

## ***Memories of a Haslingfield Childhood***

**By**

***Nora Cannell***

*The author of this piece was a descendant of the Barnard family, which has lived in Haslingfield since the 1700s. A great deal of research was made on the family by Mr. Tony Hayes, a grandson of Willis Barnard's second son. A family tree from 1750 to 1914 is in existence. This piece is based on memories and from anecdotes handed down by the author's mother, who was born in 1874.*

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### **GROWING UP IN THE VILLAGE.**

I was born at the beginning of the 20th century and grew up through the years of World War I. The war made little impact on the way of life in an agricultural village. The men who survived returned, some lucky enough to be sound in limb, if scarred in mind by their experiences in a holocaust that should never have been. The ranks of young men were sadly depleted, and the erection of war memorials became a duty of all villages, towns and cities. But the life of the village continued very much as before: ploughing, sowing, reaping and harvesting.

There were several farms in the village at the beginning of the twentieth century which no longer exist. Moss Farm, with its large thatched barn, paddocks and orchard, bordered Cantelupe Road. Lilac Farm, where there are still lilacs but no farm house, is now Lilac Close. Quarry Farm, beyond the *Little Rose*, was so named since it lay in the valley beneath the clunch pit. Green Farm is now a private residence. There was also Top Farm. The Manor House used to be a farm house with its rick yards and outbuildings beyond the Manor wall, bordered by the moat and the dovecote, an ancient monument. The picturesque thatched Grove Farm was demolished in 1965 – it took its name from the nearby grove of trees.

There were also several small holdings usually run by one man and his family who were always poor and hardworking and who were governed by that capricious mistress, Mother Nature. Payment of the rent and that awful bugbear the tithe (one tenth part of the annual proceeds of the land), that had to be paid each year to the church as part of the stipend for the clergy, were major problems for these workers of the land. They would usually have a small arable acreage, a paddock and orchard, a horse, a cow, a breeding sow and the usual free range poultry. In spite of this, the majority managed to get by somehow. Often they could hire out themselves or their horse. Many had a carrier's cart with which they transported their produce to Cambridge, selling it in the residential areas. They were conspicuous by the poorness of their clothes, the ribby pony whose chief diet appeared to be wind and water, the harness mended with string and so forth. It was rumoured that one particular mean old lady used to supplement the cows' milk with chalk.

The land was still cultivated either by horse and plough or the steam plough. This consisted of an engine on either side of the field, with a huge plough attached to cables which was hauled from one side to the other. A loud hoot signalled the return journey. It was a fascinating scene to watch, as was the self-binder cutting the corn, hauled by a team of horses, spewing out the sheaves at regular intervals. It seemed a magical contrivance to us as children.

The infiltration of a mechanised age was beginning slowly. A solitary tractor appeared, built on the lines of a caterpillar tank. This and its successors were to take the place of the horse. These were also sadly depleted since the government had commandeered many to be sent to the war front to haul the large guns, and many were slaughtered there.

Social life was still centred in the village, since the family car was a thing of the future and the bus service was in its infancy. The building of a new world was the goal. The era of the council houses began, and large families were moved into what must have seemed to them palatial residences, although they lacked all modern conveniences, after the two- to three-roomed cottage where they and their forefathers had lived for generations.

The majority of the men still worked on the local farms and their pay, although it improved after the war, was very low. But with produce from allotments, rented for a small fee, the pigs and chickens in the backyard, they managed to get by. At least some did! If you were unfortunate enough to have an erring partner who preferred the pint pot to a spade or fork then life wasn't easy, to say the least.

Some emancipation from poverty came in the form of the trades union, and the Labour movement. Those who had worked in factories or other war work acquired a taste for higher wages, and the exodus from the land began. The dreams of a more affluent society were soon dispelled by the Depression, but the clouds on the horizon of Fascism and Nazism were largely ignored.

