on the scarce shipping space. Much of the meat came from Australia. GIs were receiving about twelve ounces of meat, sausages and bacon a day, three times the British civilian ration and 50 percent more than the British troops in the UK.

The children of North Pickenham and the surrounding villages were invited to a Christmas party held on the base. The Americans were kind and generous. We had never seen so much food in our lives, and it probably did not suit us eating so much after scarce rations. When my Aunt came to collect me she was appalled to see food on the floor and sugar scattered about.

The Americans introduced Heinz baked beans to us and we thought these were a great treat when we could get them. They were also frequently chewing gum, and this habit became very popular. Religious services were held on the base but some servicemen liked to attend the village Church Services. These became so popular that a special Service had to be held for them after the usual Service. The Americans had their own hymn book, "Song and Service Book for Ship and Field", and liked to sing hymns such as "What a friend we have in Jesus", "The Old Rugged Cross", and "Rock of Ages". There were sections for Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and at the back were Spirtuals such as "Steal Away" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". The tunes were catchy and the hymns did not appear in our Ancient and Modern hymn book. My aunt played the organ for these Services which were packed to capacity, many standing for them. The clergyman, the Rev. Mather, a kind, intelligent man, must have experienced great difficulty preaching knowing that so many men would never return from their missions.

Often after an Evening Service a group of Americans would come to our house and sing more hymns round the piano with my aunt playing. This must have brought them great comfort, and helped them in tackling their difficult times.

The American troops were given a small booklet entitled "Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain 1942". It contained important advice for the three million Americans who passed through the United Kingdom during the war. In June 1944 there were 1,527,000 U.S Army and Army Air Force personnel in the United Kingdom. Advice was given under such headings as The People – Their customs and

manners - British reserved not unfriendly. Remember There's a War On, Keep out of Arguments, and Britain the Cradle of Democracy. There were some hints on British words, tables of weights and measures, and of British Currency.

There was a paragraph about children. "Children the world over are easy to get along with. British children are much like our own. The British have reserved much of the food that gets through solely for their children. To the British children you as an American will be "something special". For they have been fed at their schools and impressed with the fact that the food they ate was sent to them by Uncle Sam. You don't have to tell the British about lend-lease food.* They know about it and appreciate it".

MEN OF MARKETING

Carl G. Taylor

*Project Supervisor*
*Business Information Division*
*Dun & Bradstreet, Inc*

A native of Pennsylvania, Mr. Taylor began his business career in Philadelphia, where he sold casualty insurance, managed an insurance brokerage office, and eventually became a partner in the organization.

After four years of service during the war, in which Mr. Taylor saw action as an Air Force navigator in the European theater, he returned to Philadelphia and completed an intensive course in marketing research at Temple University.

With his formal University degree obtained, and also with his "informal business degrees" in selling, office supervision, and administration, Mr. Taylor obtained a position as a market analyst with Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. He worked for that organization at Akron, Ohio, for four years on a broad range of consumer and industrial assignments, including a number of studies made to determine the potential market for new products under consideration.

Mr. Taylor left Firestone to join the staff of the Business Information Division of DUN & BRADSTREET. He has since supervised studies of the market for an industrial product and a beverage item; conducted a dealer attitude survey for a watch manufacturer; calculated area sales potentials for a manufacturer of heating units, and handled other similar assignments.

The American Serviceman we came to know the best was Carl Taylor, and he became a real friend. I first saw him in church when I was six years old and sitting between my father and my brother, while my aunt played the organ. They did not like me turning round to look at people. I was surrounded by tall Americans everywhere I looked. I did turn round sometimes, and on one occasion saw a man, who later turned out to be Carl Taylor, smiling at me and winking. Needless to say this encouraged me to turn round all the more, which was probably his intention. After the Service he and a small group were invited to our house.

Carl was young, as were most of the Servicemen, and he was educated, urbane, and very good-looking like a film star such as Clark Gable. Indeed, Clark Gable was stationed at North Pickenham, but we did not know this at the time. Carl always looked very smart. He served as a navigator. He visited us as often as he could. I do not remember him eating much. He heeded the advice in the booklet, "If you are invited to eat with a family don't eat too much. Otherwise you may eat up their

**The Americans provided food which would have to be paid for after the war was over.*

Dun & Bradstreet, Inc.
BUSINESS INFORMATION DIVISION
P. O. BOX 803, CHURCH ST. ANNEX
NEW YORK 8, N. Y.

OFFICES IN THE PRINCIPAL MARKETS OF THE WORLD

My dear Bridget:

Poor correspondent though I be – we have not forgotten you or your family over here. Life has been moving rapidly in the last few months and we have been moving with it.

In December I changed my place of work from Akron to New York City – I am now in the No. 1 atomic bomb target area for Uncle Joe and his boys. Then in April Mary and Pamela joined me here in a lovely old home some 35 miles west of New York in Mendham, New Jersey. Our house is some 85 years old – a picture is enclosed and it has an acre of ground, a small barn, and 30 trees. We have apple and pear trees, grape vines, and flowers of all kinds. This spring I have planted many vegetables and other fruits. The inside of the house needs considerable redecorating and I work on that when it gets dark. It (the house) is a few miles from the battlefield of Morristown where your Lord Cornwallis was discomfited by Washington in 1778. Your history books may or may not have another version of the battle.

Pamela has now finished her first year of school and she has done very well. She enjoys our country

*Letter posted June 20th 1952 from Carl Taylor to Bridget Bowers.*

weekly rations". But he did bring for me the remains of his flying sweets called "candy". These were yellow, hard, and shaped like jelly babies. They were a great treat because our own sweet ration did not end until 1953. We came to know Carl as a friend. He did not talk about the war or bombing raids. He was married with a young wife back home.

living and on July 6th is to get a cocker spaniel puppy for her very own.

From my office - near ~~that~~ Wall Street - I can look out on the Hudson River and watch the ships come into and leave port. I see your British liners - the Mary and the Elizabeth - regularly and even see the ship I came back from England on - the Uruguay - so many years ago. Next week I will see the new United States arrive.

It is not difficult to look back this month to a similar month eight years ago. The memory is particularly poignant in view of the failure of the world to capitalize the victory that commenced at that time. You must be quite a young lady now - much too dignified and proper to run wildly down the front path when a soldier comes to call. I can still recall the morning I came down before we left N. Pickenham and received such a warm greeting. Only my own daughter has given me a similar satisfaction. I hope your lot in your problem ridden country is not too bad and that you are not denied things important to your growth and development. How is Richard - out on his own by now I suppose. Is he an agriculturalist of some sort.

Give my best to Margaret and your father, and Sybil. We all hope we will be coming to England some day for a visit if the Russians leave you untroubled long enough.

Love
Uncle Carl

*Letter posted June 20th 1952 from Carl Taylor to Bridget Bowers.*

*Envelope of the letter posted June 20th 1952 from Carl Taylor to Bridget Bowers.*

In 1944 we had not seen Carl for some time. We speculated that he had been killed in action or moved to another base. I looked out for him up the street from our front-room window day after day, and one day saw him walking towards our house. I flew out of the back door, ran down the path and straight into his arms. He recalls this greeting in his letter of June 1952, "You must be quite a young lady now - much too dignified and proper to run wildly down the front path when a soldier comes to call. I can still recall the morning I came down before we left North Pickenham and received such a warm greeting. Only my own daughter has given me similar satisfaction".

When he returned to the USA he sent me a pretty white fur muff which I enjoyed wearing in church on Sunday mornings. He also sent a book called, "An outline of American History" which I still own, and a collection of Arthurian legends. These I read frequently.

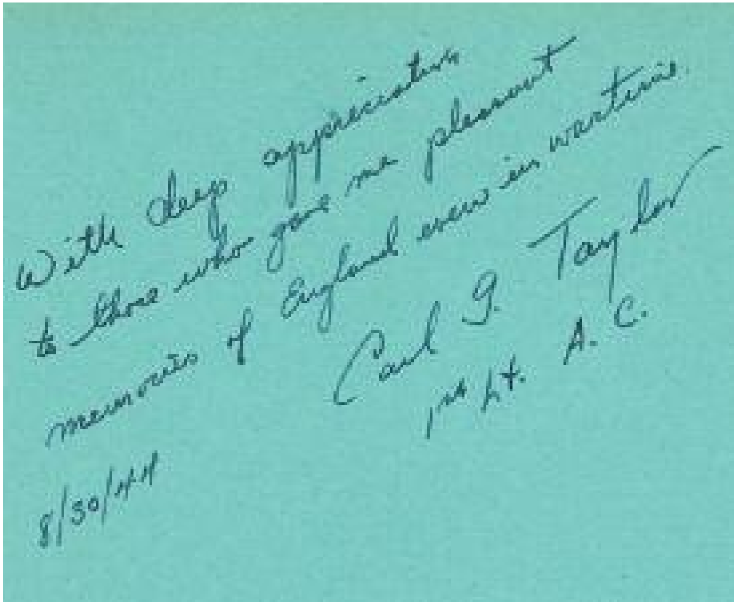
His letter of June 1952 states that he is the Project Supervisor of the Business Information Division of the Dun and Bradstreet organization. He writes, "From my office near Wall Street I can look out on the Hudson River and watch the ships come into and leave port. I see your British liners - the Mary and the Elizabeth regularly and even see the ship I came back from England on - the Uruguay - so many years ago. Next week I will see the new United States arrive" . . . "I am now in the No. 1 atomic bomb target area for Uncle Joe and his boys".

He continues, "It is not difficult to hark back this month to a similar month (June) eight years ago. The memory is particularly poignant in view of the failure of the world to capitalize the victory that commenced at that time . . . I hope your lot in your problem-ridden country is not too bad and that you are not denied things important to your growth and development."

He concludes by saying, "Give my best to Margaret and your father, and Sybil. We all hope we will be coming to England some day for a visit if the Russians leave you untroubled long enough.

Love Uncle Carl".

*Carl Taylor, a navigator, flew in this type of B-24 Bomber from North Pickenham USAAF base during the final stages of World War II.*




*The autograph of Carl G. Taylor written in the autograph book of Margaret Bowers just before he left North Pickenham*

His comments concerning the Cold War are especially interesting. What would he have said about the 9.11 attack on the twin towers?

He was not a good correspondent and it was a great surprise when he visited us in the mid 1960s. He had gone to enormous trouble to find us again because several changes of address had taken place from Norfolk to Essex. That evening we went to a local restaurant for a meal because we were not prepared for Carl's visit. There was Carl, my father and Aunt, Pieter my husband and myself. Carl returned again in 1970 with his wife and daughter Pamela for a happy last visit.

