

REMINICENCES OF CHILDHOOD

1914 - 1925

By PENNY LOVE

HEMPTON

2nd SERIES

As I sit gazing into the fire, memories flock back of my childhood days. I can picture the old shepherd on Hempton Green leaning on his crook, whilst tending his sheep, keeping a wary eye for any that strayed.

A large Sheep Fair was always held on the Green when I was a child on the first Wednesday in September. This, was great fun for the village children, as the previous' evening one and all would gather at the top of the Green, where the hurdles for the sheep were being put up. Many of the older children would jump over the hurdles to the delight of the smaller fry.

Hundreds of sheep would arrive the next morning of various breeds and colour, the lovely golden fleeced ones were my favourites. This Sheep Fair was held way back in 1300, but sadly it has now ceased, as so many lovely things of the past have done.

Dacks Amusement Fair was also held on the Green at this particular time as with the end of the Harvest, there was money about to be spent. This same amusement fair also came along at Whitsun, but was put up at the other side of the Green, which was quite close to our house. I would lie in bed and watch the lights from the roundabouts shining on the wall and pretend who I could see riding on them.

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On Whitsun Monday, Sports were always held on the Green, with practically all the Village children competing in the different events, while the Fancy Dress competition was a great draw it being a very hard job for the judges. Some of us would sell programmes, and were given 1d for every dozen sold. I also had a notice on our gate "Cycles stored here" for 2d, needless to say we had quite a few, and, as I looked after them, Dad gave me the proceeds, which I was able to spend at the Fair that evening. Mr. Dack, the owner of the roundabouts always gave £5 towards the Sports, which was quite a sum in those days. That evening of course, it was "all the fun of the fair". We could buy tiny balls covered with paper and tinsel, the insides being filled with sawdust. A piece of elastic was attached, which we would hold on to, whilst trying to hit people, we could then catch it as it flew back. Last but not least was the lovely Fair rock of all different flavours and colours which only fair people seem to make. I think my favourite amusements were the swing-boats,

pulling the boat higher and higher. What it is to be young, I certainly have not the nerve to go in one now. How we enjoyed those happy care-free days.

At this Fair, several caravans of real gipsies would be parked on another side of the Green. These were horse dealers, and would career up, and down the road in their horse and carts, frightening the life out of us children, who kept well away from them for fear of getting knocked over. This is rarely seen today, if ever, as those folk now have grand caravans, even the Fairs do not have the lure as in those far off days.

On one part of the Green is a place, which is called the Bullock Hill; here I presume is where the old Cattle Fairs used to be held way back in 1066, when this village was called "HAMATUNA".

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How well I remember, the day I came home from school, to be told not to go round the backway as Dad had fallen from a ladder, whilst painting a bedroom window, of course I had to go then. to see Dad sitting propped up against the wall, with blood running down his face, as he had caught just above the eye on the window latch. Mercifully this was the only damage sustained. He was taken to our local doctor, who used alcohol to numb that particular part which was then stitched. Luckily Dad soon recovered, and I never once heard him complain of a headache. My young sister would tell all and sundry, that her Daddy had fell UP the ladder.

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So many things cross my mind as I gaze into the fire, such as the Milkman on his rounds with his horse and milk dray. The milk would be measured from large cans with either a ½ pt or 1pt measure. These would hook on to the edge of the cans. Everyone used jugs in those days, usually in three sizes, into which the milk was put, in fact a set of jugs was often given as a wedding present, as was a toilet set for the bedroom washstand. A far call from the elaborate gifts given today. This milk was taken straight from the cows, and if stood for a while in a basin, lovely cream could be skimmed from the top, as for a glass of fresh milk, it was delicious.

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At Fakenham School we were taught cookery and laundry, the former being held in the winter. There was a school room in the playground, where the top class would spend one week learning how to cook. We made all kinds of cakes, all the ingredients found by the school,

we also made some delicious soups. When cooked, we took them round the classroom to sell. One penny each for the cakes and two pennies for a small jug of soup. The soup always sold, as several children took sandwiches for dinner, school meals were unheard of then. When I smell an onion and vegetable soup cooking I am back in the old cookery room. We were also taught how to skin a rabbit, and I have never forgotten, having reason to skin quite a few since.

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In the summer we were taught how to wash different types of materials. Handkerchiefs, towels and stained tea or tablecloths; in the afternoon we did the ironing, using a hot Flat Iron. These were heated on a round iron stove that stood in the room, as the flat cooled we would get another, which we would SPIT on, if it sizzled the flat would be hot enough to use.

At home I would use Mothers heater iron, which held a red hot iron which was heated in the fire, then held by tongs and dropped into the heater box, then a flap at the back was secured to keep the heater in, as that got cold, another would be inserted which was being heated in the fire; and the cold one was put back in the fire to heat up again, what a boon the electric iron is. At school we used all odd pieces of soap to make into soap jelly.