However hard the life there seemed to be a great community spirit. The village Feast, the flower show, the harvest festival, the school treats, the village concerts were the highlights of the year. For the native life revolved around the births, marriages and deaths within the community. Some say we had an insular outlook, since anyone who was born outside was regarded as a 'furriner'. Although there were disagreements, troubles and joys were shared by all. In spite of differences of religion, politics or class, Church or Chapel, Liberal or Tory, all shared in a common heritage. Yet we were still growing up in an atmosphere of feudalism which had been endured by our people through the ages. Our allegiance was now to smaller fry, since the Lords of the Manor were no more. The parson, the schoolmaster, the farmer were now considered our betters.

## SUNDAYS.

Apart from the summer break, holidays were few and far between, and half-term was unheard of. Therefore weekends meant much to us and, goodness, what we packed into them! We had little leisure, as there were so many jobs to do on a farm beside all the household chores which we accepted as a duty, and thought little of it. Sunday morning came all too soon, and having donned our Sunday best we set off for Sunday School at 10 o'clock. On the way we would try to learn the collect which during the week had escaped our memory. If it was short we could sometimes digest enough to give a favourable rendering. Our efforts became more determined as Prize Giving Day approached, and the number of children attending Sunday School also increased dramatically in the weeks before the Barber prizes were presented. The book prizes were not inspiring, but perhaps the powers that be had a very poor opinion of our intellect since we were the offspring of 'tillers of the soil'.

In the summer we went for a walk in the time between Sunday School and the morning service. In winter we stayed in church and warmed ourselves round the large stoves which now no longer exist. These often smoked and literally blotted out the church. No one seemed to mind, and we coughed and spluttered during the intervals between prayers and singing. It certainly did not deter the vicar of that time whose sermons were lengthy and very voluble, and whose Gladstonian style was wasted on us. It was in the days of candles and oil-lamps. On one particular Sunday evening he was gesticulating with great vigour and, to emphasise a point, leaned over the candle on the pulpit. Suddenly smoke began to ascend. We were petrified, and then someone yelled "You're on fire, sir!" Undismayed he flapped his arm like a great white bird, said "Keep calm" and, to our chagrin, continued his sermon.

We returned to Sunday School again in the afternoon at 3 o'clock, after being revitalised by our mum's Sunday dinner. After returning home for tea and the chores of the farm, we once more set out for church, this time with our parents. Our parents never sat together. It was a curious custom that the men and women sat on separate sides of the church. When and how this segregation of the sexes came about no one seems to know. Was it a hark back to the Feudal Age? The only exceptions were the farmers and their families.

We always sat with our mother. Maybe she was more tolerant towards our wriggling during the long sermons. We counted the people, the pews and the pillars and the panes in the stained-glass windows. If we benefitted little from the sermons we gained knowledge of the architecture of our church. We always sang the last hymn with great gusto and relief. After church we would visit relatives and enjoy the boiled sweets our granny made, before wending our way home. In the course of the day we had walked over six miles to and from the village. We needed no physical education to keep us fit, but the cost of shoe repairs would have been crippling if my father had not been adept in repairing them himself.

## SCHOOL DAYS.

School routine changed very little in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The three Rs were plugged daily, and the cane was much in evidence. The prepared school meal was for the future. To travel to school we had one bike between three, and this had a fixed wheel. It was a machine which needed careful handling. If one stopped pedalling it behaved like a bucking bronco, and over the handlebars one would go. The antics we achieved on this machine would have done credit to a circus act. Those of us who lived long distances from school had to take a packed lunch. There were only a few children from a long distance, such as Cantelupe. One family in particular comes vividly to mind. It was a poor, uncared-for tribe, frowsy, lousy and obviously suffering from malnutrition. Their daily diet consisted of a grey anaemic-looking mass, neither bread nor bun. The rock-like consistency of this was often demonstrated to us by one of the boys, a gangling youth called Tom. His long arms protruded from the sleeves of his outgrown jacket. He would hurl his dinner against the brick wall of the school. The fact that it never disintegrated proved the solidness thereof. He gave up in due course, and consumed the offending mass with diabolic grimaces. They were grateful for our leftovers, and would even eat apple cores we threw away. If we ran an errand for the schoolmaster's wife during the break she would reward us with a tart or a bun which we handed over to the hungry ones. They were nearly as tough as Tom's bun, and we felt it was small wonder that 'Sir' was often in an exacting mood. Our lunch was placed in a shoe bag with long strings. This was a very useful weapon of defence, and many's the time a marauding vicious dog felt the lethal end of our dinner bag.