★ ★ ★

**JULY 2013**

*Since my book was first written new information has become available particularly from Paul Arnett★, historian at the 492ndbombgroup.com and from the Carpetbaggers Museum at Harrington Northamptonshire. I am most grateful for such a positive response. I have been impressed with the deep level of interest by relatives of veterans, many of whom are now retracing the footsteps of those fathers who were shot down and taken prisoner and subsequently forced to march long distances across Europe. They are keen to visit the bases where their fathers 'took-off' from, in many cases for the last time.*

*The people of North Pickenham are equally interested in the veterans and their families. The village will always be associated with the heavy loss of American lives. These deaths show the might of the German war machine in 1944 and the strength of the opposition that we were up against.*

The 492nd Bomb Group was stationed at North Pickenham for five months. The group received no recognition for their extreme bravery and no citation. They were the only Group to be disbanded because of their severe losses. After this tragic period, some of the crews were transferred to the Harrington Base in Northamptonshire to join the 801st Group. This Group became known as the Carpetbaggers★★ and were the 801/492nd Bombardment Group (H) USAAF.

★*see e-mail 1 Appendix*

★★*see e-mail 4 Appendix*

My family did not know where Carl was sent from North Pickenham, but after a visit to Harrington Museum I have discovered that Carl was sent there. The American Military Intelligence Department known as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was liaising with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). This was a highly secretive operation involving flying agents and supplies to Resistance groups in occupied Europe. The B24s were painted black. They flew only at night with no fighter escort and they operated by moonlight.

Each B24 was adapted to carry 12 man-size metal, cylindrical containers divided into compartments where guns and ammunition could be packed. Parachutes were attached. They also carried packages such as radios, batteries, medical supplies and clothing. Much padding was needed to prevent damage to the contents on hitting the ground.

The agents were called Joes. They were driven to Harrington in large American cars with curtains drawn, taken to the 'dressing huts', where they were searched and dressed in large padded jump suits and rubber helmets. No one, except the OSS dressers, were allowed to talk to them. The Joes were driven to the Liberator and boarded with the engines running ready for take-off.

The B24s were fitted with the latest flying and navigational instruments. The radio altimeter gave an accurate readout on the low level flights. The 'Rebecca/Eureka' directional radio system functioned as follows. 'Rebecca' on the aircraft gave out a signal which triggered the 'Eureka' on the ground. Then automatic signals were sent out indicating the position of the aircraft and the Drop Zone (DZ). Near the DZ a small 'S' portable phone was used, rather like our mobiles today. As the aircraft reached the DZ, torches on the ground were set out in a pre-arranged pattern and the light codes exchanged. The pilot was guided by the bombardier and navigator working closely together. The aircraft was at high risk over the DZ and once the mission was over a quick escape was necessary.

## SECRET MISSIONS UNDERTAKEN JUST AFTER THE LIBERATION OF PARIS

I have had the good fortune of being able to study seven secret reports via Harrington Museum. These missions were completed by the Velarde (Pilot) Crew when Carl Taylor was the navigator. The reports are very interesting and give a vivid insight into their secret work between 1st September and 10th September 1944. There were only three nights when this crew were not operating during that time which represents an intense workload and great responsibility to deliver the agents and goods.

Different letters were used for the load: J=Joes or agents, C=containers, P=packages, N='Nichels' ie leaflets, PH=pigeon hampers. On one mission 2038 'Messengers 37B' on 9 September 1944 three runs were made over the DZ, the first dropping two Joes and personal packages, the second dropping 12 containers and

the third run, 10 packages. The height of the aircraft on the first two runs was 700ft and on the third run 400ft. All three runs were carried out at 125mph.

FORM A.T.F.

SECRET

AIR TRANSPORT OPERATION REPORT.

2053 Report

Squadron: 858 A/C No. 713

Date: 9/10 Sept.

Name of Operation: Bob 172

Country: France

Result of Operation: C

Crew: Pilot Velarde

C. Pilot Donnelly

Navigator Taylor

Bombardier Wesson

S-Phone Operator

Dispatcher Sarles

Radio Operator Shoger

Engineer Kalaske

Gunner Ragland

Observer

| | J | C | P | N | PH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Load Carried: | 5 | 12 | 3 | | |
| Load Dropped: | 5 | 12 | 3 | | |

Time of Take-off: 2119 Landed: 0241 Was exact point found: Yes

How was point identified: C-Type Bonfires flashing N. Identified terrain as terrain

Bombardier and Dispatcher's Report: Everything out all in 1 run. Load + Joes were seen to land right on light

In Target Area: 0000 hrs. To 0014 hrs. 0018 Time Dropped:

Height above ground: 550 ft. 160 Course: 125 MPH:

Routes: Time, Altitude and Points of Crossing English and Enemy Coasts:

Little Hampton 2300, 2600, Fecamp 2326, 2500

Fecamp 0135, 5300, Little Hampton 0159, 5200.

Leaflets Dropped: No

Enemy Opposition (Give A/C position, Time, and Altitude, and What Happened):

None.

Weather: How did weather affect mission. In Route: As Briefed

CAVU at Target

Captain's Personal Report:

Good reception good briefing

Rebecca: No Distance: Ht.:

S-Phone: No Distance: Ht.:

*Bob 172 was at Drop Zone 35k northwest of Dijon in the Côtes d'Or area of France. The exact co-ordinates are not available. 9/10 September 1944*

Two of Captain Velarde's reports are as follows: "Arrived at primary and circled for 10 minutes, no reception seen - went to altimeter - no reception - came back to primary, circled for 15 minutes - finally found reception - lights were dim - Code good." (Report 6th September 1944 No. 1964 'Peter 98').

Velarde's report for 8th September 1944 No. 1988 'Messenger 236' says: "Reception poor, lights weak and too close to forest. Code good."

**SUMMARY OF SECRET REPORTS OF MISSIONS ON 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 SEPTEMBER 1944 FROM HARRINGTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

1. The same crew operated except for the co-pilot.
2. The drops were all into France.
3. Eight agents were dropped.
4. 84 containers were dropped.
5. 51 packages were dropped.
6. Different lighting signal systems were used on the DZ (Drop Zone).
7. Height of the aircraft above DZ varied from 350ft to 700ft.
8. The speed of the aircraft varied from 125mph to 135mph over DZ.
9. The routes out were over Bridport and Lessay and Littlehampton and Fécamp.
10. It is noted when Rebecca and the 'S' phone were used.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became interested in procedures at Harrington and a three-hour long film was made for the CIA concerning all the various functions that took place there. Ideas, methods and operations were closely observed. The secrets of Harrington remained classified until the 1980s.

The 492nd BG at North Pickenham and the 801st 492nd BG at Harrington were performing different but entirely necessary tasks. They responded with immense courage when we needed a far stronger force to restore freedom to Europe.

Carl died in 2007 aged 91 years, our 'soldier who comes to call'.

Carl wrote a letter from the Carlton Hotel, Belgravia where he was staying on the 25th 1967 to my father and aunt, "I have finally found some time in a busy schedule to drop you a note thanking you for your warm reception last Sunday. Frequently in life we are disappointed in the realisation of events we have looked forward to, but our reunion was everything I had hoped for - even when for most of the past 23 years I didn't really expect it to happen. It was a great satisfaction to find you all well and so well preserved and to see Bridget so obviously well embarked on the 'sea of matrimony'. In the latter connection I felt most guilty after our dinner that I did not insist that I the 'well-heeled' American pay for the meal, rather than the young people. I was preoccupied I fear with my joy in seeing you all

again. In the event, I am enclosing a further contribution towards the dinner and if Bridget and Pieter will not accept it . . . please get something for them with it. Love, Carl."

At the dinner Carl's eyes sparkled throughout and a warm, winning smile conveyed his pleasure. In his letters he expressed himself and his emotions, with a depth of understanding.

How did I feel about Carl's sudden appearance? I could not believe that he was really there. I was excited. It was a similar thrill to seeing my big brother return home after a three-year tour in the Colonial Service in Africa. I wore a silver-grey cotton dress which I had made myself from a Vogue pattern. I had bought the material at Harrods. I wore my hair in the fashionable, high bee-hive style. Carl had aged in the intervening years. He had been through traumatic wartime experiences, that we knew nothing about and could only imagine, but the bond of closeness remained.

Many years later a Memorial Stone was erected in North Pickenham to mark the importance of the contribution of the USAAF. The inscription reads:

492nd BOMB GROUP
APRIL 1944 - AUG. 1944

491st BOMB GROUP
AUG. 1944 - MAY 1945

HIGHEST RATE OF OPERATIONS OF ALL B24 GROUPS.
HIGHEST LOSS RATE OF ANY B24 GROUP IN THE 8th USAAF
OVER THREE MONTH PERIOD

DISBANDED AUG. 1944

In St. Andrew's Church stands a stars and stripes flag and a small plaque dated 1997.

491st Bombardment Group
Postremum Et Optimum
Presented to
THE PEOPLE OF NORTH PICKENHAM
by
The 491st Bombardment Group (H)
in grateful appreciation of the hospitality, warmth and continuing
friendship bestowed upon us through the years during
and after World War II.

## NORWICH

A partial sense of order was gradually restored at my grandparents' house in Heigham Road, Norwich, after the severe bombing of 1942 when it appeared safer to return to their house. The German forces were then concentrating their strength on the invasion of Russia. My grandparents and two aunts moved back to their house. The boards were removed from the windows, and the glass replaced, although some of the original small decorative stained glass windows did survive the blitz. The furniture was taken out of storage and brought back again. The Anderson shelter was still in use until the end of the war.

In 1944 the German V-1 and V-2 rockets were a constant threat and could be seen flying over Norwich, but none exploded within the city boundaries. It was at this time that London suffered badly from these incendiary devices and 2500 women and children were evacuated from London to Norwich, and had to be found accommodation in private houses where there were spare bedrooms.

In November 1944 a B-24 bomber from the 458th Bomb Group stationed at Horsham St. Faiths on returning from a mission with severe damage plunged towards Heigham Street hitting the tower of St. Philip's Church. The pilot managed to crash the bomber on open ground just off Barker Street. All nine members of the crew were killed, but the pilot's courage and skill prevented the loss of civilian lives in a built up area.

The war ended on 7th May 1945 when the Germans surrendered unconditionally. In North Pickenham the sense of relief was everywhere. People were smiling and walking with a new spirit in their hearts as though a heavy burden had been lifted. This happiness was passed on to the children with a feeling that life could begin again. So far it had not been a happy childhood for us, and we had known nothing else but war in our young lives.

Immediately after the war my Aunt Ida was the instigator of a plan which she was keen to implement. It was that I should go to Norwich and live with the family during the term-time for my schooling. She discussed this with my grandfather who supported her fully. My grandmother and Aunt Sybil were in agreement, as was my father. I'm sure that Marg was sad at the idea of my leaving, but she knew it was for my good, as did I myself, and I had no choice in the matter. My grandparents were in their seventies and I was to become a long-term responsibility for them. They were very brave.

