

Reminiscences of farming life in the 1920s (newsletters 2 and 3)

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Oral history will be increasingly important for the volume which Chris Williams and Andy Croll are editing on Gwent in the 20th century. The Newsletter was sent this account of life on a farm on the Monmouthshire-Glamorgan border in the 1920s, written by a farmer's daughter in the form of a letter to her own daughter. Betty John (now Betty Bennett) was the youngest of a large family at Cefn Llwyd, a farm on the Cefn Mably estate. It is on the west bank of the Rhymney (and so technically in Glamorgan) but in the parish of Michaelston-y-Fedw (in Monmouthshire). Her experiences of farming life during the Depression can probably be paralleled elsewhere in Monmouthshire - but the generation with these memories is dying out, and they need to be recorded before it is too late.

The first section describes everyday life in the farm, at a time of considerable hardship. At least on a farm there was always something to eat, but during the Depression prices were low and there was seldom any spare money for luxuries.

Cefn Llwyd, where I was born in 1915, was a 200-acre farm with the farm house roughly in the middle of the land. It extended from the Ruperra Home Farm in the north to the Rhymney river in the south. The best land was in the south and this was where most of the cereal and root crops were planted. Dad took the tenancy of Cefn Llwyd in 1908 from the Kemeys-Tynte estate.

[Editor's note: Rees John's tenancy agreement for Cefn Llwyd in 1908 is in the papers of the Kemeys-Tynte estate in the Glamorgan Record Office. It shows the extent of the control which the estate retained over how the land was farmed: there were even restrictions on the ploughing-up of pasture.]



Dad had previously been farming at Lower House Farm in Michaelston-le-Pit, west of Cardiff. My brother and sisters were born there. He and Mother took the tenancy when they were married, early in 1899. He would have been 29 and Mother 24. As a young man working on the family farm, Lidmore Mill, he had also worked part time as a road man looking after a stretch of the local roads. This was his extra money, put away towards starting farming on his own.

Dad was paying £1 an acre rent for Cefn Llwyd when the farm was sold by the Kemeys-Tynte family living at Cefn Mably to the Tredegar estate. As far as I can remember, the rent stayed at £200 up to the end of the tenancy. I remember Dad 'taking the rent' to Newport twice a year. It was useful to go, rather than sending the rent, as it gave an opportunity to draw attention to needs on the farm which were the responsibility of the estate.

The previous tenants at Cefn Llwyd were named Morris. They left a trunk with their name on it which became a blanket chest at the bottom of my bed. For several weeks before his tenancy started in the February, Dad travelled from his old farm in Michaelston on a Monday morning, with a waggon loaded with implements, to Cefn Llwyd. He lodged there for the week and worked on the farm. He would have taken his own food for the week. He returned on the Friday or Saturday to Michaelston. On Sunday he took his part as deacon in the local Baptist chapel, and early on Monday morning the wagon was loaded up again. On the last journey, Mother would have driven the dog cart with three young children, my older brother and sisters, then aged 8, 5 and 2. Small animals would have been taken in a dray. Larger animals were walked into Cardiff as far as the Ely bridge and then north around the built-up area to Lisvane and Llanedeyrn, down the back drive to Cefn Mably and along to Cefn Llwyd.

Water on the farm came from a deep well under the front lawn. The original old pump was replaced by what was called a 'semi-rotary' pump in the '20s when Dad had the contract to supply milk to Cefn Mably hospital. The milk had to be cooled. It was a daily chore to pump water through pipes to a tank placed above head height in an outside dairy about ten yards beyond the back door. Milk had to be carried from the cowsheds on the other side of the long farmhouse, probably 200-300 yards, to the dairy. It was poured into a container that released it slowly over a hollow corrugated surface into a churn, being strained on the way. Cold water from the tank was passed through the corrugated milk cooler to achieve the cooling process.

My father supplied milk to the hospital until he left Cefn Llwyd. We acquired a dessert spoon in a returned empty churn with the initials W.M.H.A. (Welsh Memorial Hospitals Association), indicating that someone had been surreptitiously skimming milk from the churn. After delivering the milk to Cefn Mably, Dad would carry on to St Mellons with more churns of milk which were picked up by a Cardiff retailer - first Setchfield, then Lloyd's Dairies. In the early days, local housewives would look out for him with a jug in their hands and eventually a milk round was built up. Good measure was always given in the jugs - a half pint measure was used and then a bit extra.

The local farmers thought that a Milk Marketing Board would be a great asset and worth the levy of $\frac{1}{2}$ d a gallon from the milk producers. I wonder what the levy is now. The M.M.B.'s centralization of milk collection started in about May 1933. Each milk supplier surrendered 2 weeks' milk cheques to finance its establishment. After this, they were guaranteed a fixed price, summer and winter, and paid by monthly cheques. The M.M.B. arranged the collection of milk, kept the records, distributed milk to retailers and arranged periodic testing of milk and cows. Tuberculosis was a great threat at that time and cleanliness was essential. The cowsheds and dairy were white-limed regularly.

