Henry Shucksmith (1910-1994)

Call me Sir
Cor et cor loquitor

My father, Thomas Warth Shucksmith (1863-1949), partner with his sister Sarah Elizabeth Shucksmith (1861-1941), held tenancy of the White Barn Farm, Alvingham, from April 6 1908. This farm of 228 acres, poles and perches had been bought for £4,250 from the executors of Coates Sharphey and the adjacent Robinsons barn with 43 acres of land, part of it in Keddington, from Uncle Sam Shucksmith and he bought the Iron Bridge farm from Walkingtons for his son-in-law, Henry Pridgeon, with the proceeds (£1,032) by Henry Atkinson (1860-1921), husband of Aunt Louisa, (1865-1918), butcher in West Parade, Spring Bank, Hull. He smoked 1 oz. of dark shag daily and died while coursing his greyhounds after lunch which he had "eaten 'arty" at High Gardham, between Beverley and Market Weighton. The total acreage was 270 with about 20 threshing days, a 6 to 8 horse place, 6 horses couchant in winter.

Aunt Louisa, the 14th child of her parents, had been house maid with Aunt Sarah, cook, at Mrs. Alders, Albin Street, Hull and had probably got employment through the visits of their father to Hull to purchase leather and perhaps sell corn. They were devoted to each other and to Father. He became a bargee after leaving home and for many years worked at an oil and cake mill in Grimsby where Ernest Sharpley was manager and threatened him with dismissal for asking for a rise in wages. Being very careful and, with Mother's help taking in washing, he came to own 3 terrace houses in Legsby Avenue which he sold to pay for his share of the tenant right of the farm, but was able to keep his shares in the Queen Steam Fishing C. and the high dividend paid for years as considered my mother's pin money. Charles Osborn, husband of Betsy, née White, one of Mother's sisters, being the major shareholder and manager. Before 1908, Uncle Atkinson had offered Father the tenancy of Eastfield Farm, Patrington, but he had to withdraw because of depression. He was 45 when he started farming and in 1909 had another attack of depression, a cyclical event for the rest of his life. Aunt Sarah, together with Aunt Betsy Ann (1845-1942) who had never left home having had fits when a child for which her head had been shaven, kept home for their father Henry (1816-1904), master shoemaker and farmer, widower from 1887. His wife was Susannah, née Warth, of Leek or Thorpe St. Peter Waynfleet (1820-1887), death attributed in part to attending an evening meeting at United Free Methodist Chapel following a heavy washing day. Thirteen of her children followed her to the grave.

They lived in a thatched farm house owned by William Jacques next to Trafford's stores with most of the land on the village side of the Iron Bridge and adjacent "plats" being in fee simple; also living in the house was Uncle John (1843-1903) who acquired Topliss field - 8 acres - and barn on the way to the Iron Bridge, two small fields on the canal side of the road to Keddington, Topliss, bricked thatched cottage and large garden in Church Lane, small field and Butts bank and the 2 up and 2 down original cottage of Henry & Susannah Shucksmith which became Uncle Sam and Aunt Jane's first residence, then Johnny Coleman's and lastly Genny's residence. A further field, grass, which abutted the river Lud in North Cockerington was bought at auction after the price had been chased up by the rich vicar Revd. Benjamin

Curtis. Uncle John, who died from a cancer of the prostate at Aunt Louisa's in Hull, left his estate equally between Aunt Sarah and Aunt Bett, and after 1908, it was Aunt Bett's bounty.

From 1904, Aunt Sarah and Aunt Bett lived with Uncle Henry (1841-1930) in Church Lane, a thatched cottage enclosed in brick and tiled, outbuildings and 1-2 acres of tillage and orchard. He owned the first horse drill in the parish. He and his drill would be booked and he would set off with his drill soon enough to be at the place of work by 7a.m. It was housed at Genny's. He was a glutton for work; a stack of heavy wheat was his undoing at the age of 79 when he could work no more, having slogged his guts out on corn stacks being threshed. Aunt Bett continued to live with him until his death in 1930. He was the vicar's churchwarden for many years – the wooden candlestick and cross at St. Adelwold's Church were given in his honour on retirement. The other churchwarden was Charles Dowse, the village blacksmith, who had been apprenticed to grandfather Peter White (1834-1894) and who worked for his widow, grandmother Elizabeth Ann (1848-1920) from Tothill near Withern, until he bought the forge and Post Office from her in 1896 and sold it to Fred Phillipson.

My mother (1864-1952), the fifth and youngest daughter of the above was 41 when I was born on September 20th 1910, a forceps delivery in the eastern front bedroom (Dr. E. Sharpley). I think that her puerperium and convalescence was complicated and prolonged. A sickly baby was christened HENRY SAMUEL in the dining room by the circuit United Free Methodist minister. The aspirate was not recognized so I was always called ENERIE. Developed chickenpox with impetigo, leaving a scar on the upper lip, first noticed and explained to me by Dr. Benn, superintendent of the Seacroft Fever Hospital when I was a medical student: breast fed until I could talk and have never liked milk since. The nurse was Aunt Freshney who lived in a smallholding (Fen Houses) in Somercotes with her husband Marwood who, with Uncle William (1850-1924), farmed at Nuneaton, Notts and had a spell in Holderness until some paternity argument settled down. She called grandmother White Aunt; possibly she was a Pindar married to a White. She was related to J. Pindar Coleman. Her daughter, Marion, married Forman and lived at Conisholme. Alice Hand, daughter of the carrier Sam, was the first nursemaid with grandmother White, Aunt Sarah and Aunt Bett as adoring helpers.

Childhood memories date from the age of 3/4 years, my bottom being slapped as a reward for joining in with an audible obscenity in the general endeavour to send the cat out after its lapse at late teatime from acceptable hygienic practice, in "turn the mucky bugger out". I am indebted to Genny for this story, one of his many reminiscences. The garthman, milkman, etc, having brought into the house the evening's milking from 3-4 cows in bright steel buckets, would sit behind the door while he waited for a can of separated milk to take home: very often truly wending his weary way, for in winter times he would have spent the middle hours of the day under-draining the fallows – 2 to 3 chains of gripping, exposing and removing, cleaning and replacing as necessary the pipes, each perhaps 15' long, digging down with a special curved spade, 3' to 6' deep, the length of the tool determining the size of the spit of the earth. Having to sit on a pom (jerry) for constipation. The first maid I remember was Anne Dobson; rushing for a cap to get out on the lawn to raise it to the Revd. Curtis as he was driven up the Lock Road in his De Dion Bouton.

Aged 4-5 years, the appalling distress caused by whooping cough; spray vomiting, and I have never been able to vomit gracefully or with any sense of direction. Part of the convalescence consisted of a visit with Mother to her eldest sister Alice Jane (1860-1961) whose husband Ernest Skelton was a farm foreman on the Earl of Yarborough's home farm until disabled by tuberculous dactylitis. He was retired to a rent-free cottage at Ulceby until his death in the 1920's and his widow and Ada the daughter lived on rent-free for the next 40-50 years.

On our visit, we got off at the wrong station, Brocklesby, rather than Great Coates on either the New Holland or Barton-on-Humber line. Cousin Ada (1888-1978) was very kind and I remember fetching up as I chased the first deer that I had seen. On the way home, Mother and I sat on the sands at Cleethorpes before calling on Aunt Betsy (4th sister) and Uncle Charles Osborne at Albemarle House, Mill Road, the last word in 1904 building and quality Victorian furnishings. Uncle had a permanent suprapubic for years; they lived in their bedroom for years, resident help no longer being available. Finally, Aunt became disorientated, he died, and she a month later in 1953 or -4, both well into their eighties.

Age 5/6 years; a persistent nasal discharge developed and, being very late in being able to blow my nose, Father's admonishment to "Blow yar mouchy noes" was not appreciated for after a while I was unable to focus on the pictures in the Christian Herald at Aunt Bett's: it was nasal diphtheria and the palsy of the extrinsic eye muscles wore off after being away from school for 4-6 weeks.

Age 7/8; not very well and apple pie and thick cream was given to tempt my appetite: cream was never used as such, being kept in 2-gallon earthenware jars for churning on butter-making day (Tuesday), market day being Wednesday. Two Alfa-Laval separators were acquired in 1916-1918 and a perforated pewter saucer was used to sile off the cream from the top of the previous day's milk which had been strained from the steel bucket in which it had been brought to the dairy. A large wooden bowl for eggs stood on a fixed table at the entrance to the dairy above the tins of milk for collection by relatives.

George Stephenson Atkinson (1900-1948 – malignant endocarditis), a delightful teenager, from the age of 21 farmed with his brother John at Eastfield Patrington and when his adoring Aunt was staying there gave unforgiveable offence with pulling her leg by asking if she ever dropped an egg in her milk can. Aunt Bett fetched ½ pint of milk each day, wearing galoshes, called calloshes, if wet, until 1970 when Uncle Henry, at the age of 79, was exhausted by the heavy wheat sheaves following a dry summer and so he would sometimes collect. I remember him at the boot scraper being accosted by Genny who was in the meal house. "I should be frightened to death if I was yar age" – "Why?" – "Waiting for the end". On a Monday morning, he came to turn the wheel of the dolly washing machine. They lived very sparsely; often some of their weekly Hovis loaf finished up in our swill tub, each contributing 2/6 (the equivalent of 12 ½ pence) a week for house-keeping.