I did not know Aunt Ida well and had seen her only when we travelled to Norwich on the Wednesday bus. She had noticed how well I was reading the newspapers and thought that I should receive a good education. Aunt Ida was a thoughtful, kind person and I could always talk to her about anything. She had an inner calmness and was a practising Christian. Every day she read The Bible and knelt down to say her prayers. She valued education, particularly for girls. Her two brothers had required money to be launched as a farmer and a chartered

*Seated: Richard Bowers (Senior) and Clementina Mary Bowers*
*Standing: L Ida Bowers R Sybil Bowers.*

*Photographs taken at 9 Heigham Road, Norwich.*
*The family lived here from 1922 - 1970.*

accountant, and she felt that the girls had not received the same chances. She was always keen to start her own business and often asked me if I would be interested, but I could not fulfil this wish. She was dissatisfied with the conditions of low wages and long hours which she had to work. Holidays were short and she felt that the workers deserved a better deal. In spite of these difficulties she managed to save money. She paid for my school fees, and for my school uniform (clothes were still rationed in 1946) which was bought at Greens on The Walk. Greens was a large, elegant shop, and in a central space stood a tall, beautiful grey rocking-horse which I was allowed to ride for a short time. Later in her life she paid for the education of a black child in Africa.

*Bridget Bowers aged 10 years with her Aunt Ida*

Aunt Ida enjoyed her work at the ironmonger's shop in Castle Street. She was a stickler for accuracy with her book-keeping and her handwriting was immaculately neat. Her customers were fond of her and often carried out favours for her.

Her main interests were her dogs, a white Sealyham named Peggy, and a white and tan cocker spaniel named Primrose. These dogs were dear to her. Their food was prepared with great care, they were taken for regular walks, and they slept in a big basket chair in the bedroom at night with warm rugs around them. They were good company for my grandmother at home, and their barks were a useful warning in the large garden.

Fruit growing was Aunt Ida's other interest. She cultivated raspberries and two apple trees, a Bramley and a Dr Harvey, a very old apple tree and now rare. These apples were often baked in the oven for tea and were delicious when sprinkled with brown sugar.

Aunt Ida appreciated art, particularly the work of the Norwich School and the paintings by Crome of his famous oak trees. She spent some of her time painting and reading.

All the family had a great love of Norwich; its cathedral and churches, its buildings and old streets, its history and its businesses. This was their life. My grand-parents had come from the country to the city in the late 19th century and had no wish to live anywhere else. My grandfather was offered a job at Heals of London, but my grandmother would not leave Norwich.

My Aunt Sybil was born in 1902, the middle child between two brothers. Ida was her younger sister. The four children were born within five years of each other. Although there was a domestic help for my grandmother, Aunt Sybil was the daughter who had to help her mother. The boys were not confident and Aunt Sybil had to help with taking them to school. When my grandmother suffered from scarlet fever and diphtheria it was Aunt Sybil who stepped in to run the household. Similarly, during the flu epidemic of 1918 when the whole family was very ill, my Aunt Sybil remained well and was able to care for everybody.

The men of this unfortunate generation were killed in vast numbers in the 1914-18 war. Because of this the women were denied husbands. In addition, they suffered the Second World War and this blight of wars was a tragedy for them, and it left its mark on their lives.

Aunt Sybil was a city person. She worked at the Howlett and White Shoe Factory, later renamed the Norvic Shoe Company, as a personal secretary to Sir Earnest White who at one stage was Lord Mayor of Norwich. After he died she became a faithful private secretary to Lady White until she died. Aunt Sybil showed respect and deference to those in positions of authority. She was particular about decorum, such as how to address people properly, and the correct order in which relations should walk at a funeral. She thought that good deportment was necessary and this included my deportment and sitting up straight. She was delighted when I received a deportment badge at school after considerable effort on my part.

Aunt Sybil attended the local St. Philip's Church until the Reverend Griffiths gave a sermon on evolution and Darwinism. This was much too modern for her. She was so disgusted that she left St. Philip's Church and moved her allegiance to St. Thomas' Church. I attended Morning Service with Aunt Sybil. We often entered into arguments walking to and from church which did not seem to me to be a Christian way for either of us to behave. We had difficulty seeing each other's point of view.

Regular church attendance took place every Sunday. I was present at Morning Service, the Crusaders' Sunday School in the afternoon, and Evensong with Aunt Ida, all held in three different local places. The Sabbath was kept holy. I was not allowed to do any homework or play games or listen to inappropriate music. Best clothes were always worn on Sundays.

*The Egyptian Museum at Didlington Hall the home of Lord & Lady Amherst. In 1912 Richard Bowers Senior carried out a large contract for Trevor Page and lived there for three months. The hall was demolished in the 1950s.*

Aunt Sybil was devoted to her career in business and all that involved. Her main interest at home was reading and she belonged to three different libraries: Boots, a subscription library and the city library. In her spare time she executed beautiful crochet work and took responsibility for the herbaceous beds in the garden. She liked to see the housework done properly and good care taken of the antiques and pictures. She was the eldest daughter, and expected that position to be respected, and it was.

My grandmother, Nan, was born in 1877, one of ten children. Her family was her chief concern. She worked extremely hard for them and saved on household expenses wherever she could. She was an excellent cook and seamstress. At seventy-two she seemed old to me. She suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. It affected her knees which bent outwards and this reduced her height and strength. Today she would have received joint replacement surgery. She had grey hair tied back in a bun.

Nan dressed smartly and always bought good quality materials which a dressmaker made into dresses for her. The same dressmaker made my dresses too. In the summer Nan wore crêpe silk dresses with a small floral pattern and a long black crêpe silk coat. She would wear a favourite brooch, and her 1899 wedding ring and heavy gold 18 carat engagement ring with its large knot of gold strands on the top. It is one of my favourite pieces of jewellery now. On one occasion my grandfather brought home two sets of jewellery from Rossis the jewellers, one of emeralds and the other amethysts set in gold rings, necklaces and brooches. Nan had to choose which she liked the best. She chose the amethysts because she thought the emeralds were too expensive. I wish she had chosen the emeralds but she probably thought they were not for the likes of her. She would always think of others, and the future needs of the family. She could remember hard times. My grandfather was quite prepared to splash out money on objects of real worth whereas my grandmother was a saver.

Nan was closely attached to her house and garden spending much time tending the plants: the vine in the greenhouse, the agapanthus lilies dating back from the 1920s, roots of which I have today, and old species of fuschias from which cuttings are flourishing in my garden.

Nan spent her spare time reading, mostly biographies especially about members of the Royal Family, and history books. She did not read fiction. She listened to the wireless regularly for the Morning Service and the mid-week Evensong when she was unable to attend the local church any longer.

Nan was kind and loving, and a good person. She always gave what she could to those without food or money. She died at the age of 89 years with her daughters Sybil and Ida caring for her faithfully.

At the age of sixteen years in 1892 my grandfather Richard Bowers applied for a job at Trevor Page. He sat an arithmetic test for book-keeping and when he had finished Mr Henry Trevor, the owner, asked him why he was not writing. My grandfather replied that he had finished. In disbelief two clerks were asked to check

Didlington Hall.
Northwold.
Stoke Ferry, S.O.
Norfolk.

Sir

The tapestries consist of 6 pieces ~~[struck out]~~

The series represents the scenes from the wars of Louis XIV and allegorical subjects connected with the victories of that King.

They are in the very finest haute lisse Gobelins Tapestry and are worked in with gold and silver thread.

The borders have the Fleur de lis and the Roi Soleil badge of the shewing that the set was a Royal one a these borders with fine arabesques were only used for the King's tapestries –

One large piece represents the garrison of Dôle giving up the keys to the King who is riding beside the coach in which are seen the Queen & Ladies of the Court all are wonderful portraits.

The tapestries are all surmounted with the arms of Count Brühl and were said to have been a present from King Louis XV to that minister though the tapestries are of the time of Louis XIV.

They were purchased in Dresden in 1856 by Lord Amherst of Hackney

Yrs faithfully

Amherst of Hackney

P.S. There are duplicates of 2 of the smaller pieces which could be added to the above.

*Copy of a letter from Lord Amherst of Hackney to Richard Bowers Senior, concerning the sale of six Louis XIV tapestries*

the figures and could find no fault. He was given the job in spite of his membership of the Church of England. This was unusual because Mr Trevor, a strict Baptist, employed only Baptists.

My grandfather worked for five years under Mr Trevor and thirty-seven years under John Joseph Gray Page. My grandfather's hard work at Trevor Page was appreciated by Captain Sydney Page, a fellow Director, who wrote to my grandfather from the Middle East on 8th March 1917. He refers to the summary of figures for 1916: "You will realize how pleased and relieved I was to see them. I had quite hoped from your report that things might turn out satisfactorily but I had not anticipated a result like you have produced. It shows me that things have been handled very carefully and also that a great deal of work has been put in by you responsible people". Tragically, a month later, on 19th April 1917, Sydney Page was killed in the second Battle of Gaza. To my grandfather it was a great loss personally, and it was to affect the future course of the business.

The Minutes of the Board held on Monday November 24th 1919 state that, "Mr Bowers informed the Board that Mr George George, an old upholsterer who had been apprenticed to the firm and had always worked for the firm, had fallen on evil times. It was agreed that he be granted the sum of 12/6 weekly". My grandfather displayed a compassionate concern for old employees. Meals were sent round to Mr George George that my grandmother had prepared.

The years of the Great Depression 1929-1934 were difficult because of a lack of demand for luxurious furnishings. Apprentices were dismissed together with other staff and they were not replaced. The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23rd May 1931 refer to the salaries of the three Directors including my grandfather. They were to be reduced by 12 ½ % as from 1st June 1931. This reduction lasted for nearly ten years until 1st February 1941.

In 1912 there was severe flooding of the River Wissey including North Pickenham and Didlington Hall, the home of Lady William Cecil Amherst of Hackney. She wrote to my grandfather on October 12th 1912, "I am enclosing a cheque for £10 which I hope you will divide among the men (Trevor Page Removals) who all worked so hard for us in rescuing the things from the flood. I also enclose a cheque for £5 which I hope you will accept. I thought it might be of use to your mother, in the re-stocking of her shop, as she was a fellow sufferer with us in the flood, and as a recognition of all you did for us."