We had several farm workers. There was a cowman, Evans, a substantial reliable farm worker who came from Herefordshire in the early '20s and remained with us until the end in 1934. He had one of the tiny farm cottages at the bottom of the front field. This and the adjacent cottage (the home of a Mrs McKay) were to be condemned in the late '40s. They were replaced by the semi-detached houses near Cefn Mably lodge. Walby was the haulier in charge of the horses and doing much of the ploughing. He lived with his family in a cottage (since demolished) near the south drive entrance to Ruperra Castle. Necessary economies resulted in Walby having to go in the late '20s.



I remember Evans having 30s. a week and his cottage, Walby rather less. There was also the bottle of milk each day, a couple of rows in the potato field, and of course each cottage had a substantial garden and a pigscot. Evans's son Reg started farm work as soon as he left school.

In between and when there was need, there were the strappers, itinerant farm labourers. Most of them tagged along with a machine that needed extra labour, such as the threshing machine, but some arrived with packs on their backs seeking work. We employed several at different times. One had been in the Navy and had taken up rope making, and made several for the farm during his stay, including a skipping rope for me. Another, Edward, an ex-Army man, stayed with us for years and made the corner of the chaff house his own, having his food in the back kitchen of the farm and staying there by the all-night American stove in cold weather. He was more of an 'odd-job man', as he had got too old for heavy farm work, but he kept going at his own rate.

During harvest time, the local cottage men turned up in the evenings and at weekends. Crisp was one, a woodman who lived with his family in a cottage between Cefn Llwyd land and Bridge Farm on the Bassaleg side. One of his daughters, Grace, worked in our house for a while. Crisp was caught by Dad taking corn from the granary one night - the dogs' barking gave him away. Harvest time meant taking tea to the harvest field. A large jug of well-sweetened tea and rough cider (if any was left from the previous autumn), bread and marge, slices of American cheese (cheaper than English cheddar), always bakestone cake and frequently slices of apple tart.

Then there was threshing time. Before the advent of the combine harvester, some local farmers had steam threshing machines and would contract to do the threshing for neighbouring farms. George Edwards took his threshing machine around the local farms north of St Mellons at the end of harvest. The message would come by word of mouth: 'The threshing machine is at the Pandy where there's three days' work, then it's going to Fairwater for another three days, and then to you'. Then it would continue up the road to Pentwyn and Rudry. Sometimes it was ahead of time and could be heard a day early, rumbling along the bottom road, the first indication Mother would have. Apart from what went on in the rick yard it was 'all hands to the wheel' in the house. A message went to a couple of the local workmen's wives, who dropped everything to come and help. It was usual to feed up to 20 men, which meant peeling huge saucepans of potatoes and slicing mountains of beans. A large piece of bacon would have been earmarked for the occasion, and parley sauce was the rule. This was followed by apples and custard.

The threshing machine needed a team of men to work it. It could be powered by a steam engine or, later, a diesel tractor. A belt took the action from the engine to the threshing machine. The machine was placed alongside the mow, The straw trusser was placed under the front of the machine for the straw to drop in after it had passed over the straw 'walkers' (the shakers). In the trusser, the straw was tied with two bands of binder twine. The grain is shed from the straw as it passes under the beaters and over the straw shakers, then it is winnowed of chaff by a blower. The grain with the remnants of the chaff is elevated to the top of the machine and dropped through another blower to get rid of the remains of the chaff, then the grain is passed through a screen that takes out any small

seeds. Afterwards, the clean grain is passed to the back of the machine and collected in sacks. This process needed:

Men to look after the machine

Two men on the rick pitching sheaves to the top of the machine

Two men on the machine: one to cut the cord bands off the sheaves and the other to feed the sheaves into the machine

One man to pitch straw bolting from the trusser on to a new rick

Two men on the straw rick to build it

One man to remove chaff and 'cavings' (bits of straw)

One or two men minding the sacks, weighing and carrying away

George Edwards brought his regular team with him, and there was always a following of 'strappers'. George Edwards ate with the family in the kitchen; others were directed to go there or to the long work table in the back kitchen. I recall Evans, our cowman, standing aside and waiting for Mother to put him at the kitchen table, and realised later how important it was for him: his status was at stake. Evans was a gentle man, but everything that went wrong for him was a 'bugger'. 'The bugger broke the fence, missus'. 'I couldn't fit the bugger in place, missus'. Although a stickler for behaviour, Mother somehow found it possible to ignore his swearing. The strongest Dad was ever heard to say was 'drat' - 'Drat the dratted animal'.

The last rick to be threshed provided the 'fun'. Rats made nests in the ricks and collected in the last one. As the sheaves were thrown into the thresher and the rick neared its base, all the farm dogs pointed their noses at the rick, tails up and ready to dart and snap at any escaping rats. Not many got away. One year I found a field mouse in a rick nest. I kept it all winter and put it back when spring came. It slept most of the time in a nest of hay in a tin with a perforated lid. It provided a lot of interest.