My first watch had a gun metal case – Mephisto – and a bootlace leather guard until this was replaced by a rolled gold chain, probably age 6. I remember showing it to Edna May Hand from the Washdyke who was an uncertificated infants' teacher at the Church of England school at North Cockerington, William Paulson and his wife being the head teachers. I could tell the time before school age of 5, unless Mother was purposely exaggerating to Binkie when our son Tom could not.

First bicycle in 1918; a Kirmar Arrow obtained through Charles Dowse for £8-9 which was considered an enormous price. 18” frame yet great blocks of wood wired on each side of the pedals: speed merchant who came to grief over the handlebars on the straight of Keddington Road, cutting the left knee just superficial to the synovium, ½ linear scar over condyle remains, an escapade not discovered by my mother until a night or two later when I tried to kneel with her for “Gentle Jesus…”. I had learned to ride a bike by pedalling with one leg through the cross-bar and on such a bicycle trip, I dropped grandmother’s pension of 2 or 3 half-crowns into the hedge at the post office and I could not find one of them.

I remember the infantry on route marches in 1914-1915, taking a break in the yard, talk of evacuation inland in case of invasion, Zeppelin raids on Hull and the Atkinson silver sent to the farm and Tom, my brother, who joined the Marines under the Earl of Derby scheme in 1916, sending me gulls’ eggs from Scapa Flow.

I remember an old couple, being driven from Louth in the carriage, getting the driver to pull up in the road opposite the kitchen window and a view of Louth Church between a lime and sycamore tree and they thought a whistle would produce a dozen eggs (eleven pence). Such behaviour ignored.

Aunt Sarah agreed to have turkeys and I fetched 6 Indian Turkey eggs from Miss Dowse, North Cockerington, all reared by loving care, not allowed to get wet, morning break of boiled egg chopped and onion tops; we had a 26/28 lb cock at Christmas – previously it had been poultry or Aylesbury duck of 5/6 lbs each, all bred and reared by Aunt Sarah who was a memorable sight in her print bonnet engaged with all the poultry which she let out and fed immediately after breakfast if daylight. Uncle Sam, performing the same function, ‘sarved’ both his poultry and pigs. Guinea fowl eggs were obtained from Wilf Masons of Highbridge Road; they thrived and would lay in secretive places. Both the turkeys and guinea fowls, when fledged, roosted in particular trees, the sycamore across the road a particular favourite. The guinea fowls were very pretty but when they decided to roost in a tree outside the waggoner’s bedroom, we had to go out of production.

Guests for meals revolved around the chapel, dinner (lunch) for the circuit minister after the morning service, tea sometimes for a local preacher before the evening service, and marvellous teas on Sunday School Anniversary Sunday and before the missionary meeting and Harvest Festival. There were no special services at Christmas time. One of the reasons was that it was the darkest time of the year and getting to chapel could therefore be very difficult. Even so, in the towns it was a Watch Night service on Dec. 31st which was the special service. Possibly in the years before I can remember, the midday dinner would consist of the pudding preceding the next course: it was less expensive that way. I remember in particular the Revd. Lang playing on his knee with his hunter gold watch chiming: he had been ordained when a Bible Christian and the United Free Methodist denomination had been formed in 1907 by an amalgamation of this movement and the Free Methodist and New Connection Methodists. The Primitive Methodists had separated from the Wesleyans in 1810 and the Free Methodists likewise in 1850. During my childhood, there was the United Free Methodists (Shucksmiths), Wesleyan Methodists (Trafford, Thomsons, Mrs C. Dowse and Pridgeons) and Primitive Methodists (Hands), chapels all extant. In the early 1920s, the Sunday Schools united and in 1930, so did the Methodist Churches. In Alvingham, the Wesleyan Chapel (1836) and schoolroom in the centre of the village survived as the one chapel, the Primitive became a traction engine shed and the United was bought by a retiring circuit minister, Revd. Hill, who bought a plot from Uncle Sam and built himself a house with the bricks and slates, having started life as a bricklayer. There were also two churches in one churchyard; St. Mary's, which had been the chapel of Priory of the Gilbertine order of monks, and an outstation of Louth Abbey, and St. Adelwolds, which had been the parish church. The former became the parish church of North Cockerington and the latter of Alvingham. Services alternated between the two churches until St. Adelwold's became too dilapidated and then St. Mary's only was used for several years until St. Adelwold's was restored by the Yarburghs (elevated to Lord Alvingham in 1927).

Despite the devoted membership of my parents, Aunt Sarah either at the organ or in the choir with Harold Pridgeon (later the organ was played by Violet Dowse or Edna Hand), the services caused only a distasteful emotion in me – I could not and never did sing and at no time did I find the sermons instructive or interesting. The harvest festival was an exception, particularly the sale of the goods on the Monday night and one evening missionary meeting when the Revd. Phillipson, who was said to be blessed with a vivid imagination (his brother was Robert who owned the threshing machine and a small farm), brought a lot of curios – assegais and tom-toms – from Africa. And the same went for the Bazaar and Aggregate Meeting at the Eastgate chapel in Louth. There was no way to avoid Sunday morning service and afternoon Sunday School. The Sunday School anniversary, held the first Sunday in June – new clothes then rather than Easter – the farm buildings whitewashed and wood tarred and the first trim of the garden hedge, I detested: special singing by the children with recitations, and the gloom to me was not relieved by the sports and outdoor tea before the Monday evening service. Aunt Sarah gave up her struggle to get me to attend services after she agreed that the sermon of a graduate minister resident did not come up to standard: a cause of my not going to chapel since 1929. My non-cooperation was a source of great displeasure to Father who became voluble about it.

There was a Sunday school seaside outing, the earliest to Cleethorpes by waggon or rulley, and after the Sunday schools were united to Mablethorpe by waggon and train from Grimoldby. There was also a yearly book prize and on leaving at 14, a Bible.

My mother, in the early autumn, used to call on all the houses in the village and beyond, collecting for the missionaries, which she did primarily to spread the Gospel but also to get away from home: she never called at any other house at any time in the year and the gossip related in the evening found a ready audience.

It was almost unknown for any of the village relatives to come for a meal except Aunt Bett on Christmas day. Uncle Henry and Uncle Sam came to tea on a Sunday: he spent Christmas day with them and once, when in his eighties, got lost in the dark. Uncle Atkinson would come in October with Ernest Waites who was a carter from Lund to Hull (17 miles, taking eggs, chickens, rabbits, etc. to market) and who looked after Uncle's greyhounds to course for hares, perhaps collecting 12-20, with a brace of pheasants caught by the dogs or more likely shot by Waites. Transport for these coursing days around Hull was difficult in 1914-1918 and with a choice of Canon Berry, Father Walsh and Father O'Flaherty, James Francis Robinson (Uncle's solicitor, who also farmed at Skeffling) and the parish priest at Hedon; a wagonette hearse covered with a tarpaulin and illuminated by a lantern was used for playing cards on very early or late travel. After Aunt Louisa's death, much to Aunt Sarah's chagrin, a Hull publican, an ex-wrestler from Bilham, came into the party. I liked him for he gave me several half-crowns. On one occasion, Uncle Atkinson had annoyed me and a parting bribe for reconciliation was resisted – coins were dropped down my shirt as I was sitting on the kitchen table being dressed after my bath in the washtub on the snip rug before the fire; it must have been a Saturday night.

Uncle Joe Bradley (died 1920), Lee Street, Louth, would stay and do joinery, repairs and saw wood. He was a favourite of mine and taught me to saw and enjoy woodwork: I have a Spear & Jackson saw bought when an apprentice in the 1860's, much worn down by file sharpening. As a widower, he had married Aunt Caroline (1845-1910) who, with Aunt Eliza, (1859-1943) had been a seamstress and costume maker and had saved money and owned a small farm in South Somercotes. Father thought this was part of the attraction, though Uncle Sam was more tolerant of him. He died in Leeds c.1926 having come to his sons', Will and Harry (also joiners), in c.1922; both of them from 1927 to their deaths were very good to me. Aunt Eliza and Uncle Joe King (1859-1932) who lived at Lime Villas, Eastgate, Louth, would often come for a few days at Christmas and Aunt's gift of a tin of condensed milk was much appreciated. Aunt Susan, Mother's third sister, widow Wilkinson, would stay a few days when she could and had finished with her push-cart milk round in Grimsby: finally dying from carcinoma of the breast, aged 80.

The bicycle produced pleasure and obligations. May-June before the ewes were clipped, I had to go to them to see if any were 'falweltered': if the ewe had become fixed on its back, by the weight of wool; abdominal distention led to death by asphyxia. In September, trips to the fens along the canal tow path from the Iron Bridge to 'Levi' and across it to Uncle Sam's rented fen to make sure that no cattle had strayed into the canal or the Eau (dyke). A raised island had been constructed in the lowest-lying part of Levi which used to flood before the 1930 Land Drainage Act and the River Board Act of 1948 brought deeper sea dykes and improved pumps. Over this island, a net was suspended which a wildfowler could, by remote control, drop over the assembled lapwings which had a ready sale in London until the Bird Protection Act of 1936. The Hand families were self-employed, poachers and vegetable gardeners all, wildfowlers and eel catchers, spearing them in the deep wide dykes of Saltfleet and Somercotes with a "stangad", a trident spear with a 9–12-foot shaft: particularly Ringer (Albert) and his brother Ned, expert reed thatcher of homes, plasher of hedges and sheep washer in the Lud at the Washdyke. Peter and his brother Sam had a carrier's cart: now the adjoining houses in which Peter and Sam lived are the centre of an abandoned car dump – "the caspha".