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We were never bored winter evenings, as we used to play all sorts of games, Snakes and Ladders, Ludo and Tiddly Winks being a few, and nearer to Christmas we would stone the raisins for the Christmas puddings. We liked this job, as many a raisin found its way into our mouths.

Our first Wireless was made by a friend, who was very interested in that kind of thing. It was called a Crystal Set. Sometimes he would separate the headphones and put in a basin, then we could all hear what was being said, quite an excitement as this must have been about 1925 or 6, what a long way we have come since.

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When I was ten years old, my Great Grand-father came to live with us. As he was a retired Methodist Minister, he was very strict with us in his ways. Every week (not having to go to school) after we had had breakfast, we all had to kneel down by our chair, then Grandad would say a prayer, after which we all had to say the LORD'S PRAYER.

After lunch on Sundays, we three eldest girls, each read a verse from a chapter in the Bible, then Grandad would explain it to us. Now he had a peculiar habit of twitching his nose at times. and I

remember so well, that he would be saying 'now this is very remarkable' at the same time he would twitch his nose, how we managed to keep a straight face I will never know. He was really a dear old man, who probably missed his Ministry, as he was then 81. Woe betide the lads found playing football on the Green on a Sunday, Grandad was soon after them. I wonder what he would think today, but he meant well.

While on his death bed, he had each of us in turn to kneel by his bedside, while he blessed us, which is something I never forgot (I was 14 then) he left a lasting impression on all of us.

My young sister used to keep her toys in a cupboard by the fireside which irritated grandad if she got a bit noisy. One day he said to her, "you will be glad when I go to Heaven, won't you?" She quite candidly said "yes". Sometime after he had died, Mother had her lovely long hair cut in to the stylish Bob at that time, my sister said "I wonder what Grandad would say if he knew you had had your hair cut".

Many a time during the Winter evenings, we would take it in turns to brush Mother's hair, which she could almost sit on. I can picture her now with a candle lit each side of the mantle-piece, coiling her hair up, while we would sit and watch enthralled.

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With six in our family, wash day was no joke for Mother. The copper which was out in the shed, had to be lit very early, and with the shop bell often ringing, Mum was out and in most of the morning, as Dad was out on his coal round. No biological washing powder then, just HUDSONS WASHING SODA. How folks got their washing so white I will never know. Plenty of soap was used, either Primrose or Newpin, which was bought in 12" bars, these were cut into 3" bars and stood on the kitchen shelf to harden. All clothes were hand washed in a galvanized bath, a sink was unheard of in those days. After a good wash and scrub, the linen were then put into the copper for a good boil up. I can remember seeing linen hung over the gorse bushes on the Green, for people who had no gardens, what a boon the circular linen lines would have been then. In later years I can remember Mum having a large galvanized container, which contained hot water and the linen. She would then press the linen up and down, with a contraption! called a "Dolly". This was a long bell shaped piece of wood, with a handle across the top, which she could grip. After squeezing out most of the dirt, the linen could then be put into the copper to boil. Then two clean rinses (usually soft water from the tubs) a touch of the blue bag was added to the last rinse (blue to make them white).

When the linen were dry and folded, one of us would go with Mum

next door to put them through my Gran's wooden mangle. While easing the towels and sheets through we had to be very careful not to get our fingers in the wooden rollers. Water for all this had to be carted from the pump, unless the water butts were full. Soft water was also used to wash our hair. As long hair was the fashion then we would sit by the fire (on the floor) and brush it through, then give it a jolly good rub to dry. Friday night was "Amami" night, which was the shampoo of the day.

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Open fires will soon be a thing of the past. Well I remember cleaning the fire place with Zebra Grate Polish or Zebo liquid polish, with plenty of elbow grease, I would soon have the hobs and fire irons a lovely shiny black, knocking my knuckles many a time as I polished with the hearth brushes, which had a handle over the top to hold on to. A kettle too would always be "singing" on the hob, as this was our only way of getting hot water.

The saucepans with the vegetables in were always stood on the hobs to cook, and what a mess they got into from the smoke of the fire. Most of the baking was done in a Dutch oven or oven in the wall, with a fire burning underneath, marvellous really, when we think of the controlled heat today, I actually used one when I first married, and found it grand for making bread, then when I had finished baking, I would put newspaper in the oven and put my weekly wash in to air.

Mother later had an oil oven, with a double burner. The oven could be lifted off for saucepans or if one wanted to fry.