Pig killing was another upheaval day and there were 3 or 4 of these every year. Apart from the mechanics of the killing, there was a full day's work in the kitchen. I've never had any food more tasty than Mother's black puddings, made in basins with the pig's blood, chopped fat and herbs; also the faggots of minced liver, onions and herbs, which were formed into tablespoon-sized portions, wrapped in the mesentry from the pig's gut and baked. The gut was given to Edwards, the cowman, and the pig's bladder was blown up and tied for me to kick around. Excess fat was cut off the carcass and rendered down. After all the liquid fat had been poured into earthenware jars and crocks of various kinds - it would be useful for pastry-making later in the year - the crumbly remains were lightly salted and floured to form tasty 'crusons'. Sides of bacon were salted on stone slabs in the dairy. Salt was bought in large oblong blocks. These were broken down and rubbed well into the meat on a number of occasions and the sides turned over for several weeks. When cured, the sides and hams hung from hooks in the dairy ceiling, sometimes having been sewn up in cotton cases. Another unbeatable and well-remembered flavour is sliced home-cured ham cooked in a dutch oven in front of an old-fashioned grate fire. My earliest memory of our kitchen fire is of a barred central fire area with a let-down top to rest a kettle on, an oven on one side and a water boiler and tap on the other. Alongside was the bread oven.

Another autumn occupation was cider making. A cider press was hired. Layers of apples separated by canvas sacking material were laid on the shelf of the press between the two flat iron plates. Turning the screws of the press squeezed the apple juice out, and it collected around a groove leading to a hole and into a container below. The juice was funnelled into casks and fermented with the natural yeast on the apples, then left for a few months to mature. It was a very harsh drink but

some of the workmen liked it. Sometimes we would dissolve a lot of sugar in a little water in a large jug and fill it up from the cask. There also was a large perry pear tree in the orchard. When the crop was good, these pears were pressed separately to make perry.

Thinking about the orchard reminds me of the time my sister Marie killed a fox. We had been having trouble with foxes eating chickens. After Marie became engaged in the early 'twenties, the chicken money became her 'bottom drawer' money. It was heartbreaking to see her hard work rearing chickens for teggis and for the table come to naught. Unfortunately, this particular fox had a habit of visiting when the men were working away from the house. Marie had never held, much less fired, a gun; but she was so mad that she took instruction from Dad, and within a few days she was able to rest the heavy double-barrelled gun on the fence, take aim and shoot the chicken-eating vixen. The fox's mask and tail were mounted and had pride of place for some time. Chicken money traditionally went to the woman of the farm. It was her pocket money, but the fact that the corn to feed the chickens was not paid for was always a point of fun and contention.

Many farmers' wives and daughters worked alongside their menfolk, especially helping with the milking. Mother and Marie didn't do this, but both could get a jug of milk from a cow when needed (and from experience I know that is not as easy as it sounds), and would go out to the yard or field when an extra pair of hands was needed in an emergency. However, between them, they reared chickens, ducks and geese, dressed the birds and sold the eggs to Duggan and Jones, the grocers in Broadway, Cardiff, and to private customers. Double summer time during the second world war was a menace, as the hens wouldn't go into their fowl houses until dark. Mother stayed up to shut the fowlhouse doors, and Dad went to bed as he got up earlier. By this time, Mother and Dad had moved to a smaller farm on the Levels. All the children had married or gone away to work, and there was no one who wanted to take the farm over from Dad. Agriculture was no longer the automatic choice for young men, even those from a farming background, and Dad was the last of his line.

There was plenty of work in the house for the farmer's wife. Monday was washing day, and it did take all day. First job in the morning was to get the boiler filled with water and the fire going underneath. We had a boiler in the corner of the back kitchen. Soap bars were boiled up to make the suds and the whites were boiled up first, dunking well for 20-30 minutes. These were drawn out with a wooden tongs into a bath and more water added to the boiler so that we could dunk 'coloureds' in water which was less hot. Very dirty work clothes were put in last, usually well soaped before going in. The fire would have died down by this time.

Clothes in the bath were rubbed or scrubbed on a scrubbing board if necessary then put through a mangle, rinsed and mangled again before hanging on the line. When the line was full, garden hawthorn or privet hedges came into use for more hardy articles - towels, Dad's working trousers, his flannel shirts. (He always wore a flannel shirt, and on Sundays put a bib-like front of cotton on, fixing it behind the collar with tape and a button.) So it was bath (or equivalent) on Saturday evenings, clean clothes on Sunday, washday on Monday. Iron on Tuesday, clean upstairs on Wednesday, possibly bake on Thursday, clean downstairs on Friday, plus any special jobs.

I never had to take on the washing on my own; I just helped, or did the other household work or meal preparation that day. Wash day was a full day's work. If it was wet, clothes were draped over clothes horses anywhere they could conveniently dry - often in the sitting room around a fire there.