Many of the memories of childhood are universal, like the games we played, all in their own season. I remember especially the thrill of winning a dozen marbles, of the desolation of losing as many. The wonderful top, built like a mushroom, called a window-breaker because it had the capacity and speed for doing just that, and the thrill of keeping the top spinning for the whole of playtime. This was quite an achievement, but fairly easy if one had a half-penny to buy the special whipcord it required. When the age of mechanised travelling was yet to come I remember trundling hoops madly along the highways and byways, and those exhilarating games played in the school playground which needed no equipment, save the astounding energy of those taking part and the initiative to think out a new game or to enrich the old one.

## **FEAST DAYS AND HOLIDAYS.**

### **Shrove Tuesday.**

An old custom was kept until the 1920s. On Shrove Tuesday Camping Close and Glebe Road were the scene of a happy get-together by mostly children. A gaily-coloured stall, run by the local fair people, with its varied choice of home-made sweets, was the centre of attraction, especially for those lucky enough to have a few pence to spend.

### **Whitsun Feast.**

During Whitsun week the village green was used for the village Feast. At that time there were no roads running through the green, its border being the Manor wall. Stalls and amusements were placed along the Manor walls. The Feast was three days of merrymaking, when even the school closed down and 'Save for the Feast' was the war cry of the children for months before. Owing to the area of the village green the Feast was comparatively small, and could not accommodate the larger roundabouts. But the swing boats, the usual sideshows and sweet stalls were all popular. Water squibs and confetti were favourite buys, but deplored by those on the receiving end! At dusk the fair people lit their oil fires, hanging them on the stalls where they swayed and flickered in the evening breeze.

For the adults there was dancing in the pub, usually the Marquis of Granby, where music for the polka waltz and chain dance was provided by a local musician playing his fiddle or homemade dulcimer. In earlier times a dancing booth was erected on the green, a roped-in platform, and the musicians played a harp-like instrument. Meanwhile, at the Feast proper, the young ones were enjoying all the fun of the fair, the hissing of the flares, the shrill voices of excited children, the whoops of joy at a displaced coconut, the cry of the fair people selling their wares mingled with the occasional wail of a lost child. All too soon the last evening arrived and the last penny was spent, and we began the endless wait for the next year's Feast.

### **A Favourite Walk.**

Every year, one Sunday evening before harvest, father would take us for a long walk instead of taking us to church. He would take us along the fields of golden standing corn, over the ditches, through the hedges and up onto the hill by the plantation at the top. Looking down across the valley we would pick out familiar landmarks, the distant spires of the city churches and colleges and, occasionally, the towers of Ely Cathedral. In the valley below we looked at our church nestling amid the lime trees, and thought with glee of our empty pews.

Wandering on, observing and commenting, Father would stop to pick an ear of corn, rubbing it between his hands to test if it was ready for harvesting. The sudden flight of a partridge or a pheasant from the corn would indicate to us that a nest was near. How we hoped it would be vacated before the corn was cut. Often a rabbit or a hare would cross our path.

Soon we descended to the Quarry with its winding paths and overhanging shrubs, and here there grew a profusion of wild flowers: the elusive bee orchid, purple orchid, bluebells, thyme, mignonette, dog daisies, ladies' hair and many more. We gathered them at random, struggling to reach them in crevices of the hewn clunch. Clunch is the local name for the chalk escarpment. Later

it was used as hard core for cattle yards and pens, *et cetera*. Hewn out of the hillside with pick and shovel, it was an arduous task and often dangerous. The local people had access to the quarrying of the clunch when they needed it.

Emerging from the Quarry into the land with its wide hedges of white- and blackthorn, bramble and wild rose, we were glad to rest for a while at the cottage of a relative. Here, if we were lucky, our uncle entertained us with music on his dulcimer before we returned, tired but happy, to our home.