Besides the Sunday School outing to the seaside, Uncle Sam and Aunt Jane (née Paddison, a beautiful old woman – 'la vieillard') provided another, taking our 'trap' (i.e. a light cart which, unlike the big carts and waggons, did not carry the names T & S SHUCKSMITH – ALVINGHAM), pulled by a pony, the piebald Dolly being the first buy. Uncle Sam seemed to have a vested interest in the old trap – he may have given it to the partnership. Passengers had to sit as directed to balance the cart to take the weight of the shafts off the horse's back; straw was provided to keep the feet warm and Uncle Sam prided himself on his driving, being an expert in quartering the ruts on the bridle road to Conisholme and the other chalk-covered roads to Somercotes. Stabled – 'put up' at a farm near the sandhills, a short walk across them to the 4 miles of tidal beach to rake the rivulets for cockles and, if it should be August 'samphire' (which are ripe at the same time as wheat) were gathered for pickling. Aunt Jane produced very enjoyable grub, and a good day was had by all if Uncle Sam's vagaries did not lead to altercation as on the one day when Father was on the trip and so the driver. Uncle Sam was not yet ready for the return and was quite willing to walk home rather than accept directions for he fancied himself as a walker, remembering his courting days – walking some 6 miles each way from Alvingham to Boswell where Aunt Jane was in service. Uncle Sam and Uncle Henry were slim, tall men and both light on the feet, good walkers – the former more studied and the latter more rapid. Both had been apprenticed to their father, "Snobs", and worked in his cobbler's shop next to the post office for years, it being finally given up about 1915 when the benches were taken to their homes and where Uncle Sam would continue with repairs for the family for a few years. Both obtained alternative outside activities.

Uncle Henry obtained a corn drill and, borrowing a horse, would be employed to drill a field, rather than it be sown by broadcasting the corn with a fiddle drill, even parishes away, setting off perhaps at 4a.m. He carried the nickname "Pilgrim". As far as I know, he lived all his married life and afterwards in Church Lane, keeping a few pigs, selling apples and growing 1-2 acres of corn. On one occasion when Genny was helping him mow his corn, the sweat made Uncle bare his chest and made Genny exclaim, "cover yarsen up, yar so thin yar make me badly to see yar". He was a glutton for work and one bright full moon, mistaking the time, he got up and was so annoyed that it was only 2a.m. that he trimmed his hedge until dawn. He had always undertaken casual farm work and as a young man would go into Essex to mow at the corn harvest. He harvested on our farm. Attacks of diarrhoea were not uncommon in the hot weather of harvest and a labourer Paddison complained of it when teaming a waggon at the stack: Uncle decided he was a liar for he thought farting and diarrhoea incompatible or, at the least, extremely dangerous. His wife, who considered herself somewhat delicate, would only eat the white of an egg, died in 1904/05 and was not deeply mourned by her in-laws; Mrs. William Bett seems to have been her pal. From being a widower, Uncle was able to save money. He used to take me to Kews, taxidermist of Eastgate, Louth, for our haircuts: his with beard at 4d. His son Edwin (Ted with bow and umbrella) asked him if Mother died happy: he did not know. Ted became a grocer in Hull, failed and then worked for the Co-op. He had a brother who was a bricklayer and a sister, Polly, who was the same age as my mother. He was unique for a Shucksmith to be C of E, though before the Revd. Curtis made grandfather pay dearly for the Cockerington farm field, they may all have attended church sometimes. He was not intolerant of Methodism but never went to chapel: he minded his own business – he was unemotional.

Uncle Sam considered himself incapable of heavy work – which he never undertook – and so in his view, he had to be and was 'epon' (reverse of inept), performing with ease what others would have to do with great effort. When first married, they lived in the house where he had been born, Grandfather then being the tenant of William Jacques in the thatched farmhouse next door but one to the Trafford's village store. In 1890, they moved to a relatively new brick and slate house (the bulk of the brick houses probably dated from the opening in 1770 of the Louth Navigation Canal which brought a plentiful coal supply for the brick pits) with 15 acres of grassland. The house had been built by a grocer called Shipley which was Father's nickname for Uncle Sam. In 1903, his eldest daughter, when preparing to attend Uncle John's funeral, died of a subarachnoid haemorrhage and wedged shut the lavatory door, which bears to this day the saw marks of being sawn down the middle. The purchase of the smallholding was possible because he first bought Parkinson's paddock in the centre of the village to keep cows and then the first threshing machine which was fetched (donkey engine, threshing box and jackstraw) by the farmer wishing to employ the machinery rather than the flail – still in use in my childhood to obtain samples of corn before threshing to take to the corn dealer). Milking and butter-making would be done by Aunt Jane and she would almost certainly have to get Uncle Sam up to get him off to light the fire in the donkey engine on threshing day. From his experience with the donkey engine, he considered himself an expert at feeding a kitchen fire and, for want of anything better to do, he would annoy Aunt Sarah (who learned her fire management when cook at Mrs. Alders at Albion Street, Hull) over the fire in our kitchen for she too prided herself on fire management, and when she could stand it no longer, she would totter off to the dairy, sniffing and snorting away.

Uncle Sam showed a clean pair of heels when walking and was a stylish figure with his white shoemaker's apron wrapped up to his waist and tied over his ganzie (woollen Guernsey), not too heavy boots, probably his own make, and light long Wellington leggings covering at the front from the top of the foot to the top of the knee and held by a lateral slightly flexible spring which was held by a metal clip at top and bottom. It covered a longer area of the leg than the more usual leather and canvas legging. He would go to considerable expense to sport a good velour trilby hat. He was keen on personal hygiene in an idiosyncratic fashion; the place for a handkerchief – silk, probably – was around the neck (collars were not worn by the men except in their Sunday best – detachable dickie) or dangling from the top pocket. A nasal discharge was forcibly blown to the ground and flicked off the nose with a stylish movement of the index finger, and in the house any spit was adroitly placed on the fire back. The knives were steel and sharp and as they aged, sharpening wore them away and they became flexible. He prided himself that he could clean his plate so well from the first course at dinner that he did not need a second plate, and would put on this turn even when they entertained the circuit minister, having been told before dinner (lunch) when he was washing in the enamel hand basin behind the door in the kitchen to "swale 'is sen". He was a remarkable character and thanks largely to Aunt Jane, they became independent, a cow or two, Parkinson's paddock, threshing machine, small-holding, more cows, pigs and poultry, 150-160 acres. They were very careful but would buy the best even if little of it e.g., in later years, gorgonzola cheese if ripe enough after tasting at the International Stores counter; they would admonish any extravagance like Mollie sending a letter rather than a postcard. Robinson's Keddington land was sold in 1908 and the 100 acres Iron Bridge farm bought from Walkington. All purchases would be made devoid of mortgage for bad seasons in the 19th century which made foreclosure a well-known word to many so-called farm owners. He considered land at almost any price a good investment if you could pay for it. He, like all in the area, knew not the aspirate: his use of dialect was constant, deliberate, and artistic: Sam and Molly's son, Leslie, he called Lelly. From about 1915 onwards, he had to lead a catheter life, with frequent severe attacks of epididymo-orchistis, and when he took me to the Wembley Empire Exhibition in 1923, his catheter was in his hat. He died waiting for the Louth bus at the White Barn corner, just having admonished a car driver for not “blawing ‘is ‘orn” at the blind corner. (Probate Iron Bridge farm 100 acres; £1000 in 1933.)

My first circus was in the Quarry Field (the quarry for limestone for Louth Abbey) near Louth cattle market; cycled to Louth to have dinner (lunch) with Uncle Bradley, 30 Lee St., and then to the circus and the size of the elephant stools (turds) was the most abiding memory.

The Louth Flood of 1920 was first seen coming by Father when he went shepherding about 5.30p.m. up the Louth Road; he rushed back and then went to warn the Washdyke Hands to move any livestock as the flood was coming between the canal bridge between the Mill stream on the one side of the road and a deep ditch on the other. It came as far as the bend in the Lock Road, and swept down and destroyed the hay in the Alvingham fens. Jack cycled up next day to see Aunt and Uncle King whose Lime Villa had been flooded a yard deep from street water and it damaged their house and ground floor contents to a considerable degree; they had watched the wrath from a bedroom.

Holidays away from home were almost unknown except rarely to relatives. Father and Mother had a week in Skegness in about 1918 and thereafter in subsequent years a week at Scarborough, sometimes with Uncle Sam and Aunt Jane, and sometimes with Frank Pridgeon of Nunnets who, before this outing, had never slept a night from home.