In Cefn Llwyd the outside two-seater privy was literally at the bottom of the garden and some considerable way from the back door to the house. Newspaper was the usual aid to hygiene. Old railway timetable books were also most useful because of the size of the sheets, and there were several hundred pages in each. A hole was pierced through a corner, string was pushed through and the book was hung from a nail on the back of the lavatory door. The lavatory was the earth closet type, with liquid draining down a ditch in the front field. The remains were dug out and periodically spread on a plough field. This was easily done as the field side of the building was much lower than the garden side.

At night, to attend to 'calls of nature', we had chamber pots kept under the bed. We children had enamel pots, one each side, but in the 'spare room' (the guest room) there were two china pots in a bedside cabinet. Slops were collected in an enamel bucket plus a cover and cloth. In mother's bedroom, as well as china pots under the bed, there was a commode - a wooden chair with arms and a covered china chamber pot fitted under the seat. This was moved around the house when there was need, because of illness etc.

There was no hot water in the house. Water for washing had to be carried to the bedrooms, and the luke-warm water left in our hot water bottles was most useful for washing in the mornings.

The lower fields nearest the river Rhymney were ploughed. They were among the best for growing cereal and other crops. We grew wheat and oats, and root crops, including potatoes for the house and for sale. Turnips and swedes were used a lot as animal food: turnips for sheep and swedes for fattening cattle. We had a machine for slicing them in the chaff house, and whole turnips were also thrown to the sheep to gnaw at, especially when they were taken into the yard adjoining Evans's cottage at lambing time. Jack Howard took our surplus grain. One field next to the Rudry road, 200 yards above the house, was used for ploughing matches in the late 'twenties. They were all horse-drawn ploughs at that time. I only heard about tractors in the mid 'thirties. They weren't common but we did have a few in the area.

We probably had 40-50 acres of ploughland. The rotation was wheat (2 years), roots, spring oats undersown with rye grass, and clover. The clover was cut in June and August, ploughed in autumn and sown with wheat, and the cycle started again.

When the wheat and oats were reaped, the dogs collected around the last few rounds and caught many rabbits that had sheltered in the middle. Then the sheaves had to be stooked by hand. Two sheaves were stood ears uppermost and balanced to support each other, and another two were placed likewise, then a third pair and sometimes a fourth pair. We had plenty of help with this at Cefn Llwyd but I remember helping during the University vacation when Dad was on his own at Hendre. I should have known better than to do this bare-legged, as the sharpness of the cut ends of the stubble played havoc with my legs and the sheaves cut my bare arms.

After about a week the grass and herbs in the base of the sheaves of oats would have dried out: wheat was cleaner and could be collected within two days. The sheaves were placed with a pike on a wagon and carried to a chosen spot on the side of the field or to the rick yard. Here a base of twigs, branches and trash would be assembled and the rick was built on them. The sheaves were arranged with the ears pointing inwards in such a way that the rick sloped outwards a little to shed the rain. 'Heading' the rick involved setting each layer in a little to shape the top, keeping the centre a bit higher than the rest. Two layers of sheaves were then placed lengthwise across the top.

There was an art to thatching the rick so that it would be rain-proof. First, the top of the rick was shaped to have a gradual slope from the ridge to the sides. A roll of straw the diameter of a dinner-plate, and tied with twine pulled tightly every 6 inches, was laid along the middle of the top ridge and fixed with hazel pegs: this was called a dorch or grachan. 'Reeds' of straw had already been prepared during spare time and in wet weather. Each reed was made up of 3 or 4 handfuls of straw, dropped on the floor to level the ends and with the stragglers cut away. A ladder was placed an arm's width from the edge of the rick and a horizontal row of pegs stuck horizontally into the mow, at the edge of the slope from rim to ridge, to stop the layers of straw slipping. The thatcher would walk up the ladder with about three reeds of straw in each arm plus about 20 pegs. Between six and eight pegs were tied with binder twine twisted in a figure-of-eight, one for each layer of reeds. Starting at the bottom of the sloping surface of the rick top, the reeds are laid from the rick edge to the ladder, pegging in at the edge and then horizontally. The peg is slanted in and binder twine tied to it. The peg is pressed in with a leather (the top part of an old boot pushed on to the hand and tightened by pulling the laces). The pegs are put in 9-12 ins apart. The next row of reeds overlaps the bottom row by about a third, and so it carries on up to the dorch. In the layering of the reeds, the lowest were placed butts down, ears up. The layers above were alternated. The top peg goes into the dorch,

fixing the top of the layer of straw to it. Coming back down the ladder, the binder twine is stretched across the straw to the next peg and pulled tight as it goes along horizontally.

Then it's down the ladder, pick up two armfuls of reeds, more pegs and binder twine, and back up again. When the first strip is secure, the ladder is moved an arm's length at a time and the whole process is repeated. Thatching ladders have the rungs rounded on the knee side for comfort, and are flat at the back. Sacking placed around the knee and tied above and below, called a 'york', acted as a cushion and a bunch of hay was stuffed in as well.