### **Summer Holidays.**

The feast of Whitsun over, we counted the days to the summer holidays. When the holiday started we threw ourselves into the many tasks of gathering the harvest, from the fields of stoked corn, the rick yards with their rows of golden gleaming cornstacks waiting for the thrashing machine, to the empty fields of stubble all ready for the eager gleaners.

When the corn was ready for harvesting a team of men would scythe a pathway round the field to make way for the self-binder with its team of horses. The sheaves of corn were stoked or shocked into long rows across the fields. This was to dry them out. As the days passed the fields of standing corn grew fewer, and the haunts of wildlife less and less. When the carting of the corn began, leading the wagon from one shock to the next until there was a load (called 'leading shock') was the job of the day. 'Ogee!' and 'Whoa!' must have haunted us in our dreams. We toiled through the days, often needing a lantern to bed down the horses, our first consideration before returning to the house. We were tired, hungry and incredibly grubby. A wash, a meal, then bed, glorious bed. The day the last load was gathered, 'the Hawky' as it was called, gave us all great satisfaction, as did the long line of golden, gleaming haystacks.

The fields having been cleared, gleaning began in earnest. We gleaned the ears of wheat and barley, sometimes walking long distances to find a good gleaning field. The gleaning meant a great deal to the working people, for it was threshed into flour and formed part of their winter food store. The corn was threshed mainly by flailing. The flail was a manual instrument made by joining lengths of pole together by a leather thong, so that the shorter length swung round the other. It was a difficult tool to use until one got the knack, but it was a joy to watch a skilled handler.

My mother, who was born in 1874, remembers the small bell in the church tower being rung at 8 o'clock in the morning, and until the bell had rung no one was allowed in the fields. This gleaning bell was also rung in the afternoons, when everyone had to stop gleaning and leave the fields. The women, with the children's help, did the gleaning, collecting it in cloths and aprons which, when knotted up, looked like huge dumplings. These they hoisted on their heads and made for home, looking like ships in full sail and presenting a marvellous lesson in deportment.

Our reward for our work during the harvest was a trip to Cambridge with our father. We saved our pennies from the sale of our gleanings for this long looked-for Saturday treat. If we were lucky we went by train. If not, we walked. Arriving at Cambridge, we made our way to the market place where we spent our hard-earned pocket money on whatever took our fancy. Our favourite purchases were mixed boiled sweets. These contained many flavours – paregoric, clove and peppermint, the pungent odour of which will forever mingle with the memories of our after-harvest outing, with father and mother's abhorrence of the sweets. 'Stinking things', she called them.

The last treat was the Hawky Supper, to which everyone who had helped to gather the harvest was invited. The shadow of school loomed but, with the stoical adaptability of childhood, we settled down once again to our normal routine.

### **Harvest Festival.**

One of the tasks we most enjoyed as children was the decoration of the church for the Harvest Festival. Over a period of time the fruit and vegetables were nurtured and protected for the Festival. The marrow was chosen at birth and marked with an appropriate text. The rope of onions was made by Father and shone like polished oak. These and the flowers were loaded onto our handcart or prams, taken to the church and unloaded. All available baskets and containers were then collected and, with our medley of transport, we made our way up the hill to the clunch pits to gather moss. The practice of using moss has long since died out. It was very effective as a bed for the fruit and vegetables but very messy, especially if wet. Combining duty with pleasure, we would have a hilarious time climbing the steep banks and rolling down them. Suddenly we would remember the ladies waiting patiently for the moss. We filled our baskets, loaded them onto our transport and careered madly down the hill, negotiating the turn at the bottom with professional skill. Naturally we were grumbled at, but we settled down to fetch and carry. We were allowed to decorate the windows at the rear of the church with the leftovers. This was somewhat resented, and we would surreptitiously collect some of the forbidden fruit and vegetables, for which a severe reprimand was given.