At about the age of 9, Aunt Sarah took me, and most of the food, to lodgings in Scarborough, which I explored in detail. I had a very successful mackerel fishing trip, attended the concert parties at the Fol-de-Rols and at Catlins – Aunt Sarah so frightened of the crush on leaving that we came out before the end which made me furious. She was, as ever, very tolerant of a selfish and cheeky little lad. Next year, I went with Aunt Bett to visit her niece Carrie, married to a lorry driver, in Grimsby: her father had been convicted of manslaughter of his wife Mary Jane Bee (1857-) by setting her on fire, having thrown the paraffin lamp at her when drunk. Henry, Carrie’s brother, was a bricklayer in New York in 1948 and used to correspond with Mother.

I think that it was just before I left my parent’s bedroom that Jack (b. 1903) developed scarlet fever, the haematuria being a great find for Aunt Sarah who did the bedroom slops each morning. A bedsheet soaked in vinegar was suspended over his door, but supplies of milk and butter continued. He also was a pale-faced, sickly child but was the only one to learn and like swimming: Genny would describe his pallor as looking like a dish of cold spew. Before he could swim, he fell into the canal while crossing the lock instead of the road bridge when coming home from school, was rescued by and delivered home by Sidney Wright (killed in the 1914-18 War) who was rewarded by Mother with twopence: it was a thank you, not a measure of his value. When he had learned to float, he could apparently, when still, look like a corpse. He went to the Grammar School probably from the age of 11 to 15 years, unlike Tom (1897-1983) who left the village school to work on the farm at the age of 12, having passed a special examination conducted to permit leaving before 14, and was playing a full part in tenching with Genny in the winter, under-draining the land for fallow with gripping pipes. Jack did not take the School Certificate and reluctantly, as he wished to be an engineer, came back to work on the farm. Father had attended Samuel Bateman's private school in Keddington Road, Louth, which prepared candidates for all the preliminary professional examinations (I have his school Atlas) but he had to leave at the age of 14 to work on the farm, probably because Uncle Joseph (1848-1890) had suffered a severe shoulder scald; he subsequently farmed Poplar Farm (off Iron Bridge Road) and later the Abbey Farm where, a demon for work, he died from a perforated peptic ulcer. Caroline, his widow, and 3 young children went to live in Uncle Sam's old home. The three children were Cissie, Lizzie and Joe. Cissie married a war-time soldier, a miner from Nottingham, which turned out badly and she suffered from depression and delusions. Lizzie married Jim Crow, and, after his death, a widower, Jimmy Wilson, and had rheumatoid polyarthritis from the mid-thirties and died aged 92. Joe became an apprentice at Halls, jewellers and watchmakers, living with his cousin Sam and with Aunt Caroline Bradley at 30 Lee Street. He recalled Aunt being advised to wear her boots on the other foot when worn down at one side, and the re-use in the home of teabags used in the urns at the Eastgate United Free Methodist Chapel teas. Joe married Christine Johnstone and had a jeweller's business at Stamford and his window smashed because of his name during the 1914-18 War and to help him, Uncle Atkinson bought from him two large Victorian silver candlesticks for their silver wedding. Asthma, possibly induced by his wife, led him to Dargaville, New Zealand, in 1924, where he became bankrupt but eventually thrived. He died in the 1960's, aged 77; carcinoma of prostate presenting as shortness of breath from pulmonary secondaries. Aunt Caroline Shucksmith died in her Monks Dyke house, Louth: the pavement 2-3' above the road. Joe's daughter, Christine, was born with an Erb's palsy and her aunt, Miss Catherine Johnstone SRN, who was 'housekeeper' to Mr. Rawlinson QC living in Crown Office Row, Inner Temple, paid for her to come over to see a London surgeon in 1948: she came to me to arrange arthrodesis of wrist.

Jack Shucksmith (1903-1986) was an avid reader of Sexton Blake which was barred from me and this may have been a reason that I never read anything primarily for pleasure until middle or old age, my reading being confined to school and technical books. He took piano lessons from Mr. Price, Louth Parish Church organist, and practised so assiduously that further noise on my part was not encouraged: he was better mechanically than artistically with his music; and mine has been non-existent either way. He became a waggoner and in 1922/3, he gained the first prize in the Louth and District Ploughing Competition (held in Newmarket, Louth) with Col. Fenwick, president of same. A skilled cereal farmer first at the Abbey, then Grange Farm, Alvingham and, after selling the Grange, at a farm which he took at Foxfleet, Howden: he was almost devoid of interest in sheep and oxen. He never appreciated the folklore in farming and rather than relax around the fire, would study maths and Latin while farming, and after retirement aged 77, he obtained an O level in English, living alone, his wife Violet (née Dowse) having died in 1973 (a coronary thrombosis) and not taking a newspaper. An energetic, very bright person who never appreciated the niceties of life, had lived so narrow a life that his decided opinions, so loudly expressed, made him a loner.

My childhood was lonely and the memories are of the busy farm house and different obligations in the farming year. No friends of a similar age except occasional forays with Ernest Hand, of the corner Hands, returning home via the churchyard to a shed in Kirk Fen to smoke a Woodbine, a Park Drive or a Robin (silk cigarette card) 4d for 10, bought for us by Mrs. Graves who lived alone near the Wesleyan schoolroom and Trafford's shop, and sometimes (most dangerously) home-made cigarettes from clover knobs whiffed in a lair of thatch pegs in the eaves of the waggon house, the pegs being stored there in bundles when not in use for holding the thatch on the fodder of hay and clover (seeds) and corn stacks.

A cade lamb (or lambs) which I fed before and after school was a constant companion, running after me, chasing a metal hoop to the shop, carpenter's or blacksmith's: it was Fred Phillipson, the blacksmith, who warned me of the police during one foot-and-mouth standstill order. The cade lamb joined the other lambs in August and was wintered with them on the turnips, being sold in February or March: if there was any distress on my part at our parting, it was tempered by receipt of the sale price which was hoarded like a squirrel. My regular income was twopence per week and any surplus after expenses was saved with gifts from aunts and visitors: these savings of £150 were used to pay for the Fellowship course and that Diploma in 1935.

A bottle of gin was kept to revive newly-born lambs which had to be brought in to the hearth when suffering from cold and this bottle would furnish my first taste of the stuff. A barrel of beer in the pantry was broached at harvest time; Aunt Bett would even enjoy the "ullage and spillage" and apparently Tom seemed to have such a liking for it (he confessed at 84 that he had always liked the taste) that Mother stopped the practice. Mother's aversion and the tragedy of Mary Jane Bee, and the Band of Hope meetings at the Chapels, possibly a speciality of the Primitives, made it a teetotal home.

Beyond the Daily News and the weekly advertiser, the Bible and Methodist Hymn book, The Christian Herald & Sunday Companion from Aunt Bett (read largely for the serials), reading matter was limited to about five books of which one was "Mary Slessor of Calabar". Aunt Bett would come on Sunday night and read to me "Masterman Ready", "The Last of the Mohicans", "Robinson Crusoe" and "Treasure Island". Then came the Sunday School prizes and later the weekly Arthur Mee's Children's Newspaper and the monthly Wonders of the World series: so probably there was a modest amount of reading but as yet, no Lindsey library service – it had to await the motor van.

The kitchen was the hub of the farmhouse at White Barn Farm, a 20' by 18' room with the longest dimension from window to fireplace. The window and the outer door, protected by a porch on the west wall and the inner doors to the passage and back kitchen on this side, giving a relatively draught-free area around the fireplace which was flanked on either side by floor-to-ceiling cupboards for storage: groceries and shoes on the one side, jams, bottled fruits and men's boots on the other. The fire-grate in the open black-leaded range was elevated about 18" from the scoured hearth stone in which there was a grate over an ashpit which needed emptying each 14 days – the ashes for the petty, earth closets (privy) the whole hearth being surrounded by a steel fender hooked to each side of the range. There was a deep fireback on which cinders raked from the ashes were stored and the coke, which was kept in the open under the kitchen window, was dried; and from a transverse bar in the wide straight chimney a recken crook with three hooks was suspended for copper kettles or iron cauldrons or steamers. The fire area could be enlarged by elevating the hob which, when flat, was used for smaller kettles or pans. The boiler on one side, holding perhaps 2 gallons, provided some hot water which was ladled out of it with the boiler can: on the other side was the oven which was high enough for the fire to be drawn under it, the flu being controlled by a damper in the recess above the oven. The oven was big enough for a 30lb turkey: milk puddings and the like could be kept warm on top of it or tureens and plates warmed there. Kindling for next morning's fire lighting was dried on top of or in the oven during the night, and a straw bundle was dried on the edge of the hearth.

Picture the grate in full spate, banked high with coal, coke or faggots, to provide dinner for 12, oven roast and Yorkshire pudding, fire for steaming potatoes or vegetables and either a boiled or a milk pudding. In the ceiling at right angles above the painted brick fireplace surround, in which there were two brass knobs just below the mantlepiece, was a 2" meal runner holding a metal hook which had been part of a turnspit. This fire was lit every day of the year until 1920, when a paraffin stove and oven was obtained for the back kitchen to be used on the hottest days of the summer when the heat of the sun streaming through the window made the kitchen almost intolerable. Father would light the fire about 5.30a.m., early enough to fry up with dripping yesterday's left-over potatoes to accompany the basic dish of cold stripey bacon for the first breakfast.