Loose hay or straw is pushed under the sloping top of the rick to keep the surface flat. The pegs are 15ins-18ins lengths of hazel with the ends shapened to stick in the rick. Sometimes a peg is stuck at an angle at each end of the dorch. The farmers say 'it's for the sparrows to scratch their arses' as that's where they like to rest. I seem to remember Dad splitting the hazel lengths. He used to get these and thicker, longer, lengths of hazel for bean sticks from the Tranch wood between our land and Ruperra home farm. He also used to make 'spars' - split hazel pegs twisted and bent in two to secure the reeds more firmly.

After the reaping and thatching, there was still plenty to be done. First the hedges and banks of the plough field were 'trashed'. The hedge tops were cut then the banks were cleared. Brambles, grass and weeds were cut to a few inches above the ground, using a curved hook in a sweeping movement. The hook had to be sharpened regularly on a special 'stone'.

Then it was time for muck spreading. Manure from the piles near the cowsheds and stables was forked into carts and carried to the fields where it was forked out into lines of smaller heaps across the stubble. Later, it was spread by fork over the fields. This was followed by ploughing. Fields intended for hay were rested from a certain point in March. Manure was spread on them and the stock were kept out. After a few days on the field the chain harrow was used to break up the lumps of manure. This also broke up the moss which would dry in the wind and the grass would grow better. We used no artificial fertiliser, but Dad put lime every few years on the poorer back fields. Relatives who farmed on heavier clay soils used basic slag from the steel works to put on their fields, 5 cwts to the acre, spread from a drum. This lightened and improved the soil.

The aim was to finish ploughing in September and sow winter cereal by the end of October. But root crops were planted from late April to early June. Potatoes might be a little earlier. Then the swedes, turnips and mangolds were hoed between the hay harvest (starting in early June) and the corn harvest (late July to August).

Periodically the hedges were relaid. This was a winter job after threshing, ploughing and winter sowing. It was not allowed after 1 April because of the birds' nests. The Monmouthshire and Brecon style of laying a hedge differed from the Glamorgan style. Dad was born and brought up near Barry, so I think he used the Glamorganshire style. This produces an open pleached hedge. When the hedge is getting thin at the bottom, it is left for 2 or 3 years without trimming the top, until it has 8-10 feet of sapling growing up from it. To lay the hedge, a sapling is chopped about three parts across, just above ground and above a bud that will sprout the next spring and fill in the lower part of the hedge. The sapling is bent over and secured with crooks, about one per yard. Then the top is trimmed flat. The Monmouthshire style has more stakes instead of crooks to hold the branches down and a sapling branch across the top. The stakes are put in at an angle to the bent saplings and both are secured near the top by lengths of hazel or willow, woven in and out of the saplings and stakes. The Glamorgan style had fewer crooks and was a more open pleaching style and usually no sapling across the top.

The farm at Cefn Llwyd had about 15-16 milking cows, a bull, calves and a bunch of steers. There were 2 or 3 cart horses for ploughing and heavy work, 2 or 3 cobs or trap horses and sometimes their foals. I remember Dad's different calls for his animals. He'd be standing at the open gate to the field where the milking cows were lying down. His call would be 'Dewech, dewech'. First one cow would very slowly get up and make her way towards the gateway. Slowly, a few more cows would get up,

until all were making their way. The same cow would always be in front. She would push herself forward if another cow happened to be ahead. If Dad was behind the cows his call would be 'How, How!' 'How, How!'. On the plough field, coming to the end of the furrow, his call to the two horses pulling the plough was either 'Coom here' or 'Coom sere'. Which was left and which was right, I don't remember. Of course, for the dogs, 'Gyp', 'Rover' and several others over the years, there was a variation of whistles, difficult to explain but each having its own meaning.

We had about 200 sheep, kept mainly on the back fields, sometimes on the breasty field. Fields near the river could be quite damp and the liver fluke snails flourished there. About every other year, Dad replenished his ewes at Sennybridge sheep sales. We made friends with a Mr Jones and his family who reared sheep for sale on a farm near Sennybridge. We visited them there and the oldest son was very interested in my oldest sister Connie. Once, I was nearby when Dad and Mr. Jones were bargaining and each trying to get a more favourable price. In the end, as part of the deal suggested by Mr Jones, I became owner of a young ewe and had the money for her lambs put into War Savings.

Sometimes Dad had a lift up to Sennybridge but I've known him come home by train to the halt near Lower Machen. Then he walked the track to Ruperra Home Farm, down the fields to the belt and on to our top fields. On one occasion he had been in the company of Victor Harding, one of the smart young farmers of the St Mellons area who was an officer in World War 1. Dad had had so much to drink that he decided not to show himself when he got back to the farm. He slept the night on the hay in the stables. This was a most unheard-of thing for Dad - he was normally most abstemious. He couldn't afford to be otherwise. The flock of sheep he bought would have been put in a railway truck in Brecon and carried to the halt, where they would be left in a pen alongside the station. Dad would have picked them up there and walked them to the farm along the track he walked himself.