When we had finished the decorating we climbed the belfry steps and, through a small window in the ringing chamber, we looked down and surveyed our handiwork with pride. Feeling venturesome, we would climb up to the bells. This was a day when we felt we need not whisper or go on tiptoe, a day when we took the opportunity to view our church from a somewhat different angle, such as from the pulpit or from different seats *et cetera*. On the Sunday evening, with our parents, we made an effort to get to church early to seat ourselves at the back, where we could watch the people coming in.

Looking back, it was more like a glorified agricultural show. However poor the villager and however bad the harvest, the choicest fruits were always set aside for the Festivals at church and chapel. With great pride the gifts were deposited round the houses of God, and the Sunday services were attended by almost every man, woman and child in the village. The popular hymns were sung with great gusto until the whole edifice seemed to come alive with their vibrations.

After the service everyone would walk round the church to view the 'exhibits', which were later given to the local hospital.

## **OLD HASLINGFIELD.**

### **The Knapp.**

Many generations of Haslingfield families first saw the light of day up the Knapp. Until recently the right hand side of the Knapp was packed with cottages built in a higgledy piggledy fashion. The two- or three-roomed cottages housed large families, and despite the lack of amenities and the overcrowding there was a great feeling of belongingness among the residents of the Knapp. The numerous children were sent to school as soon as they could toddle.

### **Broad Lane.**

The present lane was laid out in the late 1950s. Until then the lane leading from Church Street to what was then called Vicarage Lane and the meadow footpath was a cart track, virtually impassable in the winter months. From Church Street the lane was bordered on the right by an orchard and on the left by a bank and hedge beyond which was a meadow populated by many elm trees called The Grove. In the spring the meadow beneath the elms was carpeted with violets. Barbed wire, padlocked gates and even the irate lady standing at the farmhouse door gesticulating her annoyance could not deter the eager children from gathering their first violets.

The footpath leading from the New Road to the church and to the Green was a popular walk with its stiles and kissing gates. The meadow then bordering New Road was used for sporting events. This was before any houses were built along the road, and before the present recreation ground came into existence.

### **Recreation Ground.**

This ground was given as a legacy by Mr. Henry Badcock, who died on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921. He was a tall Victorian figure, a reserved unassuming kindly man who farmed land at the bottom of Barrington Hill. The field he provided was separated from another field by a hedge running from River Lane to the Harston Road. This was owned by Messrs. Chivers, who gave it to the village on the condition that the two fields were made one and used as a recreation ground in perpetuity. The opening day was arranged for April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1925. To commemorate the event a monument to the patron, Mr. Badcock, was unveiled by the late Dr. W.J. Young, whose skill and faithful service as a family doctor over many years will long be remembered by those to whom he administered. A wooden pavilion was soon purchased with money from the Badcock Trust. In due course a kitchen and billiard room were added, and many social functions were held to raise money for its upkeep. The building remained in use until 1974. After World War II the ground was levelled, a cricket pitch laid, two tennis courts and swings *et cetera* were provided, mainly by voluntary labour and contributions.

### **Camping Close, Glebe Road.**

This is the old name given to the stretch of glebe land between Church Street and the Vicarage, with the public footpath alongside. Now only a small part remains, the rest having been sold for building. The land is now so overgrown that it is almost impossible to see the fairly deep hollow that exists there. Some say this could have been a plague pit or a slurry pan used during the fossil digging at the end of the last century. Much of the land in and around the village underwent these excavations.



### The River.

This was regarded as the local beauty spot until marred by the felling of the trees and the grubbing out of hedges and shrubs. Approaching from the village via River Lane or porkers Lane, one came to the first bridge, which no longer exists. The footpath was bordered by the river on one side and shrubs and overhanging trees on the other. Beyond these lay a stretch of marshland where tall yellow iris, willow weed, meadow sweet, purple loosestrife, marsh marigold and the delicate mauve cuckoo flower grew unrestrainedly. Overhead, festooned among shrubs and trees, hung the wild hop, belladonna, honeysuckle and white bryony. It was a natural habitat for the common birds and the wild fowl. An occasional swan's nest could be found among the bulrushes and reeds. The old river left the new at the first bridge and meandered through the meadows, meeting up with it again beyond the second bridge, which still exists. This was known as Burnt Mill Bridge, for there was once a mill there which was destroyed by fire. This was always a favourite bathing place for the village youths. The footpath continued from this bridge to Harston or Hauxton, as now. The meadows along the river were populated by walnut, elm and chestnut trees, and were a favourite site for campers and family picnics.