Didlington's Museum of Egyptology was the inspiration for Howard Carter who catalogued and painted many exhibits there. He later made the sensational discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun. My grandfather knew Howard Carter and they probably worked together removing the Egyptian antiquities from the Museum for storage at Trevor Page in Norwich. In the same letter of October 12th 1912 Lady Amherst writes, "I am very anxious to have all the papyri in London and if you could get all the boxes of it and the drawers, so that I could come and see them, I should be very glad. There is the big box with sliding trays – several long-shaped boxes, like

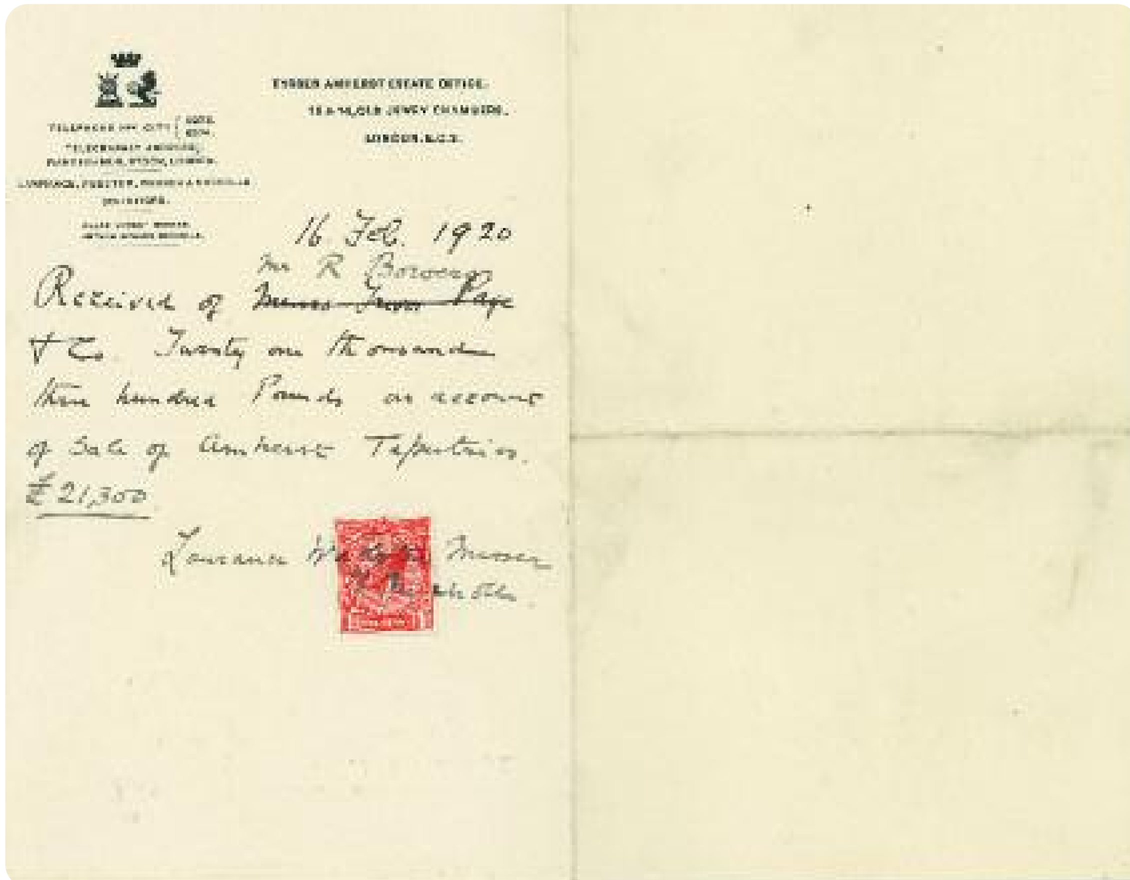
STOWLANGTOFT HALL
BURY ST. EDMUNDS

Feb 5-20.

*Letter from Lord William Cecil, concerning the sale of the six Louis XIV tapestries*

negative boxes, and 3 or four drawers that were under the staircase in the big Museum – some with cords round them. P.S says, "Please be careful not to shake the papyri in moving them"."

As a sideline my grandfather had studied to become a qualified valuer of antiques. When required he carried out valuations for the Royal Insurance Company. His knowledge was extremely useful when it came to the sale of a valuable set of tapestries from Didlington Hall. The 1st Lord Amherst of Hackney wrote to my grandfather, "The tapestries consist of 6 pieces. The series represents scenes from the wars of Louis XIV and allegorical subjects connected with the victories of that King. They are in the very finest haute lisse Gobelins tapestries and are worked with gold and silver thread. The borders have the Fleur de Lis and the badge of the Roi Soleil showing that the set was a Royal one as these borders with fine arabesques were only used for the King's tapestries. One large piece represents the garrison of Dole giving up the keys to the King who is riding beside the coach in which are seen the Queen and ladies of the Court – all are wonderful portraits. The tapestries are all


TYSSEN AMHERST ESTATE OFFICE.
15 & 16, OLD JEWRY CHAMBERS,
LONDON, E.C.2.

16 Feb. 1920

Received of Mr R [illegible] & Co. Twenty one thousand three hundred Pounds on account of sale of Amherst Tapestries.

£21,300

[illegible]

Receipt from Tyssen Amherst Estate Office

surmounted with the arms of Count Bruhl and were said to have been a present from King Louis XV to that minister though the tapestries are of the time of Louis XIV. They were purchased in Dresden in 1856 by Lord Amherst of Hackney". My grandfather was able to negotiate the sale of these tapestries for what was said to be the highest price ever paid for tapestries. The sum was £21,300 on 16th February 1920.

Lord William Cecil wrote to my grandfather on January 29th 1920 from Stowlangtoft Hall, Bury St. Edmunds as follows, "Our furniture I don't think will be removed from here, as I think most of it will have to be sold and this place has to be sold too. The Death Duties will be so heavy that it is a necessity. When the time comes for anything to be sold I should be very glad if you could come over so as to show which furniture you have in store at Norwich from Didlington as there is a considerable amount which never went to Norwich at all and it is rather difficult to know, also you would have the notes of what you had sent to London".

This was a time when the aristocracy were finding their financial circumstances very difficult, and they were having to sell many valuable possessions. The rich Americans were keen to purchase 17th and 18th Century paintings, tapestries and furniture from the Old World. Joseph Duveen, later Lord Duveen, was facilitating the movement of these treasures to America on a grand scale through his

London, New York and Paris galleries. Many of these masterpieces now rest in National Collections such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Frick Collection, New York.

Dealing with these contracts at Didlington Hall was undoubtedly the high point of my grandfather's career. He was confident in the company of the aristocracy, and could help them as much as possible. He was undaunted by the scale of the projects or the large sums of money involved. He was able to conduct smoothly these operations in his commanding and organising way. He bore an uncanny resemblance to Captain Mainwaring in Dad's Army: the stature, facial appearance and manner although he was not quite so severe in his tone of voice. It was clear he was to be obeyed.

This was my grandfather's background when I went to live in Norwich in 1945. I was close to my grandfather and I brought him joy. He was of average height and balding. He had pale blue eyes and wore spectacles and a small, grey moustache. He was a jolly person and laughed loudly at a good joke. He was not fat, but inclined to be stout. He looked smart in his pin-striped, tailor-made suits. He carried a gold pocket watch in his waistcoat pocket and never converted to wearing a wristwatch. One of his Lordships asked him who his butler was. My grandfather said that he could not say it was his wife. He was very fond of the humour in the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas, and he was an avid Dickens reader, and owned the full works. He saw great humour in the characters and their strange names. He was a member of the Norfolk Archaeological Society and the Norfolk Naturalist Trust.

The house at Heigham Road was a Victorian brick and slate building, double fronted and detached. It had two bay windows either side of the front door and sash windows to the side of the house and on the first floor. It stood in a quarter of an acre of garden. Neat gravel paths surrounded a large lawn. Four herbaceous beds and two long borders were enclosed by short box edging. A long, six feet high, red brick wall stood along Heigham Road, and a studded oak gate marked a secure entrance. The back garden was walled in and double gates allowed for the entry of a car. The back lawn was smaller. A cooking pear tree grew there and these pears were a favourite of my grandmother. A major difficulty was that they had to be simmered for so long in order to be properly cooked. My pressure cooker would have cooked them perfectly. When these hard pears fell off the tree they made a dent in any car standing underneath. Three gable ends bordered the garden, and rows of Victorian houses stretched along the adjoining streets.

A large sitting-room stretched from the front to the back of the house. The bedroom above was the same size. A dining-room led off a small hall and the staircase rose directly from this small space. The kitchen was a step down from the dining-room. It had a cooking range, and leading off was a washing-up area and a large walk-in pantry. A spacious glass conservatory stretched over the back of the house and was a further step down. At the back of the house there was a row of little outbuildings; a scullery with a stone sink, a copper, an open fireplace and an oven

in the wall. Beyond the scullery was an outside lavatory and a knife-house. I can remember steel knives being cleaned in a knife-cleaning piece of apparatus. Beyond the knife-house was a greenhouse leaning against the boundary wall. It protected a spreading black grape vine and it could be a warm place of retreat. Various cactus plants and pelagoniums stood on a metal table inside.

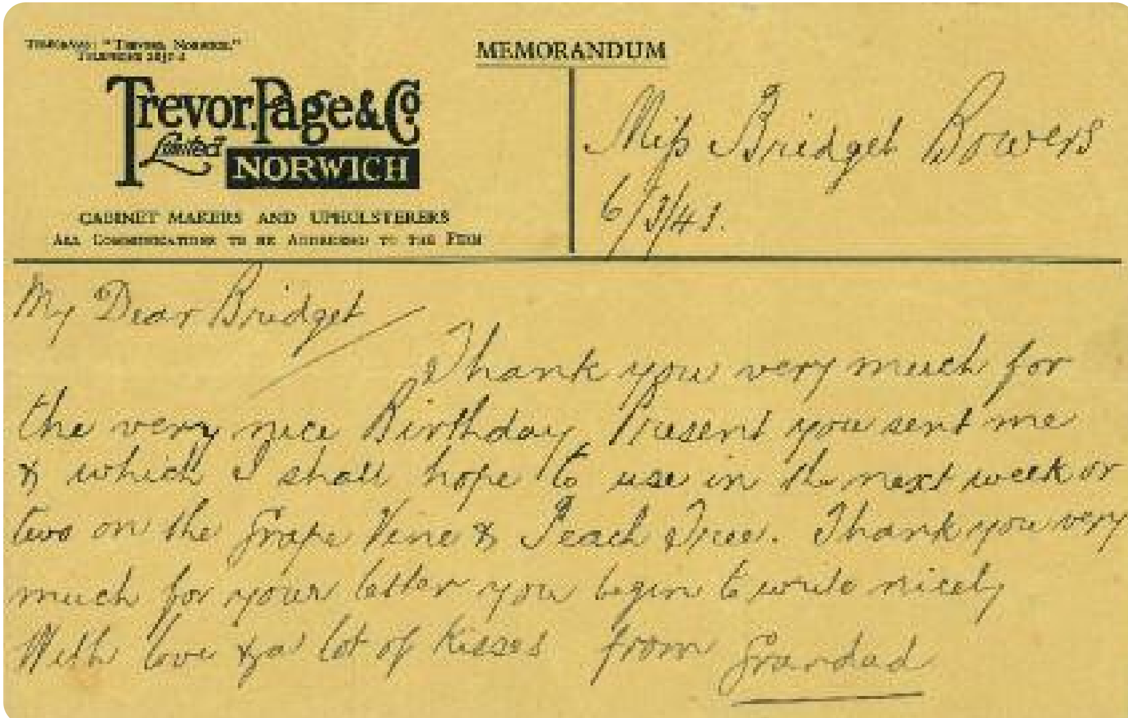
The house was furnished as a small country residence in the Georgian style. The large sitting-room had painted pale blue walls and the two doors were painted in two shades of blue, pale blue and turquoise. A three-branched chandelier graced the centre of the ceiling, and an elaborate circular, plastered, patterned rose surrounded the chandelier. The coving was ornate to match the ceiling rose. Long turquoise linen curtains, with a floral rose pattern, hung at the three windows, and a Chinese floral carpet covered the floor.