There were smaller animals in the farm yard. We always had 2 or 3 sows, but never a boar. At one time our sows were taken two miles up the valley to Rudry where there was a boar at the Maenllwyd Inn. One day, one of the sows went missing and was eventually discovered at the Maenllwyd: she had evidently learned the way for herself. If she ever went missing again, we had only to check at the Maenllwyd to see if the boar had company.

Mother always kept chickens for eggs for the table; she had ducks most years, but rarely geese. She tried turkeys a few years but they were not very successful. She would put a dozen eggs under a broody hen, perhaps several times a year, but most of her stock came from day-old chicks bought in and kept warm in a secluded corner of the shed or chicken house by a paraffin heater.

The farm had the usual machinery for a lowland farm. There was a one furrow plough, a horse rake, mowing machine, hay turner and reaper, harrows and a scuffler. To prepare animal feed, we had a chaff cutter and a turnip slicer. There were three waggons, a dung cart, the milk cart and the trap or governess car. For hand work in the fields, there were two-pronged pikes for lifting sheaves and clumps of hay. A 4-pronged fork was used to spread dung from piles carried to the fields and left in rows. Wooden rakes, rather bigger than modern garden rakes, were used with a skilled flick of the wrist and arm to turn rows of hay drying in the hay fields. Alongside the rick area was the pitching pike, with its pole firmly fixed at the side of the rick.

The pitching pike was for easier transfer of hay from wagon to rick. It was made up of a stout pole taller than a rick, a cross bar loosely attached above rick height, a pair of double pincers, ropes and sets of pulleys. Pull one rope and the pincers would open and could be placed over a clump of hay. Pull another rope and the pike would close around the hay. Pull another rope and the horizontal bar would swing around from wagon to rick. Pull the last rope and the pike would open to drop the hay on the rick and it could then be forked to the area where it was needed. Then the pike could be pulled back to repeat the process.

The second instalment of Betty John's reminiscences looked at the social life of a substantial tenant farming family. Life revolved around family visits, chapel and seasonal celebrations. The social circle

was limited by the scope of the farm cart and pony, but a few of the family's friends had cars and were much in demand. The household was run by a strong-minded and independent matriarch who determinedly maintained old-fashioned traditions of behaviour and hospitality in spite of the problems of the Depression.

Pheasants and partridges were reared in the 'belt' region which separated Cefn Llwyd from the Ruperra home farm. Part of this was established wood and part newly-planted conifers, a good area for picking wild daffodils. In November and December, shooting parties from the Tredegar estate used Cefn Llwyd as a base for lunch. The butler with his helpers arrived from Tredegar House with containers of food and 'took over' the kitchen, dining room and sitting-room. Dad would be invited to join one of these shoots. I remember the estate agent Mr Foster Stedman at several shoots. I used to sit at the top of the stairs and watch these important men come in. The crystal wireless set my brother-in-law had built up in the corner of the dining room in the mid-twenties provided a lot of interest. Mother tried to persuade Dad to draw Mr Foster Stedman's attention to 'this and that' in the house that needed repair - the damp wall in the sitting-room, rotting wood in the windows. 'Not today, mother' was always the reply. There was always something left for us to sample after the men had returned to the shoot - once, a delicious Irish stew.

We had little knowledge of the events at Tredegar House. I don't think there was ever an invitation to the Servants' Ball there. In any case, I think Mother would have considered it infra dig to have attended. I was brought up 'not to talk to village boys' after I reached my teens. I remember the Price family coming to the Home Farm adjacent to the Laundry Cottages in the early 1920s. They came from Llanwensan-fach in Groesfaen, Glamorgan, the next farm to my mother's ancestral home at Llanwensan-fawr. The Prices had two daughters - one named Ada, who spent a lot of her time near the farm gate with her hands on her hips, talking to any passers-by and especially those of the opposite sex. Mother's comments on this were voluble and I was given a lesson in how not to behave.

A couple of brace of pheasants came to us after a shoot over the farm. After this day, Dad was allowed to have his own shoot, but only to shoot rabbits and hares. On a number of occasions, Boxing Day was our shooting party day. Dad's men friends arrived early: William Jones of Highcroft, Rumney, Reg Baker and his sons from Spring Court in Castleton, Mr Miller the Castleton schoolmaster, Mr Cox, who owned Cox's Café near the Capitol in Cardiff. Wives and children came in the afternoon. Food preparation and eating seemed to go on all day. The house was full. In the evening, after cleaning up and eating, one room was set aside for card players. This was where I learned to play whist, as I 'filled in' when there was a space vacant at one of the tables. Unfortunately, as soon as an adult became available, the place was taken. Very little alcohol was drunk in the house. Some men had their own flasks for use outside, others (like Uncle Will Jones) were teetotal. Rabbits were hung up in the barn for display, then shared around the visitors. Workmen who had been helping were given a share and were tipped by the visitors.