### The Village Pubs.

Of the six public houses originally in the village only two remain, the *Jolly Brewers* and the recently rebuilt *Little Rose*. Of the other four, three are now private dwellings and the other was demolished. This was on the site of the self-service shop at the junction of Fountain Lane and the High Street. It was a picturesque thatched house with a curious sign, the bushel and strike, this representing a form of measuring corn *et cetera*. The bushel was filled; the strike, a piece of flat-shaped wood, was drawn across to level the contents. The *Marquis of Granby* at the foot of Barrington Hill, the *Waggon and Horses* next to the chapel and the *Carpenter's Arms* in Church Street opposite what was the Grove Farm are now private dwellings.

Apart from the social activities of Feast Week, women were conspicuous by their absence, their presence being frowned upon. Most houses had a club night each week. This was not a social club, but a meeting time when people paid into the 'local share-out' of the national clubs, this benefitting them when they were ill. The share-out, if any, was generally made at Christmas. At Michaelmas one or two of the pubs were used to collect the allotment and cottage rents paid by tenants to the local landowners.

As in all communities, there were well-known characters, habitual visitors to the pubs, some notorious tipplers whose tongues were loosened by the intake. One character comes to mind, a noted scrounger. To score over him an acquaintance treated him to a pint, but surreptitiously loaded it with Epsom Salts. Enough said! Another old custom was that of 'tin kettling'. When a person was found out to be 'carrying on', the villagers collected their tin ware and proceeded to the abode of the culprit, and beat a loud tattoo. It was ironical that often some in the crowd were worse than the victim!

### **Crickets on the hearth.**

The superstition that it is unlucky to destroy crickets should have made my family one of the world's unluckiest. The massacre of these insects came about when my family moved into an old cottage in 1920. Reputed to be about 16<sup>th</sup> century it had, as most cottages of that period, a huge brick chimney rearing up through the centre. When we took over, it had been inhabited by my father's family for many years. They believed in the superstition, apparently. The brickwork of the chimney was infested, and literally alive with crickets of all sizes. We could not sleep for their chirruping. It was like a dawn chorus. We declared war. Lucky or unlucky, we vowed to rid ourselves of this menace. We were helped by our cats, several in number, who took a liking to them. They would pounce, then crunch, and there was one cricket less. Devouring these seemed to have a slimming effect. Maybe the cricket has some property in its makeup worth investigating in this day and age of slimming pills and suchlike. However, with the help of the cats and a liberal sprinkling of insect powder, we achieved our purpose in a very short time. One of the 'old men', who had lived in the cottage previously, was heard to remark "They think they'll git rid o' they crickets but they never 'out'". Needless to say we did! Soon afterwards we were plagued with cockroaches. These were fed on honey and rat poison. Being cannibalistic, they soon disappeared. Which was the lesser of two evils? Did the crickets eat the cockroaches? We are still wondering after fifty years, but we are still free from either menace.

### **Memories of Yesteryear.**

I gaze down from the hill above  
Onto the village that I love.  
The church amid the stately limes,  
The moated Manor since ancient times;  
Gone are the meadows where we used to play  
Gathering wild flowers on a summer day;  
The tiddlers in the babbling brooks  
Their mossy banks and shady nooks;  
Where the spring violets used to grow  
The croaking frog spawning below.  
The majestic walnut in the Manor field,  
Wondering what booty it would yield  
When armed with sticks and stones  
We sallied forth chased by ol' man Jones.  
The rows of cottages with their Disney look  
Producing hordes of children since the Doomsday Book.  
The ways of men are hard to define  
One wonders for progress or decline.  
The payments for membership of Mankind  
Are the memories one has since time out of mind.