There were some interesting and beautiful objects in the room which were absorbing to gaze upon and to touch. There were the four individually carved angel faces, carved by Mr Barrett of Trevor Page, on the octagonal, bespoke occasional table given to my grandmother by my grandfather. A lower shelf held the family Bible, and family photographs stood on the table surface. Above a large white marble fireplace rested an elaborate Victorian mirror which had three small shelves projecting each side and a longer shelf at the top. On each of the six little shelves stood a Dresden figure of The Arts. The records of the manufacturer of the Dresden figures are thought to have been destroyed in the wartime bombing campaign. On the high shelf stood the Meissen porcelain figures of two children about four inches tall. A boy and a girl held a green hooped wreath of foliage with a red and green parrot at the centre. The beak of the parrot had been slightly worn by tender touching over the years.

On the mantelpiece itself stood two beautiful golden glass lustres with turquoise and white floral decorations. Hanging from the bowl at the top were eight long cut glass prisms with six-sided drops at the end of each. When touched they jangled in an appealing way to me as a child, and when the sun shone upon them the light refracted into rainbows. At the end of the room stood a glossy, black piano of German make named MORS. It rested upon a frame of wooden pedals which my uncle had used when he was learning to play the organ. This made the bench seat and the piano much higher than usual. A tall grandfather clock stood near the bay window. Its face was enhanced with that of a moon, and a poem about time was stuck inside the door of the long case. A comfortable soft couch and armchairs held elaborate silk and satin cushions. A fire was seldom lit in this room and it was a cold room in which to practise the piano in the winter. In the summer it was a cool place of retreat.

In the dining-room a white marble mantelpiece was the centrepiece. This was the living-room and a fire was always alight here when it was cold. A brass, French glass clock with dark blue enamel decorations stood in the centre of the mantelpiece, and on either side two bronze Roman figures which had held gas lights

*One of a set of six Louis XIV tapestries sold by Lord & Lady Amherst from Didlington Hall in 1920.*
*They were most probably bought by Lord Duveen and taken to America.*



MEMORANDUM

Trevor Page & Co Limited NORWICH

CABINET MAKERS AND UPHOLSTERERS
All Communications to be Addressed to the Firm

Miss Bridget Bowers
6/7/43.

My Dear Bridget
Thank you very much for the very nice Birthday Present you sent me & which I shall hope to use in the next week or two on the Grape Vine & Peach Tree. Thank you very much for your letter you begin to write nicely
With love & a lot of kisses from Grandad

*Letter to Bridget from her grandfather Richard Bowers in 1943.*

in earlier times. A large wooden wireless stood on an oval occasional table, and in the bay window was my grandmother's octagonal sewing table with all its little compartments for cottons, needles, tapes, scissors and other items of haberdashery. A large, oval, mahogany table stood in the middle of the room with five Sheraton blue leather covered dining chairs tucked underneath. One blue leather covered dining armchair was made especially for my grandfather with mahogany rescued from the blitz. An elegant Sheraton sideboard stood near the double doors leading into the conservatory. The carpet was floral and dark blue. A Persian rug stretched out in front of the hearth. On one side of the fireplace my grandfather took cat-naps in a large, grey leather armchair.

The previous owner had built two staircases into this average-sized house. In order to answer the front door the resident maid had to climb up the back staircase, and then go down the front staircase because she was not allowed to walk directly through the dining-room or sitting-room. My grandfather removed the back staircase and in its place installed a new bathroom upstairs with a gas geyser to heat the bath water. Underneath, a new walk-in pantry was constructed. Two of the three bedrooms had fireplaces in them, and large sash windows which rattled in the wind. The floors were covered with patterned linoleum and scattered with loose rugs. All the beds, chairs, and soft furnishings came from Trevor Page. There was no central heating.

I was following in the footsteps of my grandfather when I went to live in Norwich aged eight years old. He had done exactly the same thing when he was eight years old in 1884. He was a bright boy and it was thought that he should

benefit from a good education in Norwich. When he left North Pickenham he caught the train from Holme Hale station. He cried as far as Thetford at the thought of leaving home, but after Thetford he acquired some composure.

It was a life changing situation for me. I can not remember crying but I did suffer from home-sickness for several days and I used to count the days when I would be going home again. I did not talk to anybody about it. I used to look out of the upstairs windows in the direction of North Pickenham and think about my family, Nobby the dog, the animals, the farm and the beautiful countryside. I looked out for the numbers on the buses going to Swaffham, but they were not for me to catch until I had completed my term at school. I felt hemmed in and a lack of freedom.

*Chippendale style dining chair made by Trevor Page. Photo by Bruce Adam*

I did not like the urban environment. The bomb damage was pervasive. When leaving the house by the front or back gate, turning right or left, the eye was met with destruction in every direction. When I walked a short distance to school, I passed a bomb site four times a day on the corner of Earlham Road and Belvoir Street. Deep craters could be seen with wild flowers growing on the pitted wasteground. Local children used it as a playground. Dereham Road, St. Benedicts, and Old Palace Road were scenes of destruction. An old friend of my grandmother's was rehoused in a prefab* in Old Palace Road and I used to go with my grandmother to visit her. It was a strange sensation entering the prefab, rather like a large caravan. It had a temporary feel about it and the walls were thin and insubstantial. The centre of the city suffered severe bomb damage, and it was several years before shops such as Trevor Page, Chamberlins, Garlands, Buntings and Bonds began to recover and hold more interesting stock. I had not known the exhilaration of window-gazing or the experience of walking through luxurious shops.

I disliked the hard pavements of the city, and the row upon row of Victorian terraced houses with hardly any garden at the front. Those streets were dreary. I liked the streets where the houses had more space round them with larger gardens and trees growing in them. One house in Park Lane had a fascinating monkey puzzle tree, and there were several beautiful magnolia trees too.

* *Prefab - a prefabricated, small bungalow-style, temporary house.*

My grandparents and two aunts tried hard for me and gradually I settled into their routine. Meals were always on time with eight o'clock breakfast, one o'clock lunch and six o'clock high tea. We used a Wedgewood breakfast service, and for lunch a painted dinner service with a pheasant in the middle of the plates and gilding round the edge. Georgian silver was used for every meal. We ate our meals altogether and the food was all home-cooked. Favourites of mine were steamed cod in white sauce, Cromer crabs, fried cods' roes, large currant loaves and sticky dark ginger cakes, egg custards, sausage-rolls and beef pies.

*Angel face carved on an octagonal occasional table made by Trevor Page. Photo by Caroline Elliott*

All the family entered into the spirit of what I was learning. In the dark winter evenings I used to devise word games for us to play and this brought much amusement. I learnt poetry at school such as that of Walter de la Mare and W. H. Davies and everybody would listen to me reciting. Later on, I used to read poetry with my grandfather from his Golden Treasury in the garden in the summer. I learnt the entire poem by Thomas Gray "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", and "The Brook" by Tennyson. I expect we both had in mind North Pickenham Village Church and the River Wissey. Poems I read with my brother Dick were by Shelley and I knew "Ode to the West Wind" by heart. We all loved the language, the music and the power of thoughts in the words.

I was very keen on sport and devised my own high-jump and long-jump on the big lawn. When I was older I practised my tennis and lacrosse skills on one of the gable ends of a neighbouring house. A plain wall is very helpful for developing ball skills. I was chosen for my school netball, rounders, tennis and lacrosse teams and I thoroughly enjoyed playing matches and travelling round the county to other schools.

I spent much of my spare time drawing and painting. I was always keenly interested in birds, and my grandfather owned two volumes of "British Birds with their Nests and Eggs" by A.G. Butler and illustrated by F.W. Frohawk. I spent hours copying these pictures using Indian ink and a mapping pen, and making my own Christmas cards and calendars.

We listened to the wireless together including the Promenade Concerts, and the serials, such as The Forsyte's Saga and Vanity Fair. This was a helpful background when I studied Victorian Literature for "A" Level. My other subjects were Botany and Zoology where my country pursuits came to the fore.

I built a bridge in my mind between my country life, and my city life, but my heart rested in the country. Gradually, recovery from the war years took place but the mind-set of danger, doing without, taking care of things, being economical in every way were to stay with my generation. The constant news on the radio was information concerning the number of houses that were being built and still needed to be built, and the great need to export goods in order to improve our balance of payments. It was an uphill road into the 50s.

## REFLECTIONS AND ANTICIPATION

Looking back seventy years at the changes that have taken place at North Pickenham in the intervening years, it is clear that these changes could not have been forseen at the time in the 1940s. Indeed, we did not know what the outcome of the war was going to be, until 1945, and were not in a position to plan ahead until that date.

Some of the original inhabitants are still living in the village. They are retired and provide a strong link with the past. All of the eighteen members of my family have either died or moved to neighbouring villages or further afield. Some members set up their own businesses, or worked for others in business, and in farming. My Father and Marg left Glebe Farm in 1956 for a variety of reasons. It was difficult to hire farm labourers, and large sums of money were needed to be spent on mechanisation. My grandfather had died and there was no longer his support with continuing renting of the farm. It was almost impossible for the Church to acknowledge its responsibility for repairs on the farm such as the replacement of broken farm gates. Stray dogs, owned by some Americans still resident in the village, could easily enter the farm, and attack the sheep, causing considerable distress and loss of income. Eventually, my father returned to engineering which pleased him immensely.

A major improvement to people's lives was the installation of running water. The metal for the pipes could be obtained after the war, and people were keen to build simple modern kitchens and bathrooms, but not the elaborate ones that are popular today. That would have been wishful thinking! A new small housing estate provided larger modern accommodation, and more people were able to buy their own homes. The small meadows, cottages, and farmstead near the River Wissey, once owned by my great, great, great grandfather William in the early part of the nineteenth century, and kept in the family until the late 20th century, have been built upon and neat bungalows with pretty gardens stand where cattle used to graze. Most people own cars and travel a total distance of six miles to do their shopping at the supermarkets in Swaffham. The village shop closed after being in the family for a century. The old Victorian School was sold and is now an attractive private house. A new school was built offering more space and better facilities. People have more money to spend and life in a material way has improved. The old village wooden "hut" was demolished and a new village hall built on another site. The "Blue Lion" public house is still functioning, but is not as thriving as in the 40s.