If there was no Boxing Day shooting party, then some time between Christmas and New Year's Eve there was a party at Cefn Llwyd or we went to Llywynhaid [a farm near Bettws, north of Newport] where Auntie Bessie, Mother's sister, and Uncle Dan had a party. There was always a good supper, and then we gathered around the piano to sing choruses, frequently hymns - Cwm Rhondda being Dad's favourite. Mr. Miller, the headmaster of Castleton School, had a number of comic songs: one I remember with 'Cockalorum' in the chorus - we all joined in that. We played charades and lots of card games then, tired, collected around the fire and gossiped. If the party was at our house, Mr. Reg Baker of Spring Court, Castleton, and his two sons would ride to us on horseback and stable the horses in Cefn Llwyd stables. Mrs Baker, their daughter Eileen and the other ladies staying at Spring Court would drive up in their pony and trap. The sons Rondesley and Vivian were older than I was and handsome, manly young men, very attractive. When Mother and Dad drove over to Llywynhaid, at some point in the evening the young children were put to bed there and rolled up in blankets and rugs and tucked under the trap seat to make the 1-1½ hour journey back to Cefn Llwyd. In later years, my brother-in-law Len would drive his family out and Uncle Will and Auntie Beattie would bring other members of their family by car.

There is a family story that my mother's father, Grampa Harry, was once mistaken for Edward VII. Old photographs of him show that he did look very like the king: he was stout, heavy-featured and bearded. He was visiting Auntie Bessie at Llwyn-haid. He travelled by train to Newport station. King Edward VII was expected to arrive there at any time. When Grampa Harry alighted from the train, the stationmaster hurried up to greet him and the band on the station started playing. In all of ten seconds it was realised that a mistake had been made and Grampa Harry went on his way to Llwyn-haid.

Apart from these Christmas parties, outings were few. In the 1920s there was the annual Whitsun Sunday School outing to the Peterston or St Brides levels. Farm wagons were used for those who didn't have traps, bikes or other forms of transport. Bales of straw were used for seating. Trestle tables were set up for the tea, which was supplied by the chapel ladies: there would be sandwiches, cakes and tea to drink, and games and competitions were arranged. Later on, after the mid-twenties, there were charabanc outings to Barry Island. I didn't enjoy the outings much as I didn't have any close friends in the chapel. I rarely went to Sunday school and wasn't part of the village crowd. I lived too far away to take much of an active part in chapel affairs. We went to the singing festivals and such like but I was never in a choir.

Cefn Llwyd was three miles from Castleton Baptist Chapel and it was difficult enough getting to one service in the day. We attended most Sunday mornings: the service was at 11 am. This was a big effort for Dad, as he had to milk, deliver the milk to St Mellons (and possibly Cefn Mably hospital) and have breakfast, wash and change before we could start out. In my earliest memory we had a dog-cart, but in my later years it was a governess cart. It was a three mile drive. Horse and trap were left in the yard alongside the chapel. We had the front seat, Dad sitting on the outside as a deacon.

We did attend one evening service each month, as this was the Communion service. On Communion night the wine was brought around in trays of six or eight very small glasses. The wine was drunk and the glasses were left on the back shelf of the pews to be collected after the service. Boys crept round quietly and drained the left-over glasses if they were given the chance. I think it must also have been on Communion night that the young children were called on to recite a verse from the Bible. I remember having to stand on the seat to say mine. It had been well rehearsed at home as a rule. My favourite standby, which I trotted out at regular intervals if I hadn't learned anything new, was 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God'. Not all chapels had this practice. A young visitor, Gwenda, had to learn a verse to recite when she stayed with us. I remember her being absolutely terrified.

About once a month (not on Communion Sundays) we had a visiting preacher - either an exchange of pulpits or a student 'practising'. They were entertained to dinner and tea by the deacons in turn. Old preacher friends were requested and a Mr Bebb who had been minister in the chapel always came to us. We had our share but, transport being what it was, the preacher could not get back to Castleton for Sunday school in the afternoon. Frequently, Dad was late getting to the morning service because of his milking, the milk round and so on, and it took quite a time to drive the three miles to Castleton. Then when we got back the horse had to be taken out of the trap, cleaned, fed and stabled before we could go indoors. These were the kind of jobs which Edward the strapper did when he was with us. I can remember him coming out from the stable to take the horse when we got home, and it was a great help. It is no wonder that we were glad to be offered an occasional lift in a friend's car.

The Rev. Howard John, who was the minister in the 1920s and 1930s, was a very gentle man, so thoughtful and genuinely 'good' (and unlike his successor Mr Thomas!). When I was swotting for my Finals, I had a letter from him wishing me luck. He recalled that once when he was sitting exams he saw cut into the desk where he was writing 'Keep your pecker up' and passed the message on to me.

Returning from chapel one Sunday evening in Horace Evans's car, we were involved in an accident with another car and Dad was shot out of the back seat and on to the road and hurt down one side. The following Sunday, Howard John was confused when he heard a lot of whispering about 'Mr. John

this' and 'Mr. John that' and later reported that he said to himself 'Whatever have I done wrong now?' He never did anything wrong - but his successor was a different matter.