The kitchen ceiling was evenly divided by a beam which provided support for a dividing bedroom wall above, running parallel with the fireplace. Six to eight large single hooks came from the joists a few inches from each of the side walls, and large double hooks on the window side of the ceiling beam.

The preparation of food, catering and cooking and provision of meals at set times for 10-12 people, many of them working hard and with enormous appetites, was a major daily task, with extras. The two threshing machine men came for their meals on the 20-30 threshing days, one or two sheep clippers on their 2 days, harvest hot dinners and teas to the residents working in the fields, extra tea and oatmeal drink for the men building the stooks in harvest time, which could be a very hot period. After Father had started the breakfast at 6a.m., the maid would come down and help with the preparation of the lunch bags of bacon sandwiches and sweets for the horse men who would be working in the fields until 2-2.30p.m. At about 7.30, Mother and Aunt would have their breakfast and on school days at about 8 a.m. or later at week-ends, I would come down, wash hands and face in the back kitchen, toast a couple of rounds of bread before the fire, sitting in a child's armchair (bought for 3 shillings for Tom in 1899 and now in 1981 valued at £75 after removal of the paint and waxed with our own blend of beeswax and turpentine), and plaster the toast with the butter made by Aunt Sarah – who liked to see me use a lot as she felt that it would be good for me – and with this, have a cup of cocoa. At 9.30 a.m., the men of the family working in the yard came in for lunch, a farinaceous meal.

At 12.30 dinner which, except for cold beef or mutton on Monday, was a hot meal: perhaps boiled bacon and cabbage, boiled mutton and onions, boiled brisket, cockerel, and from the last three there would be separately consumed broth, maybe with dumplings. Hens would seldom be used; they were sold to the 'chicken hucksters' who came round for them in their trap to sell to the Jews who had moved into the big towns after the pogroms following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, such hens being Kosher food. Rabbit pie and occasionally roast or jugged hare would be on the menu, but never pheasant nor partridge. Roasts were mainly reserved for the Sunday dinner, in the dining room if there were guests – the maid and the waggoners being left in the kitchen – otherwise we all sat around the large table in the middle of the kitchen. It was a strong deal table built by Uncle Joe King, permanently covered with American oilcloth with a white linen tablecloth superimposed for meals (no serviettes) and, in the evening, when the kitchen became the maid's sitting-room, joined sometimes by the waggoners, covered by a chenille-type table cloth (a better specimen for the dining room expanding mahogany table). The maid and working men sitting on the window side, Father carving at one end and Mother taking the end near the dresser which she could utilise as she rushed from the fireplace and oven to dish up and serve the mashed potatoes and vegetable or puddings, boiled or apple pie or milk puddings (half-skimmed milk), rice or oatmeal and sultanas. The ribs of beef were roasted to contain next to no blood as Father was the only one to like and tackle rare beef; the fowls were excellent with forcemeat stuffing, and the Aylesbury ducks (reared by Aunt Sarah) were superb, likewise the guinea-fowls. These birds were not appreciated by Father, beef, mutton and bacon being his favourite. Boiled ham was eaten cold, particularly for guest teas.

Food from the 12.30 dinner would be kept warm for the ploughmen who would come in for it about 3-3.15 having stripped their horses, watered and given them a feed before cleaning them with a curry comb: to be brushed later after further fothering before the bedding-down straw was put down in the cleaned stable. When the land was wet and soft, it stuck in large lumps on the hair of the fetlocks and, bouncing about on walking, could make the fetlocks sore: so, on each farm there was a horse-pond and when necessary, the horses were taken straight to it and the 'clags' washed off before the horses were taken to the stable.

Tea for the women and me was at 4.30p.m.: cold left-over meat and sweetmeats. Father and men of the family 5-5.15 and the waggoners at 5.30: all over perhaps by 6p.m. A cup or basin of warm milk with brown treacle was consumed by the elders at 9 p.m., just before bedtime. Fresh milk fortunately was never drunk; abortus was rife and shewn by the number of dropped calves some seasons, and there may have been bovine T.B. Aunt Sarah had senile tuberculous glands of neck (1937) and a rodent ulcer of lateral forehead. Father a rodent near the left inner canthus (1931).

Beyond the daily routine for meals, as soon as breakfast was over, Mother and the maid washed up in a large metal pancheon on a table under the window with warm water ladled from the boiler and, after the big wash-up after dinner, boiling water from the 4-pint kettle might be added. The washing-up water, very often fatty, was emptied in the swill tub for the pigs – a greasy unsavoury mess in a divided barrel wooden tub. Aunt Sarah would don her bonnet and, according to season, other clothes, to go and let out the ducks and chickens and feed them. She would return to the house and go upstairs to air the beds before making them, all the mattresses being feather-filled, and empty the slops and, with Mother, would complete the bedroom work, which in the wintertime could be perishing.

Each day of the week had special household duties. Monday: washday for 10-14 (Aunt Bett, and later Uncle Henry, who came to scrub in the wooden tub and turn the handle of the peg washing machine, would add theirs); hot water from the large open boiler in the back kitchen, the water being removed from the clothes by an enormous wringer. Clothes were put on lines attached to the meal house and laid on the garden hedge, and finally, clothes-horses were filled up.

Tuesday: separator, milk buckets and all dairy utensils washed in really hot water and scalded, separately from each other. Cream which had been siled off the milk churned in a barrel churn in the dairy in hot weather, when it could take hours, but on the window side of the kitchen at other times. Buttermilk for pigs. Butter kneaded by hand to press out fluid and finally beaten into pats with wooden pats and weighed into 1.1lb pats plus 1 penny-weight to allow for evaporation if checked at market.

Wednesday: ironing. Father would drive the high trap (made by Uncle Joe King and his brother George) to Louth market, calling on his niece Lizzie Crow at 30 Lee Street and spending time with Freddie Snowden, the butcher in Mercer Row; Mother and/or Aunt Sarah would go to Louth with him. They would deliver a large hamper of consumables to Aunt Eliza King's at Lime Villas and put up at the Temperance Hotel. Uncle Sam might go with them and annoy Father about balancing the trap and the need for more straw to keep the feet warm. A mid-week joint might be bought.

Thursday: clean bedrooms, dining room, hall, and dairy. Cake and pastry making.

Friday: cattle market at Louth for Father, sometimes selling hogs or bullocks, though these were often bought by dealers, e.g. William Heath, coming directly to the farm. He would often bring home herrings, hake or haddock bought at the Fish Shambles, Eastgate, and this meant fish tea. Mother, I think, thought this fish tea a bit of a nuisance as Friday was her baking day: a large pancheon or two of dough placed near the hearth to help it to rise and then kneaded for baking into loaves or flat-cakes: the latter with fresh farm butter (Joe King's expression) and golden syrup were scrumptious. The carrier, Sam Hand, and later, Jud Smith – went to Grimsby on a Friday and a hamper of farm produce would be sent to Aunt Betsey Osborne (butter being omitted in hot weather which gave for her an unacceptable taste, attributed in the spring to buttercups) she would send back sole or plaice and, until Grandma White died in 1920, for Good Friday, a large cod and a large tin of oysters (for sauce). Uncle Charles Osborne, a teetotal fish merchant, had founded the Queen Steam Fishing Co. in about 1900 and it thrived until the 1920s and then continued to pay a good dividend (capital distribution) and my father had been able to leave in the company his small investment when he took up farming: the dividend was my mother's pin-money.

Saturday was lantern day, which was Aunt Sarah's province; wash chimneys, trim wicks and fill with paraffin 4 storm lanterns, small single burner sessile kitchen lamp (which was often put on the tea caddy to spread its light a bit more), a double burner pedestal or (later) round wick lamp for the evening in the dining room – eventually replaced by an incandescent mantle Aladdin lamp which made reading easy. Saturday was also clock-winding day: Mother's Grandfather in the kitchen standing in the corner between the washing-up table under the window and the Shucksmith oak bureau, and Aunt Bett's grandfather clock in the dining room which, because of the low ceilings in both of grandfather's houses, had had the brass finials removed and been somewhat reduced at the bottom because of standing for years on earthen floors. Whichever the paraffin lamp, the wick had to be even and clean of carbon. "Waste not want not" being a family motto, lamps

were turned down whenever possible: on a Sunday evening, tea on that day being meatless, water jelly or custard blancmange or even a small tin of West's Salmon being the main alternative dish, supper was put out on a serve-yourself basis. Once Father, last out of the dining room, dealt with the Aladdin lamp but turned it up; screams from Mother when she later went back to the dining room and found a black ceiling and lamp chimney – and her remonstrances were countered by the known joy she had in cleaning. Saturday was also the day for tidying up the pantry to the dresser in the kitchen for use in the bedrooms.
The largest extra item for the house was pig killing and "getting it away". About five fat 30-35 stone pigs were killed in the period from early November to mid-February for the house, and one each for the married labourers, a fat pig, potatoes, coal and faggots (but not milk) being part of their wages. The pigs were fed by Genny, the garthman, on barley meal, swill or skimmed milk if there were no calves of the 3-4 milking cows being reared on this separator milk which was sterilised with the searing iron before being fed to them; fish meal was occasionally used but it was avoided if possible as it made the meat taste of same; boiled potatoes – the small ones were called pig potatoes – were an appetizer for the pigs when the outside Soyer stove field boiler was obtained in the disposal of army stores.