St. Andrew's Church, the centre of so much of our life, has been well maintained. It has been rewired, and improvements made to cater for friendly gatherings and entertaining. People have worked hard "to keep the church going" which demonstrates a dynamic spirit. After the departure of the Rev. Mather, who secretly eloped with his housekeeper early one morning to the astonishment of his flabbergasted parishioners, without even saying good-bye to them, the North

Pickenham living was combined with other villages. The special bond between the clergyman and parishioners was lost. The vicarage was sold and has been divided into flats.

Major changes have taken place with farming methods, including the demise of the small mixed farm. The role of the agricultural labourer has been taken over by large machines which are expensive to buy but do the work more quickly. Fields have been made much larger to give more space for the machines to operate. Planting takes place mostly in the autumn, whereas it was usually carried out in the spring. The fields look permanently green, and are brown only for a short period. Free-range pigs can be seen in the fields. This better practice was not adopted in the 40s when there was less concern about animal welfare. The main emphasis was upon meat production to feed everybody.

The hedges that used to provide cover for birds such as the nightjar have been removed or cut very short. With the removal of habitats such as hedgerows, the small birds have departed, and birds of the river bank, for example the snipe, are not seen along this stretch of the River Wissey. However, lately, subsidies are available for the replanting of hedges and for verges left fallow round the edges of fields. This practice can be seen in the area, and should encourage the return of birds, insects and invertebrates. Few people are employed on the farms now, and it is often a solitary life for the farmer. This is in sharp contrast to the communal life on the farms, and in the village, in the 40s.

The closure of the Swaffham to Watton railway line, which included our nearest station at Holme Hale, took place on the 19th April 1965 after serving the area for 90 years, with especially heavy wartime use. The Beeching Report led to the closure of the picturesque line. More people were owning cars, buses were replacing the railway, and lorries were taking the goods traffic away from the railway which had become uneconomic. My father, a railway enthusiast, was saddened by the railway closures across Norfolk, but he could still read about the routes and the heyday of steam in his railway books and magazines.

After World War II most airfields were returned to private ownership and to agricultural use. Runways were broken up, buildings demolished and it is difficult to find any traces left behind. It was different at North Pickenham. The airfield was retained for the purpose of launching and storing Thor missiles from July 1959 - July 1963 as part of the Cold War deterrent. In 1965 experimental aircraft Kestrel VTOL were flown from the airfield. Today, it has changed its use completely and become one of the first wind farms. Operating eight turbines and a radio mast, it is a prominent local landmark.

The Americans left the base in July 1945. Friendships had been formed and our attitude towards America was that it was the place to be with its optimism, money and glamour. The wish to travel developed, although travel allowance was restricted to small amounts of money for many years under the Exchange Control Act 1947 restricting the movement of our currency out of the country when our reserves were

low. Britain was benefiting from the Marshall Plan*, but large repayments had to be made for half a century. We adopted the idea of hire purchase and bought household goods on what was called the "never never". People were not ashamed to use this method of payment. It is doubtful if we would be considered "down-trodden" now as Carl thought in his letter of 1952.

The American and British authorities discouraged marriages between American troops and British women. Servicemen had to seek permission and could be given other postings and papers deliberately delayed. Sometimes unwanted births took place from such unions. An abandoned new-born baby boy was left in a doorway in the business area of The Walk in Norwich, and adopted by my uncle and aunt. It was thought that his father was American, but it was never proven, despite every effort to find out the parentage. He was named after the policeman who found him. This poignant affair and other sad heartbreaks were repeated across the country at the time, in one form or another. LIFE magazine in August 1948 estimated that in wartime Britain white US soldiers had fathered twenty-two thousand children out of wedlock**.

The influence of America has been increasing on a large scale since the 1940s in industry, business, tourism and culturally.

In the 1950s North Pickenham suffered the destruction of its two oldest historic features. These losses took the heart out of a small village. A 17th century

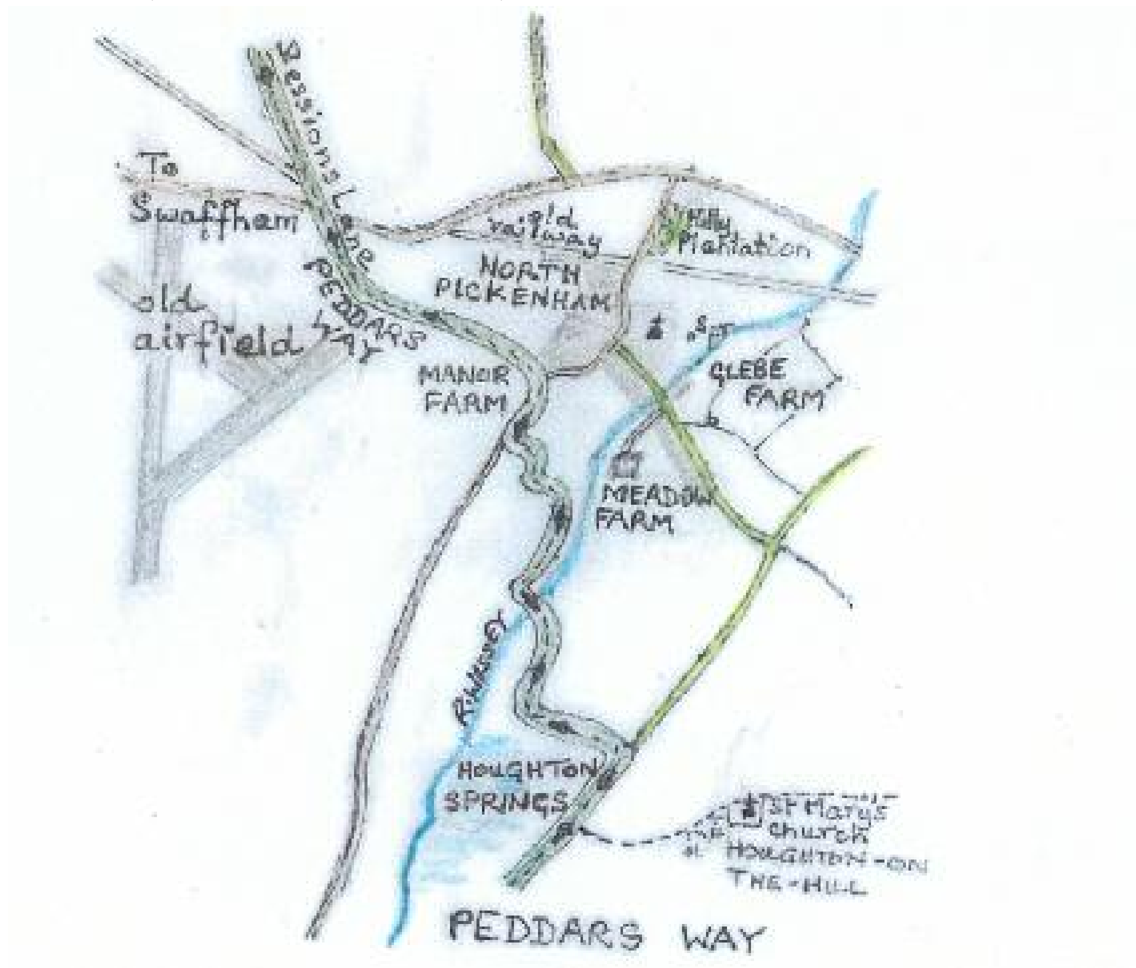
*Centre: Rose Cottage, right 'The Blue Lion' public house,*
*left the 17th Century Manor House demolished in the 1950s.*

**A large scale scheme of U.S. aid to Europe announced in 1947 by U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall.*

***see e-mail 3 Appendix*

small manor house or farmhouse stood at the centre of the village, and from our house we looked out onto this building. It was like an old friend, always there. A photograph clearly shows the mullioned windows dating from the 17th century. It was a solid building, built of brick and had been divided into three small cottages. This would have been quite easy to do using the simple original floor plan of the hall, parlour and service area. This type of building was common in South Norfolk. It has been replaced by modern housing development.

Further destruction took place in the 50s with the removal of the remains of mounds of earth and the surrounding hillside, of a Bronze Age Burial Ground. This ancient site was mentioned as a prominent site by the informative writers on Breckland, WG Clarke and Olive Cook. In the 40s this site was called "The Three Hills" and the Ordnance survey maps mark it as Hilly Plantation. Records suggest that the tumuli were destroyed about 1953. Today there is government guidance which would ensure that such sites are either preserved or fully excavated, reported upon and published. In 1974 the Norfolk Archaelogical Service was established to protect the county's ancient sites. It is evident how necessary this service is, but sadly too late for "The Three Hills" which we loved and where we used to play as children. It is incomprehensible that the ancient Bronze Age site had survived for centuries and yet was destroyed in the 1950s. Similarly, the Elizabethan manor house had existed for



five hundred years and was demolished in the 1950s too. There had been so much destruction during the war that a general lack of respect for antiquities developed. Another example of this post-war attitude was the widespread destruction of large country houses across Britain.

Two outstandingly successful restorations have taken place in North Pickenham with the reinstatement of the Peddars Way footpath, and the resurrection of St. Mary's Church at Houghton-on-the-Hill from its ivy-clad dilapidation. Both have come about through the dedication and enthusiasm of keen individuals, J.F Wilson in the case of the former, and Bob Davey MBE the latter. The new Peddars Way follows the ancient archaeological line as far as possible. Some sections had disappeared and new routes had to be negotiated with private landowners, twenty of whom objected to the plan. Consultation took place with two county councils, four district councils, six parish meetings, 51 parish councils and 16 bodies and government departments. It took three years of discussions and planning to achieve a final route for this 46 mile path from Knettishall to Holme-next-the-Sea which links up with the Norfolk coastal path. The new route zig-zags near the River Wissey as it approaches North Pickenham. In July 1986 HRH The Prince of Wales declared open The Peddars Way and the Norfolk Coast Path as new national long distance walking routes.

The Breckland area is enriched by its local history, ancient and modern. These treasures should be valued and conserved for the enjoyment and knowledge of future generations. It is especially important that schools actively encourage an interest in, and knowledge of, local history.

Flints from Breckland and around the county would have been used in vast quantities for the construction of the 13th and 14th century Norwich boundary walls, several sections of which can be seen today, and for the strong entrance gates that were the means of entering and leaving the city. The walls were 20 feet high and 2 ¼ miles in length. There were twelve gates: St. Benedict, St. Giles, Ber Street, Brazen, Conesford (King Street), Bishopgate, Pockthorpe, Magdalen, St. Stephen, St. Augustine, St. Martin-at-Oak and Heigham. The gates were demolished in about 1792. The ancient Guildhall displays a fine example of flint knapping, making attractive geometrical shapes and patterns. It is quite possible that flint knappers from Breckland were brought to Norwich to carry out this skilled work. The older Norwich churches, the Brideswell Museum and St. Andrew's Hall are built from flint, the local building material, and a high degree of ability would have been required to construct the walls and round towers to such a height.