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Dad used to rear pigs for the table. I can remember seeing the man "stick" the pig and bleeding it before it died (how could I!) no wonder a more humane way to kill came in. Later the pig was put on a wooden trestle and scrubbed down with boiling water. When beautifully clean and white, Dad would slit the belly open from top to bottom, and clean out the entrails etc. The pig would then be hung in the outhouse, with a piece of clean wood tucked inside and across the front and hind legs, then left until the next day, when it would be ready to cut into different joints, all of which were sold previous to killing. Mum would have two hind legs to salt into hams, which I can remember turning over for her every so often. Chitterlings were made from the intestines, and pork cheeses were made from the chaps and hocks. As for the Fry, we never had any trouble to sell that, Mum had the bladder for lard, which when empty we used as a balloon, this was very tough and strong.

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We sold ice cream in our little shop. After Mum had made the custard with vanilla ice cream powder, it would be put into a galvanized container, then a large mixer would be put into the container (rather like a meat mincer) and the lid screwed on tight. The whole was then stood inside a wooden churn, with broken ice packed all round it. After rotating the handle for "hours" it seemed to me, the ice cream froze and was then ready for sale, but first the mixer had to be taken out, with one of us on hand to lick it clean, after mum had scraped most of the ice cream off. Cornets were sold for one halfpenny, and wafers one penny, and for 3d it could be had in specially shaped glasses. Talking of licking reminds me of how we used to love cleaning out the basin when mother had made a sponge often making a mistake to find the basin had been used to make Yorkshire pudding, maybe you can picture the faces we pulled.

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After a harvest Dad would take the fowls down to the field for gleaning, no burning the stubble then, I would go down after school to collect the eggs. I guess both hens and eggs would be stolen if that were done today. The cockerels got nice and fat on the gleanings, so were a good weight by Christmas.

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A Sunday School treat was a very happy event. Not a visit to the Seaside, but tea and games on Digbys Hall Lawn, which is now Fakenham High School. After fun and games, we would sit at trestle tables outside, with a spread of brown and white bread and butter, buttered dough buns and slabs of fruit cake, then when we left we were given a bag of sweets and an apple. How little we needed to make us content in those far off days?

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My Gran's best suite was made of horsehair, and well we knew it, as we used to prick our legs from pieces that stuck out underneath, wearing short socks, this was no joke, although I am sure the high backed chairs were much better for our posture than the easy chairs that we have now.

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As now, when very dry, the gorse bushes often caught fire on the Green, leaving them dead and blackened, Early in the Autumn we would

go and break the dry, dead bushes into kindling, and fill sacks of them, which could be used for Mothers copper, going home looking like a coalman. Have you ever tasted dumplings made from bread dough? They are delicious, many a time have I gone to the bakers for 3d of dough for dumplings, they are as light as a feather.

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During the Sumner holidays several of the village children would play at the top of the Green, which was nice and hilly. We would make pies with the clay-like soil and the cakes we would sprinkle with some chalky substance, to pretend they were iced. Other children would play on the so called Bullock Hill pretending they were airplanes, zoom, zoom, zooming around with their arms outstretched, so contented, happy. We would play game of Five Stones, having five stones and making a square with four and one in the middle. We would throw the centre one up and pick another up, then catch the falling one. this went on until all five were in your hand, a very tricky game.

If too wet to go out, we would blow bubbles with a clay pipe and a saucer of soapy water, in the kitchen of course; we would see who could blow the largest bubble.

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After the 1914-1918 War, the whole village celebrated with a tea and sports held in a barn on the Abbey Farm, which sadly is no more, as both the farm and barn have been demolished, such a pity as the farm was on the site of an old Abbey, which stood there in the days when the village was called Hamatuna. After the tea, we were entertained by local people, even after 68 years I can recall it all very clearly. At 15 years old, my parents took over The Bell in Hempton (now the only Public House of three in the village). Our house where I was born, was let, and I remember taking a last look round the empty house, full of nostalgic memories of my childhood. The happy times spent in the attic, where with my sisters we had spent many a happy afternoon if wet; we had played 'Mothers and Fathers' using the old cradle for the baby. I must admit I had a little weep, as I looked into my bedroom for the last time.

We kept the little grocery shop on for another year, which I managed. Sugar was bought by the sack and was kept in a long wooden chest, as was the brown moist sugar. This I had to weigh into 1 and 2lb blue marl bags, as were currants and rice as these were all bought loose. I used to weigh the lard into ½ lbs also the butter, which I loved patting into fancy shapes. Bacon had to be sliced with a very sharp knife, as very few bacon slicers were about then. Biscuits were sold loose from tins at 6d per 1lb, and some lovely assortments could

be had then. My worst time at the shop, was in the summer, as the wasps went crazy round the brown sugar bin.

In my young days we used to start what was called a bottom drawer when we were sixteen, this meant getting things ready for a home if we got married. At birthdays and Christmas we had maybe a towel or tea cloth given us, and we ourselves would add to them. Sheets and pillow cases also were bought, and I still have towels and table cloths, which I had at the time of my marriage. I remember getting six white towels, six coloured and six huck-a-back ones, all for £1, how on earth they made a profit in those days is a mystery.

Penny Love.