The pigs were killed on a Saturday morning almost as soon as it was light and either the back-kitchen or later the field boiler was boiling and, as it was one of my interests, I had to get up earlier than usual; the two butchers brought a rope noose which went behind the upper incisors and the pig had its head extended, by tightening the rope over the crook of a door, sufficiently for the butcher to plunge his knife into the neck to cut carotid or innominate artery, maybe the arch of the aorta, and the animal died from exsanguination. The carcass was cast into a large shallow wooden tub, provided by the butcher, scalding water poured on and the hairs removed with scrapers. The depilated carcass was suspended by the heels (Achilles' tendons) on a cambrel and hoisted by a block and tackle in the barn; the head was severed through the neck and then the chest and abdomen were opened by removing a belly piece – the wider, the fatter the pig – of fat and perhaps a slip of rectus abdominis and this was cast over the cambrel to solidify when cold. Complete evisceration with lungs (the pluck), heart and aorta in one piece – the lungs were minced for mincemeat in some households which utilised everything from the pig except the squeal (with us, the pluck and spleen became dog food) – the apron or Kell (great omentum) was removed and cast over the cambrel and then the guts and bladder. The intestines were brought to the back kitchen where, except for the large intestine, they were washed out (the bladder could be kept to be filled with lard). The stomach, the tripe, was separated and it was the small intestine which was to provide a most important item – the sausage skins or 'tharms': this intestine was everted and scraped with a wooden spoon until it was transparent, which the skilled operator (Aunt Bett) could do without perforating it, and then was stored in salt water until the Monday. If it was a cold day, the belly piece as well as the Kell would be brought into the house in the evening to be cut up into small pieces to be ready for "getting the pig away" on Monday.

The butcher would come to early breakfast on the Monday and cut up the pigs, often by lantern light. The retroperitoneal fat was the major source of lard but also contributing were the fatty trimmings around the hams, shoulders and flitches which were not required for the fries of liver, kidney and pancreas covered on a plate or dish by a thin piece of apron and eaten fried with shallots. The fat was cut into small pieces, and any grey pieces removed for the hens – these were lymph nodes, unwittingly perhaps infecting the chickens but protecting the humans if TB were present – and then rendered down in the wide preserving pan and finally the lard ladled into 2–3-gallon earthenware jars and the residue of 'scraps' were, when fresh, a delicacy and when old, chicken fare. The sausage meat was the final cut; lean trimmings with some cut-up fat trimmings, minced, mixed with old bread and seasoning (sage, salt and pepper) and then once more turned through the sausage machine to fill the tharms which were dropped into an earthenware pancheon and finally at about 5" intervals, the tube of meat pressed empty and the sausage skin twisted to give the final sausage. The fresh sausages of October/November were a gourmet's delight, and the Bramley apples stored in straw all around the dairy floor came into their own, but monotony as the season wore on overcame relish and by New Year, even fresh sausage had lost its charm; and when semi-dried sausages, which had been suspended from the kitchen hooks in their links were served after boiling, they were enjoyed only by those with a specialised taste.

The special features in cutting up these large fat pigs were the chines and spare rib: the spinal column was separated with the cleaver in the region of each costovertebral joint and there was 6" of skin, fat and muscle adherent to the laminae and the whole column was divided transversely to give chines of different sizes. Occasionally, a small fresh chine would be roasted and served with sage & onion and/or apple sauce, but the larger ones were always salted and dried and eaten after boiling, and they furnished a delectable cold dish when in June parsley was profuse. Incisions perpendicular to the swarth were made parallel to the spinous processes and were filled with finely chopped parsley (a large chopping board with sides and a guillotine hand knife were kept for the purpose), the whole wrapped in parsley in a linen bag and then boiled or roasted; it provided a delectable dish for entertaining to tea at Chapel anniversary time in June. The other special joint from these pigs was the spare rib: all the ribs were taken out of the chest wall – probably to make it more likely that the thoracic part of the flitch would cure properly. When porker 8-12 stone pigs replaced the 30-40 stone bacon pigs, the carcass was cleft down the middle of the spinal column and the ribs were left in situ: no more spare-ribs and no more chines – the half-chine was sold as spare rib.

The basis of the preservation of the standard joints and flitches was salt, the whole immersed in brine or laid on a layer of salt and salt rubbed into the surface. The difficult part to preserve was the attachment of muscle to bone and this area, pricked by a carving fork, had a preliminary treatment by rubbing in saltpetre. The brick pantry floor was half covered with these joints lying in salt, probably for about a month, racked up for a few days to drain after the excess salt had been removed, and then the hams and smaller joints were suspended from the hooks at the side of the kitchen and the flitches from the double hooks on the window side of the table until judged dry – perhaps another 6 weeks, or less if the flies had started. The dried specimens were placed in linen bags and then taken to a fly-proof wooden bin in the sunless bacon chamber.

Sometimes, the cure was not a success, a tragedy for the one-pig household: it could have been regarded as a status symbol, for such were the only ones that could eat it. A wreasty flitch fell into this category but the perfectly cured ham had an excellent and matchless quality in those days.

Those unobtainable delicious sausages, pork pies, sausage rolls, jelly or brawn, spare ribs, even scraps and fries, provide the most nostalgic memories and made one a connoisseur when one adds stuffed chine: many years later, when fried bacon and eggs were eaten, the flavour of the flitch from the frying pan was remembered. Cold bacon required a good deal of mustard and pickle to give it pique, onions, red cabbage and samphire being consumed in large quantities, and HP sauce more the standby at Aunt Bett's. These special dishes are remembered even more than the luscious ducks, tasty guinea fowls at Sunday dinner and large beautifully cooked turkey on Christmas day: all home-reared, prepared and cooked with appropriate stuffing of suet, bread, eggs and parsley.

The waggoner was the number one horseman, having another man to help him in the stable. The single men were engaged for 1 year, at Martinmas and at Candlemas; married labourers lived in tied houses. The value of the horses was 20-25% of the tenant right and their well-being was essential financially: fit horses with a shiny coat not only looked well but worked well – waggoners from different farms vied to have the best 'turn outs'. The standard diet was chopped winter oat straw – the corn that was cut first in the harvest, kept in the stook longest to 'weather' and stacked last – crushed oats and wheat chaff and possibly some chopped mangold wurzels and hay in the top rack. A little arsenic (which could be bought as a rat poison) or wheat would add lustre to the horses' coats. Careful grooming took some hours in winter time when 6 horses were couchant in their stalls when not working, being bedded down and wheat straw changed each day. The horse manure had a relatively low nitrogen content, being mainly straw and urine. They were turned out to grass after being groomed and fed from April to September: when first released from their winter confinement, they rushed across the road to the horse field and frisked about and farted with delight. The change of diet might have serious consequences: a horse affected with colic might die – drinks of Osmonds, bran mashes, hot blankets to the belly, balls shot down the gullet with a wooden plunger gun, and arm length rectal manipulation were all tried to relieve a stoppage. Not much faith was placed in the vet but an equal amount in the unqualified as in the qualified.

Not only were the horses responsible for all traction on the land, but they had to fetch and carry away everything to do with the farm. Before these road journeys, 8 miles most commonly, sometimes 20 miles, the horses were shod by Charles Dowse, Fred Phillipson or Jim Crow, the collars and harness dubbined, the brasses on the forehead and blinkers cleaned, every attempt being made to have a smart team pulling a clean waggon displaying the partners' names and village (on all carts and waggons except the pony trap) and naturally, the waggoner led the convoy. Several tons of coal would be brought, steam for threshing and the engines doing deep ploughing, and Barnsley nuts or the like (say 7 tons) for the farmhouse and one or two labourers and fetching these from Louth G.N. Station plus coke from the gasworks (stored in the open to get rid of the smell) might mean 2 or 3 journeys. Lime from the kiln on the Grimsby Road at Louth, linseed and cotton seed cake from the station, and faggots for the farmhouse and labourers to provide some kindling from a distant wood at Tothill. When an old thorn hedge was plashed (by Peter Hand et al) the tops were bundled into thick fascine (faggots) and sold to the drainage or coast defence authorities to reinforce the edges of the deep dykes and a focus for the collection of sand in the sand dunes.

When carting coal and other solids, the waggon bodies were made deeper by slotting into the sides detachable boards and when carrying, faggots shelves, as for the hay and corn harvest, were affixed. The usual waggon was heavy and cumbrous and would carry 2-3 tons of solids. The dilly which was much lighter, had a smaller body, but as large an area of shelving for hay or corn. A cart such as was used for carting manure or collecting wozzels or swedes or potatoes – the land was too soft for a waggon – could be converted into a harvest waggon by fixing a pair of wheels at the front which carried an overhanging platform and shelving around it extending over the cart. This hybrid was called a MOFF, dialect for hermaphrodite. Grandfather had a dilly waggon built by the local wheelwright and joiner; it was a light waggon. Father bought it back into the family at the sale of Henry and Louisa Thompson's at the Grange; in 1949, led by Gibbons the waggoner, it carried him to the churchyard drawn by his favourite horse Dolly, bought at the sale of G.S. & H.J. Atkinson, Eastfield, 1944.