Looking back over half a century of Norwich history many changes have taken place. St Giles and Chapel Field Gardens suffered severe damage with the construction of the inner link road from the top of St. Stephens to Grapes Hill. The Drill Hall, an interesting, castellated building erected in 1909, and opened in 1866 by the Prince of Wales, served as the headquarters of the 4th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment Infantry. It was demolished along with numerous other old

*In Norwich the Drill Hall was demolished in 1963 to make way for the new inner link road.*

buildings in 1963 to make way for a dual-carriageway road. My aunts could no longer walk from Earlham Road straight down St. Giles but had to climb up a narrow flyover which they disliked intensely. The priority of the motorist was placed above that of the pedestrians and the local residents. The environment and atmosphere of the area was destroyed. Chapel Field Gardens used to be a delight with well-kept gardens, a bandstand, and quiet sitting areas. Now the noise of traffic intrudes from all directions and the quiet pleasure has disappeared. However, it is pleasant to walk in the many pedestrian areas in the centre of the city.

It is distressing to witness the vandalism at Earlham Road Cemetery and the neglect at The Rosary. Crosses, and figures of angels, which I can remember standing tall and beautiful, have been broken off and damaged. At the Rosary the vegetation is so overgrown that it is impossible to see most of the graves, and gives the impression of abandonment. Surely there could be more respect for the citizens of Norwich who have contributed so much to the life of the city in earlier times.

Two large shopping malls draw people away from the old shopping area. The usual brand names that are found in any urban area are strongly represented. Fortunately, some independent shops have survived and provide a welcome alternative.

Great progress has been made with the construction of The Forum which replaced the old library after a severe fire causing the destruction of much archive material. A new hospital provides the latest facilities, equipment and treatment. The old Norfolk and Norwich hospital has been restored tastefully for residential purposes, as has Thorpe St. Andrew's Hospital.

The most important development in Norwich was the opening of the University of East Anglia in the early 1960s at Earlham Hall, the home of the Gurney family, notably that of Elizabeth Fry, the great prison reformer whose portrait appears on our £5.00 notes. The fine reputation of the university has grown internationally. It has brought to the city young people seeking intellectual challenges and a new influx of people from across the country and overseas. The little Victorian houses, two up and two down, in the Heigham and Earlham districts are often bought by parents for their sons and daughters while studying at the University.

My own schooling was particularly important for me. The 1944 Education Act gave me the opportunity to benefit from an Assisted Place at The Norwich High School for Girls GPDST. The teachers regarded their profession as a vocation, and were well-informed about their subjects. They were keen to widen our experiences beyond the classroom with visits to The Cambridge Arts Theatre to see "Let's make an Opera" by Benjamin Britten and to Stratford-upon-Avon to see "Twelfth Night" by Shakespeare. We travelled to London by train to see the Festival of Britain exhibition and this was a thrilling experience. Modern concrete structures such as The Royal Festival Hall, the imaginative Skylon sculpture, and the informative Dome of Discovery were demonstrating exciting prospects for the future. On our return journey we were served dinner on the train which was a treat. The other girls were highly amused to see me select roast pigeon for my main course. It was much too exotic for them. Further expeditions included field study courses at Flatford Mill and to Hadrians's Wall. It was interesting to visit other parts of the country and see different environments with their respective flora and fauna, way of life, and history.

King George VI died in February 1952 and the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place in June 1953. The ceremony was televised and we went to the air-base in North Pickenham to see it but we were unable to receive the pictures. The photographs in newspapers and magazines made a powerful impression.

In the sixth form I decided to work hard and achieved 3 "A" Levels. As a result I was awarded a Norfolk Major Scholarship. This enabled me to study for three years at the Froebel Educational Institute at Roehampton. There were interesting new subjects to learn, such as Philosophy of Education, History of Education, Comparative Religions, Health Education, Psychology and the usual 3 Rs, and a special subject of individual choice. My subject was Art. I chose to write a long study about the Hampton Court Tapestries and Modern French Tapestries, some of which I had seen in France, by artists such as Lurcat, Matisse and Dufy. This interest in tapestries must have been stirred by my grandfather's experiences with the Louis XIV tapestries at Didlington in the 1920s.

The spiritual and aesthetic quality of life can be experienced in the Museums, in the Castle Museum where the Norwich School of Painters are superbly represented, and in the Sainsbury Gallery at the University of East Anglia. The Cathedral and Churches with their long tradition of worship, teaching and

knowledge, and their wealth of treasures and beauty still provide places for contemplation, and a sense of continuity linking our history through the ages.

The modern statues of Mother Julian of Norwich and Saint Benedict by David Holgate on the West Front of the Cathedral are fine examples of our appreciation of the past. They make us ask questions. Who were these people? What did they do? What effect do they have on us today? How did the sculptor manage to create such beautiful work? We could be asking exactly the same questions today concerning the creation of the 9th Century murals at St. Mary's Church, Houghton-on-the-Hill more than a thousand years ago.

I have been interested to set down this important period of history in the 1940s from a personal perspective highlighting the life in one small Norfolk village that before the war had remained unchanged for generations in so many different ways.

I have described how the Americans, in our hour of need, came here in their thousands and helped us to win the war. I have emphasised their suffering and heavy loss of life. This study is a tribute to them. Our nation was poor and the American financial aid, under the Marshall Plan, helped our gradual recovery after the war.

This account contrasts village life in Norfolk with city life in Norwich in the 1940s and describes the life of one family and its many members, during these troubled times.

## APPENDIX

### EMAILS FROM: contactus@492bombgroup.com

1 Tuesday, 2 April 2013
Subject: Re: North Pickenham

Bridget,

Most of the 492nd men who survived the war did so as a POW. I recall at the 492nd reunion with my father someone commented, "If someone didn't know better they would think this is a POW reunion."

The best casualty figures I could come up with is a total of 520 men as follows:

234 men were killed in action
260 men became POWs
26 men were wounded in action but managed to get back to the UK for treatment

These figures do not include the RTDs (Returned to Duty). That's a casualty figure of those who were missing due to enemy action but managed to return. This includes those who escaped capture while downed in enemy territory and those who bailed out over the Channel and lucky enough to be rescued by British rescue/patrol boats.

Of the 260 POWs, 131 of them were put into German camps, the officers went to either Stalag Luft I or III while all the enlisted men went to Stalag Luft IV. The other 129 POWs were interned in either Sweden or Switzerland.

Those interned at Stalag Luft III (Poland) had it reasonably well until 1945, when the Russians began closing in. The POWs were forced-marched into Germany, where they were placed in box cars and railed to camps in Southern Germany. These camps were not as good as Luft III and for those who got put into Stalag XIII (my father) they almost starved to death before getting forced-marched to Stalag VII. Eventually everyone from Luft III did end up at VII and liberated by Patton. By the way, VII and XIII were run by the army, not the Luftwaffe, so the word Luft isn't used.

Those in Stalag Luft IV were also forced-marched for the same reasons. But unlike the officers at Luft III, these guys had no where to go.so they were kept marching around in a big giant circle throughout central Germany until getting liberated by Canadian and British troops.

Those at Stalag Luft I stayed right where they were even after being liberated by the Russians. They had no where to go so they decided to stay there until the British showed up. Meanwhile, no one is feeding them. The local Germans began feeding them in order to get them to stay in their homes because the Russians did not bother or molest any of the homes with US POWs living in them.

The ones in Sweden found out just how lucky they really were as they enjoyed a really nice life there. They stayed in fancy hotel resorts, free to go anywhere, date local girls and got their full pay regularly through the US Embassy. Even the military pay for enlisted men was rich compared to the local Swedes during the war. And with so many of their young men gone serving as volunteers in other armies, an American POW had all the Swedish girlfriends he wanted. Some of them did end up marrying one while others left behind a war baby. On average these men only spent about three or four months there before getting smuggled back to the UK (Operation SONNIE). From there they got sent home for a few months before getting redeployed to the Pacific Theatre. By the way, no one wanted to escape Sweden.

Being a POW in Switzerland wasn't as good as Sweden but far better than being interned in Germany. They too stayed in high dollar hotels and were given the freedom to enjoy the country but . . . none of them had the money to do so. They were instructed that if they created any trouble for the locals or were caught trying to escape then they would be placed in a very different camp. This camp was practically a death camp run by a zealous Nazi . . . who later became the only Swiss national convicted of war crimes.

Some of the 492nd guys did escape Switzerland while others tried but were caught and sent to the Swiss death camp. But most stayed at their resort hotels, also occupied by Luftwaffe pilots on leave, and learned to ski. Shortly after the Battle of the Bulge, the US began flying these POWs back to the UK. And not secretly either as they knew by this time there was nothing Hitler could do about it.

The reason the Luftwaffe stayed in the same hotels as the Americans was so the US wouldn't "accidently" bomb them. One veteran told me it was strange dining, drinking and skiing with those who just a few weeks earlier you were battling with, trying hard to kill each other.

2 Wednesday, 27 March 2013
Subject: Re: North Pickenham book

Bridget,

My father was a pilot at the 492nd, shot down and taken POW during that Brunswick bombing on 19 May 44. Seeing how he didn't get to North Pick until the last day of April, he never got a chance to go off base and meet any of the locals, therefore, he really couldn't tell me anything.

His best friend in life, Wayne Stewart, was a pilot with the 491st and also got stationed at North Pick. He was killed on that one deadly mission you mentioned in your book. It's sad to think that he was on his 30th mission and only a few hours away from finishing his combat tour and going home. My older brother was named after him.

By the way, that monkey on the base was bought in Morocco by one of the crews while on their way to England. It was against military regulations, but the Colonel turned a blind eye. What was he supposed to do? Kill it? Besides, he was on his second combat tour and knew full well that many of his men were going to be killed and felt he should allow them to enjoy their lives while they still could.

3 Friday, 22 March 2013
Subject: 492nd BG

Mrs Elliott

It's true that the US Army did tell the men that they had to get their permission to marry local girls. However, they did not have that kind of power as it was unconstitutional for them to say so. Their concern was the fact that all US servicemen were given $10,000 life insurance policies. If they died while still single, then their parents would get the money. But if married, then his wife would get all of it. The US Army was aware that not all girls are good girls and that there are those hoping to become a rich widow quickly. With such a large casualty rate in the US Army Air Force stationed in England, her chances of becoming a widow were great. Most of our soldiers were inexperienced "fresh off the farm" and could be easily taken in by a professional seductress, thus the lie about needing Army permission.