Barley sold for malting was delivered to the malt kiln at Louth Station (now part of Dalgety) for grinding to meal, put on rail or to the corn merchant's warehouse at the Riverhead (canal); similarly, best wheat, peas, beans, tares; second quality, if not sold as such, along with most of the oats, were kept for the farm stock, any grinding being carried out at the Alvingham water mill owned by William Bett, being taken and fetched by cart.

Ploughing would start from the end of August on "put off" harvesting days which would be sown with the winter corn, wheat on the manured grazed seed (clover) land, beans or turnips after an intermediate white crop and winter oats after a black crop. Barley might be sown in the spring on land previously harvested of a black crop but it was always the crop for the turnip land.

(Lincolnshire rotation = fallow/turnips, barley, clover, wheat, peas/beans, barley/winter oats; East Riding rotation = fallow, wheat, [clover, perhaps], wheat, peas/beans, oats.)

Each year, 10-15 acres would be fallow; it was its turn in the 5–6-year rotation. Land full of thistles or wet land were possible indications that the drainage system required maintenance. The land was in ridges and furrows and the gripping pipes, in situ some 20-40 years and now partly blocked, lay somewhere deep in the furrow; the precise location was found by the red sediment from the tile left when the 4-5' pricker found it and marks were set up. The land was then ploughed to increase the ridge and take an extra furrow out of the area over the pipes: it made it easier to expose them with the gripping tool and this exercise would extend to January and February, providing a job for the little lad to lead the 3rd horse which was yoked to the front of the other two when finishing the deep furrow, reaching the field at 7 a.m. and then moon full. Later, this field was 'worked' until it must have been dizzy: hoping to kill weeds – thistle and twitch (couch grass) – and when very dry, small clods would be broken up with a small double hammer on a long shaft to release entrapped twitch for collection and burning. White turnips would be sown in May and most years, a good crop for the ewes was produced. Throughout November-February, this would be folded (strip-grazed) on the turnip lands. The turnips were harvested by pulling them up with a short-handled two-prong fork, topped and bottomed by a stout knife in the right hand and by dexterous use of the fork, holding the turnip and tapped on the back of the knife, projected into the turnip cutter or heap nearby. The cutter was a series of knives at right angles arranged in a helical fashion on a large drum which was turned by hand. The old ewes with bad teeth needed the cut-up turnip.

The red clover grown for winter fodder (if for grazing, some white clover seed would be sown) was cut with the grass mower pulled by two horses in early July and the hay harvest followed. There were special wooden hay rakes and swathe rakes to help in making organised rows of these loose cuts. In a wet period, harvesting these cuts to obtain useful feed was difficult, when repeated drying was necessary. The product was not relished by the stock and if stacked before it was really dry, the stack might burn: a long clinker poker (from the days of the threshing engine) was thrust into the stack to determine the degree of heating and sometimes the stack had to be turned, making a new stack.

The corn harvest was opened nearly always by cutting the winter oats. When the crops had been badly laid by thunderstorms and if so, flattened 2-4 weeks before the corn was ripe, the ears would fill badly and the yield would be much reduced and much work was involved. The binder, which was at its best with upstanding corn allowing it to go round and round, might have to approach laid corn in one direction only: “it fetched it”. Otherwise, the flattened corn might be too wet for the binder and then it had to be harvested with the scythe or, more easily, the sail reaper, where the reaper sails deposited each swathe it had cut away from the machine so that there was a clear path for the next round. The sheaves were tied by hand. A field was opened out with the scythe cutting a 6-7’ swathe which was gathered into sheaves with a special gathering rake – 3 tined, 6-7 feet long, and the tie being a handful of corn. When the straw was long, as in wheat or oats, the band was made by dividing the handful, twisting the neck of one bit around the other and then dividing the one bit around the head and with short corn, like barley, a special continuous special twist of heads and stalks until the band was long enough. The hardest work was done by the mower, no longer did he smoke his clay pipe as he bent forward with his rub-stone prominent in his belt or his buttocks and swung on his feet keeping down the heel of the scythe blade from extreme right to extreme left, keeping his quid of thick twist or black shag in his mouth the while. Some could mow much more efficiently than others. A man who could mow using his power efficiently could mow 1-1¼ acres in 12 hours but most men would be somewhere between. With this track free of corn, the binder – a 5’ cut Massey Harris – pulled on this first and even second round by two horses and thereafter by three horses which would then have full play.

The to and fro knife, running in a groove made by the hollows in 20-30 short points, cut the straw, leaving a variable length stubble, a short stubble if the straw was wanted for feeding barley and oats but longer with wheat and beans, which fell backwards on to a revolving canvas which took the corn upwards to two further canvases which brought it to the packers and when it had reached a certain weight, declared by an adjustable tripper, a needle came forward threaded with Blue Bell binder twine, the knotter made a binder knot, the twine was cut and the tied sheaf thrown off. The mechanism was powered by the driving wheel central to and supporting the binder, one other small wheel supporting the cutting platform, the horses pulling the whole along. Even when the corn was dry, the land might be too wet for this driving wheel to grip (it was much better when a tractor pulled the binder if it separately powered the mechanism). Binding was hard work for the horses and in hot weather, the three would be changed every 3 or 4 hours when there was a full day's work between clearance of the morning dew and nightfall. The waggoner not only steered the horses but he had to adjust the cutting height and make sure the knotter was working: in some seasons loose sheaves were frequent and many were the trips of Charles Dowse and Fred Phillipson who were expert with these things.

Peas and beans were cut with the grass-mowing machine carrying 3-4 extra-long points to elevate the peas before they met the cutting blade and each swathe was hand-forked to allow a clearway for the next round. Sometimes, the cut had to be made by a special sharp-bladed hand rake, 3 blades with the knife edge facing the shaft forming the cutting rake, e.g. when the crop was too short, matted and laid too thickly by thunderstorms. Beans might demand pulling by hand, cutting with the sail reaper or binder, and could be dealt with when slightly moist, thus allowing bean leading in the early morning before the white corn was dry enough. The waggoner was one of the teams leading the corn that was forked up to him from the stooks, made up of 10 sheaves, about 25-30 for a load, and then he unloaded it to the loader on the stack who passed the sheaf to the stacker or an intermediary. The rate of teaming depended a good deal on the teamer.

So much for the waggoner who was a most important man on a farm and while he fed at the master's table from the same food as the family, he had to make his own arrangements for his laundry and if possible, find a refuge by a fire for the early part of the winter evening – often spent at the blacksmith's shop as they worked until 7 p.m., having started early enough to do an hour before breakfast – possibly 6.30a.m. In the lighter, warmer evenings, time might be spent in the stable, for a cribbage board was carved on the corn bin; a ring attached to the roof by a long cord provided a challenge to get in over an appropriate hook and there was a set of quoits kept in the stable. The waggoner was expected to make his own sanitary arrangements, away from the family petties; he picked a dryish place in the straw in a crew shed, once again exemplifying the no-waste principal so essential on a farm in those days. (Tom West, a married waggoner 1920-24, was attacked by a billy goat while loosed down at stool and he had to jump into the crib with his trousers down.) Bill Genny, an older waggoner, who could not be asked to stay on at Michaelmas because of osteoarthritis of knee (which he knocked working), recalled the story of a farmer remonstrating with a boy he employed to tent pigs on the pea and bean stubble when he found him defecating in a ditch, "Come into the field – I only employ you for your muck" the farmer was reported to have said.

The shepherd, Holmes, Foster and then White (1922) came to the house in lambing time for cow's milk to give extra feed to an ailing lamb or to bring in lambs for warmth. He superintended the ewes on the turnip land, had thereon a large hut on wheels primarily to store the extra feed of cake with oats, bean meal and oat chaff (barley chaff being used only for bedding the main open crew yard), given for some weeks before lambing time which was organised for the 2nd week in March. When the turnip land was very wet, the soil would stick on the wool and form such clods that the animal would lie more than stand, thus increasing the weight of soil and further lessen the time standing to feed. The sheep would then be brought on to the grass land which was wet and although the 'clegs' would gradually disperse, the danger of infestation with liver fluke was real (rock salt was used to fight against this). It would present an opportunity for attention to foot rot, paring the hoof down to the ulcer which was then filled with an ointment of tar and Verdigris (copper acetate).

Nearer lambing time, grossly soiled animals would be docked and wool pulled away from near the udder; lambs could die from wool swallowed when suckling, which produced a bezoar. The shepherd's expertise was most in evidence at lambing time 4-6 weeks from mid-March when the ewes were kept in a paddock near the yard and folded in protected pens at night in the yard. A skilled eye was kept on them night and day. And attention in a difficult and prolonged labour could save mothers and lambs. When the lamb or lambs died, an orphan lamb or one of three would be covered with the dead lamb's skin and, with varying amount of trouble, the disconsolate mother would take it as its own. As the lambs became more robust, they were taken further away from the farm and remained with their mothers until early August when the parting led to a few days' bleating by the ewes. The lambs were put on the "eddish" which was the new growth of grass after the hay crop had been gathered (known as 'fog' in the East Riding) and eventually folded on the turnips and these hogs were given added concentrate to fatten them up for sale in February/March. The turnips were cut up for the ewes because the incisors of the older sheep were defective/missing and for some weeks before lambing, concentrate was given: these ewes were mostly long wool Lincolns, believing the extra clip of wool in May/June justified the breed but the tups were Suffolks or Hampshires because it was believed that such a cross gave more lambs: probably less than 1½ lambs per ewe were reared. Itching was common in the ewes before clipping and salve from a container strapped on the wrist was put between the layers of wool: the salve was probably carbolic soft soap.