4 Monday, 1 July 2013
Subject: North Pickenham

The Two 492nd Bomb Groups

There were two different 492nd BGs during WWII. My website is about the original one who flew daylight bombing missions during the Summer of 1944.

The other 492nd also known as the Carpetbaggers was the OSS arm of the USAAF. They did all sorts of covert cloak-and-dagger missions at night. Today, such activities are known as Black Ops. They were organised in December 1943 designated as the 801st Provisional Bomb Group. The term 'provisional' means an outfit created by the military in the field whereas regular units are organised and funded by Congress. Congress allows the creation of provisional units in effort to give the military some flexibility. Provisional units are made by borrowing men and equipment from existing units already in the field.

Shortly after the Carpetbaggers Group was formed it was suggested that they be given a working cover, disguising them as a regular bomb group. Although the plan was quickly approved, it was decided to wait until after D-Day to do it. Congress had authorised and funded thirty-six bomb groups (72 planes per group) for the 8th Air Force but during the build up for the invasion, they allowed the 8th

AF to swell to forty groups. After D-Day, the plan was postponed again until the Allied troops could breakout of Normandy, which happened beginning with the infamous St Lô mission on 25 July 1944.

With the breakout achieved, General Doolittle was ordered to pick one of his many B-24 groups, disband it and give their identity to his 801st Carpetbaggers. He could have easily picked the 489th BG, the newest group in the ETO, or the 491st (also with less seniority than the 492nd) who had accidently blown up their own base during the middle of July (bomb dump accident). But since the 492nd had suffered such high casualties, they drew the proverbial black bean.

After the disbandment, the 801st Provisional was redesignated as the 492nd BG. Their old squadron numbers were given back to the groups from which they were borrowed from and then redesignated with the squadron numbers they had also got from the original 492nd. This was done as 'transfers on paper' as the men in the Carpetbagger didn't go anywhere or get a new job. They just woke up one day with a new group and squadron unit number.

This shell game was designed to confuse the enemy and their spies. So should you find this confusing . . . don't feel bad because it's supposed to be. Even today there are many people in the Pentagon and Washington DC who can't see the differences. Everytime anyone suggests that the original 492nd should get a citation, those in Washington respond by saying, "They've already got one."

Most of the Carpetbaggers records remain classified for decades after the war and some of the records are still classified as we speak. There are many reasons for keeping secrets but covering up mistakes or war crimes are NOT among them. Some of the covert tactics were reused in later wars and some needed to remain as available options for just-in-case. But the main reason for keeping these records classified is to prevent personal vendettas against the foreign spies, agents and operatives involved. Many of these people remained in their own countries after the war and their lives are still at stake.

For many decades the men who served in the Carpetbaggers were sworn to secrecy. The men were not allowed to talk about what each did, other than they flew a B-24 with the 492nd. Finally after 50 years, the gag order was lifted and now their stories are being told.

## CREW 615 AND THEIR FLIGHT MISSIONS FROM NORTH PICKENHAM 12 MAY 1944 TO 7 AUGUST 1944

Back row, left to right: Richard Wesson, *bombardier*, Armando Velarde, *pilot*, Harold Powers, *co-pilot*, Carl Taylor, *navigator*

Front row, left to right: Armond Berg, *gunner*, Arnold Malaske, *engineer*, Lewis Williams, *gunner,* Virgil Shoger, *radio operator*, Wesley Sarles, *gunner*, Norman Daniel, *gunner*

**Velarde Crew 615 Summary**

The Velarde Crew was one of the original crews for the 492nd BG that trained in Alamogordo, New Mexico. They transferred to the 492nd on 26 Jan 44 as crew 63 from the 331st CCTS (Combat Crew Training School) in Casper, Wyoming. No personnel changes were made to the crew. They were assigned to the 856th BS, designated as Crew 615.

Flight Officer Armando Velarde signed out for a B-24J, 44-40116. The ship was given the nickname, "TOBASCO KEEDS." In April 1944, they flew their assigned aircraft to North Pickenham, England, via the southern route. One of the staff clerks, M/Sgt Harmon flew with them, thus bumping Sgt Sarles onto the Queen Elizabeth.

By our count F/O Velarde flew as the aircraft commander for Crew 615 for a total of 27 missions, plus an aborted one. We can't be positive what personnel changes may have been made on some of their missions. We do know that their co-pilot was promoted and given his own crew (Powers Crew 614). It's always possible that the bombardier could have missed some of the pathfinder-led missions.

Velarde was the only original pilot in the Group that wasn't a commissioned officer. But the fortunes of war put him on the fast track for promotions. By July he was

already serving as a lead ship for the Group. During the three months at North Pickenham he advanced from Flight Officer to Captain.
The Velarde Crew was transferred to the 801st/492nd BG in August when the Group was disbanded.

**Original Roster for Velarde Crew 615**

| Position / MOS | Name | Rank | Serial # | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pilot | | | | |
| MOS 1024 | Velarde, Armando C | F/O | T-185424 | |
| | | | O-550855 | Promoted 2nd Lt<br>Promoted 1st Lt<br>Promoted Capt<br>Acting Assistant Operations Officer<br>Transferred to the 801st/492nd BG |
| Co-Pilot | | | | |
| MOS 1024 | Powers, Harold F | 1st Lt | O-692815 | Promoted to pilot Crew 614<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd, 857th BS |
| Navigator | | | | |
| MOS 1035 | Taylor, Carl G | 2nd Lt | O-692352 | Promoted 1st Lt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |
| Bombardier | | | | |
| MOS 1034 | Wesson, Richard S | 2nd Lt | O-752728 | Promoted 1st Lt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |
| Engineer | | | | |
| MOS 748 | Malaske, Arnold V | S/Sgt | 37322214 | Promoted T/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |
| Radio Operator | | | | |
| MOS 757 | Shoger, Virgil R | S/Sgt | 36635272 | Promoted T/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG<br>*Have seen name as Saccer* |
| Gunner | | | | |
| MOS 611 | Daniel, Norman C | Sgt | 35684921 | Promoted S/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |
| Gunner | | | | |
| MOS 611 | Berg, Armond | Sgt | 19148307 | Promoted S/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |
| Gunner | | | | |
| MOS 748 | Williams, Lewis D | Sgt | 38274553 | Promoted S/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG<br>*Seen name as Louis* |
| Gunner | | | | |
| MOS 612 | Sarles, Wesley B | Sgt | 33447299 | Arrived to the UK via the Queen Elizabeth<br>Promoted S/Sgt<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |

## Others Who Flew with Velarde Crew 615

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff Clerk | | | | |
| MOS 405 | Harmon, Horace | M/Sgt | 7002333 | Flew to England with the crew |
| Co-Pilot | | | | |
| MOS 1024 | Bowland, Orrin T | 1st Lt | O-809915 | From Bowland Crew R-11, replaced Powers<br>Transferred to 801st/492nd BG |

## Velarde Crew 615 492nd BG Mission Record 856th Bomb Squadron

| Crew Mission Number | Group Mission Number | Group Mission Date | Aircraft Serial Number | Primary Target | Mission Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | 02 | 12 May 44 | 44-40116 | Zeitz, Germany | Target: Oil refinery |
| 02 | 04 | 15 May 44 | 44-40116 | Siracourt, France | Target: Crossbow (V-1 rockets) |
| 03 | 06 | 21 May 44 | | Siracourt, France | Target: Crossbow (V-1 rockets) |
| 04 | 07 | 23 May 44 | | Avord, France | Target: Airfield |
| 05 | 09 | 25 May 44 | 42-110152 | Belfort, France | Target: Marshalling yard |
| 06 | 10 | 27 May 44 | 44-40116 | Saarbrucken, Germany | Target: Marshalling yard |
| 07 | 12 | 29 May 44 | 42-95272 | Politz, Germany | Target: Oil refinery |
| 08 | 13 | 30 May 44 | 44-40067 | Rotenburg, Germany | Target: Air depot |
| 09 | 14 | 31 May 44 | 44-40116 | Brussels, Belgium | Target: Marshalling yard |
| 10 | 16 | 4 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | Avord, France | Target: Airfield |
| 11 | 17 | 6 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | Normandy, France | Target: D-Day invasion coast |
| 12 | 19 | 6 Jun 44 | 44-40227 | Vire, France | Target: D-Day invasion coast |
| 13 | 20 | 8 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | Angers, France | Target: Railroad junction |
| 14 | 23 | 11 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | La Possonniere, France | Target: Marshalling yard |
| 15 | 29 | 17 Jun 44 | 44-40150 | Melun, France | Target: Airfield |
| 16 | 31 | 18 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | Luneburg, Germany | Target: Airfield<br>Bombed target of opportunity |
| 17 | 34 | 20 Jun 44 | 44-40116 | Politz, Germany | Target: Oil refinery<br>Aborted over the Baltic Sea, credited |
| 18 | 36 | 21 Jun 44 | 44-40067 | Genshagen, Germany | Target: Aircraft engine factory |
| 19 | 38 | 22 Jun 44 | 44-40067 | St Cyr, France | Target: Airfield |
| 20 | 47 | 8 Jul 44 | 44-40116 | Alost, Belgium | Target: Railroad bridge<br>Lead Ship |
| 21 | 50 | 13 Jul 44 | 44-40116 | Saarbrucken, Germany | Target: Marshalling yard<br>Lead Ship w/Green |
| Abort 51 | 51 | 16 Jul 44 | 44-40116 | Saarbrucken, Germany | Target: Marshalling yard<br>Led B Section w/Graham<br>Aborted, uncredited |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | 52 | 18 Jul 44 | 42-50456 | Troarns, France | Target: Tactical<br>Led C Section |
| 23 | 56 | 24 Jul 44 | 44-40116 | St Lo area, France | Target: Tactical<br>Lead Ship w/Turnbull |
| 24 | 57 | 25 Jul 44 | 44-40116 | St Lo area, France | Target: Tactical |
| 25 | 61 | 3 Aug 44 | 44-40116 | Mery-sur-Oise, France | Target: Crossbow<br>(V-1 rockets) |
| 26 | 64 | 5 Aug 44 | 44-40116 | Brunswick, Germany | Target: Aircraft<br>manufacturing |
| 27 | 66 | 7 Aug 44 | 44-40116 | Ostend, Belgium | Target: Oil dump<br>Lead Ship w/Adams |

*Courtesy of: 492ndBombGroup.com - an Arnett Institute Project*

**CREW 615**

The flight record of CREW 615, of which Carl G. Taylor was the navigator, and their missions from 12 May 1944 to 7 August 1944 from North Pickenham can be read above.

On June 6th 1944, D-Day, 2 missions were undertaken over the invasion coast of France. Over France there were 15 missions, over Germany 10 and over Belgium 3. Stationed at the North Pickenham base there were about 4 to 5 thousand men and women to support about 800 soldiers (flyboys). It was like a small town on our doorstep. When a crew had completed 30 missions, their combat tour was over and they returned to the USA.

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