Jack Genny, wife Ada Ophelia, was the garthman who came to work on the farm in April 1909/10, occupying until his death in 1956 the 2 up and 2 down cottage next to the blacksmith's shop recently vacated by Johnnie Coleman (said to have killed a man when in the USA), the erstwhile residence of Grandfather Shucksmith where his 14 children were born. Jack was born in Thorseby and worked for a year or two in Yorkshire near Burton Agnes before coming to Alvingham. There is a story of a hunting farmer telling his men walking through turnips to avoid kicking them, and the next day the hunt then running over the field. He was thatching the haystack which was always put parallel to the horse/duck pond, the clover (seeds) at the waggon house end, when I was born. He was the most hard-working, reliable, amusing, loyal worker who was never down-hearted or dissatisfied: no bawdy talk, a breath of fresh air under all circumstances, he knew nothing but work and he liked it.

He had a story of working at a hall and, when bootboy, would put them together and quickly polish the outsides which was sufficient for a penny from the rather simple owner of the boots. As a single man working for Nickerson, he was in charge of a tent or booth on fair day to sell admission to see the 6-legged foal: two soldiers were not impressed by the enlarged fetlock bones and knocked Genny unconscious: he took exception to the army and resigned from the militia of which he was a member. Later, as a single man, he worked in Yorkshire near Burton Agnes for a year or two. After marriage and becoming a tied labourer, it is likely that his only semi-days holidays were at the Martinmas and Candlemas fairs. He recalled one showman selling cure-all pills: he did well until his pills were found to be hare turds wrapped in flour and another herbalist guaranteed a cure after listening to the history: he was taken on by a man complaining of a peculiar sensation moving upward and then downward in his abdomen: the herbalist doubted if he could cure him for it was a lodged fart, confused by his face and arse being so alike that it could not decide on its exit.

In his ‘spare’ time, he cultivated a wide variety of vegetables and a sizeable potato patch (and his wife was the flower gardener of the village). He told the story of one labourer with a large garden whose ambition was to get enough money to flagstone it down – rat catching at 1d a tail and in the moonlight if necessary, setting traps to catch moles which he skinned, dried and sold for some 2d a pelt. When the cats became too many (a few were encouraged to keep down the mice, a fox terrier for the rats), he missed his target with the gun but as the cats had a set promenade, he would lie in wait partially concealed and leap on the cat with an axe to make sure of a kill.

When Uncle Henry Atkinson died in 1921, Genny received his clothes which included long-tailed coats: some stranger passing him on the road when he was hedging or going to work in one of the coats tried to make a pleasantry to Genny who replied, “Must be in fashion for my job”.

He milked 3/4 cows, except during harvest time when he was at work in the fields and it would then be done by Father or Aunt Sarah or me, and brought the milk to the house. Before the evening milking, he would wash his hands when they were particularly dirty – they never would be totally clean (and he prided himself that he had never had a bath since his mother finished bathing him). After washing, he would come into the back kitchen – a large chalk-walled room with open rafters, half of it occupied by a large charcoal brick oven which was preheated by charcoal burning in it and a second large copper for brewing and the other half for a wooden wash stand and enamel basin, the slop pail, a second copper and a wringer, the outer door being in two halves horizontally divided and the inner door leading to the kitchen which he would open and ask for a “sup of warm watter please, Missus”. Cleansed but not purified, he would don an old cap kept in the cow stable and made filthy by the lashing of the cow’s tail above the udder, sitting on a three-short-legged milking stool: it was important to make it as much (or more) a balancing than sitting act for, with some cows, rapid avoiding action to miss the hind leg was essential. It was found easier to manipulate the teats if they and the milkman’s fingers were moistened from the froth of the milk in the bucket. The infrequent and unskilled milker suffered from cramp in the small muscles of the hand, particularly those of the hypothenar eminence. The milk was poured from the bucket which had been under the cow into a stainless steel bucket which had been scalded and this milk, with hairs and all, taken to the house, sieved through muslin and, once the Alfa-Laval separator had been installed in 1917, the cream separated straight away – Genny often in the evening sitting in the kitchen cheering up the company while he waited to take home some skimmed milk which, after the domestic users had been satisfied, was kept for the calves of the milk cows which were reared by hand bucket and/or the pigs. A newly calved cow produced a thick fatty milk: green colostrum and a boiled pudding (Beastling pudding) made from this was considered a delicacy by the elders; I found this beastling pudding nauseating. It is amazing that the only attempt to keep the milking process clean was the scalding of the house utensils, yet diarrhoea in the family was very rare, much more uncommon than diarrhoea caused by tasty butter in hot weather.

While Genny was milking, another man or lad – Genny's son Sydney, a mentally disabled youth with a marked talipes equinvarus was, until the age of 24 when he died in a diabetic coma, good for a lot of mundane tasks – would feed the cows in calf and yearlings in the boxes, partially covered and open crew yards. Starting with chaff from the barn, mixed with cut wurzel or swede and, at times, oil cake – the linseed cake being reserved for the milking cows who would also get some hay or clover – next for the better foods would be the yearlings particularly the bullocks and all a goodly measure of pea and barley straw and if available, after the horses had had first pick, oat straw; the bean straw was used for bedding in the main open crew yard. After feeding the pigs, both bacon and porkers, on soaked barley, potatoes, boiled in the Soyer stove, and swill, Genny would help with the hay and straw for the beasts (cattle), carrying on a gathering fork (two long prongs on a straight handle) a heavy load cut from the stack (straw/hay/clover) by a 2 ½ foot-long truss knife with a handle long enough to take both hands affixed at right angles tangential to the blade.

Sydney would pump up the water from a surface well in the open crew into a large stone trough for the cattle, horses and pigs – in the winter time probably pumping between 1 & 2 hours a day. The drinking water for the house was pulped form a surface well a couple of yards outside the kitchen door; fortunately, this was 2 or 3 yards higher than the crew. The surface water from the house roof was collected in two tanks and if not too dirty, this soft water would be used for the copper boiler on washday. In severe weather, the pumps would have to be unfrozen with hot water.

Genny would have his lunch at 9.30a.m. sitting in the cake house or horse stable and then to work in the fields. Hedging, mowing and cleaning out ditches, under-draining (gripping) at which he was an expert and could do as much as two chains (44 yards) if not more than 2 spits deep in a day, stubbing thistles in the rows of young corn, forage harvest, opening out corn fields by scything, stooking, forking up to the waggon, thatching and finally helping with the threshing – probably on the straw stack (Syd chaffing). A rare combination of hard work and skill. Hours of work would be a little less in wintertime, probably 7 to 5 and 1p.m. on Saturday, but the garthman would have the milking, and the feeding of the beasts and pigs every day. In the corn harvest, the hours would be from 6.30a.m. until the evening dew or darkness, and for this overtime, a bounty was paid; the size of the payment was somehow decided by the farmers meeting on market day. On one occasion (in 1945) when Genny was told that it would be £3, he was disgusted and said that if things were as bad as that, he would "do it for nowt".

From time to time, Genny would be a regular chapel-goer and probably read the Old Testament a good deal: one of his heroes was Nebuchadnezzar and he believed that, as in Daniel 4:25, that if things were really bad, he would have to eat grass ("thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, they shall make thee to eat grass as the oxen"). One finely built minister, when shaking hands with the congregation, was told by Genny that he was wasted in that job; he was built for muck spreading. Hard work as it was in manure-leading time, often hot weather in June making it very hot in the crew, forking it up to the cart, Genny said he preferred that lot on earth to being in heaven. On one occasion, while muck filling, he was given a sweet; a cough brought it and his false teeth into the muck; his teeth were recovered, given a wipe on his filthy clothes, and replaced. It is evident that this crew yard knew not the salmonella.

Amongst his multitudinous duties would be being the main man in looking after the large farm garden, several others helping to dig for the winter, in April he set the early (Sharp Express) or late (King Edward) potatoes, an acre or two also grown in the field as were the peas, kidney beans, shallots and onions from seed, and plant cabbage, cauliflower and brussel sprouts which Genny had grown from seed in his home garden. His other specialty was the dry salting of the bacon pigs, saltpetre in deep pricks down to the bone and salt rubbed into the lightly pricked soft flesh in the other parts and only occasionally was the process ineffective. Another job was emptying the deep ashpit in front of the kitchen fire. Cleaning gravestones and tidying family graves was a pleasurable extra for him on a summer evening: he may have mowed the churchyard too for a small fee to be spent on his shag tobacco for chewing ("chowin'"), a quid being almost a necessity and removed (to the waistcoat pocket) only for meals.

Jack Genny came to the farm before Mother's funeral – a mark of friendship and intimacy. We were having lunch in the kitchen and Genny sat in his usual chair by the door. When I had finished, I went from the table to Genny and gave him a pound for tobacco: "Thank 'ee, Sir" says he, "I shall get there before thee, all being well, and will put a good word in for 'ee."