During the war, the tale is told of Dad, by then the senior deacon, interrupting Mr Thomas in the middle of his sermon. He objected to Mr Thomas's reference to sons of the house visiting the maids in their bedrooms and getting them pregnant, saying the congregation didn't want to hear things like that. He then said 'Preach the Gospel, minister' and walked out. This caused a major incident. Eventually, Dad apologised to the deacons for causing an upset, but refused to apologise to the minister. And Dad was such a quiet, gentle man. I had left home by this time. I heard about the episode once again, 20 or 30 years later, from a deputy headmaster who had been a lad in the congregation. Apparently, it became a saying among the youngsters - 'You can't do that, you're not Rees John Cefn Llwyd!' My sister Marie and I bought a table for use in the chapel as a memorial after Mother died. We went back for the service of dedication in Mother and Dad's names.

Several Whitsuns before I went to secondary school, Mother and I spent up to a week with Grandma John and Aunty Agnes in Windsor Road, Barry. If it was fine, Mother and I would spend our days on Barry Island beach, returning mid-day for dinner and going back most afternoons, sometimes with Aunty Agnes. This is when I taught myself to swim - well, more of a dog paddle to start with. Of course, there were bucket and spade activities in the sand between times. These were very happy times. Once during the week we would visit the show ground to walk around and see what was going on, trying out one or two (not many) of the items. Grandma John spent most of her day sitting by the front room window which was directly opposite the High Street so she had plenty to watch. She always dried the dishes and cleaned shoes and the silver etc. sitting on her chair by the draining board in the back kitchen. One of her sayings was 'Agnes will miss me when I'm gone' - but she lived to 91. She was a cousin of Lord Pontypridd. There was a lodger there during this time and well after Grandma John died. His name was Mr Hope but everyone called him Hope. He worked in an office in the town. He lived with the family and had the back bedroom.

When I was older, there were day trips to Barry Island. We walked down to Cefn Mably corner, caught the Danygraig bus to St Mellons, the Corporation bus to the Royal Oak in Newport Road, just past the tram terminus, took the tram to the bottom end of St Mary Street and the train to Barry Island. It had to be an all-day effort to make it worth while. We also had an annual pre-Christmas day in Cardiff with a visit to Father Christmas's grotto, a look around the shops and lunch in David Morgan's. There are times when I walk through James Howells in St Mary Street and think back to my earliest memories of shopping there. Of course, Mother had an account there. As soon as she entered the shop, a morning-suited shopwalker addressed her by name and took her to the counter she required, gave her a chair and called an assistant to attend to her. She once recalled being served by James Howell himself. After 1929, when my sister Marie married and moved to Cardiff, we would have tea with her after our rare shopping expeditions and Dad would meet us in the trap off the Danygraig bus at Cefn Mably corner.

Another kind of entertainment was the family walk. I remember one walk in about 1919 up to Cefn Mably at the time the Kemeys-Tynte estate was sold to Tredegar. I remember seeing the remains of the gallows at the back of the house, the long table made from one tree trunk plank and the long gallery with a door leading to a passage to the Rhymney river bank. The local tradition was that Cavaliers escaped that way during the Civil War. The rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias and a tulip tree in the garden were magnificent and remained so for many years. The young horse chestnut trees either side of the drive were a great attraction for the local youngsters, especially in the autumn for conkers. My initials and my brother's can still be identified on a tree near the bridge.

We went on more purposeful walks out into the fields to pick mushrooms, blackberries, elderberries or elderflowers. The elderflowers were dried in the large store-room over the dairy and made it smell as if cats had been spraying there. They were used to make medicine and a skin lotion. Mother also had Grandma Harry's recipe for a light brown ointment which had beeswax and chopped herbs in it. This was used like a poultice to 'draw' an infected area. Commercial medicines were more widely available when I was young and I can't remember much about the traditional remedies of my

grandmother's time. But veterinary techniques were not so advanced. I do remember Dad giving a cow a 'drench' for some internal complaint - he had the cow's head held up and poured the liquid down through an old boot with the toe cut off.

There were always unmarried aunts and sisters staying with the visiting families at Christmas. We had Auntie Gwen, who was headmistress of the primary school in Llandaff, staying with us every Xmas - and in fact every school holiday. It was always a nuisance to have to be especially quiet in the morning before Auntie Gwen got up and in the afternoon if she had gone back to bed for a few hours or retired to the sitting room for a rest 'because she was very worn out after a hard term teaching and needed to recuperate to be well enough to teach the following term'! I'm aware now how dreadful it was that she made a fuss when Dad woke her when he attended to the fire in the American stove to get it going at 6.00 am when he got up. And there was Auntie Gwen lying in a nice warm bed, even if she was awake, and Dad had to go out, milk cows, deal with the milk, get Bonny in the milk cart plus churns and, having eaten his porridge, take the milk to Cefn Mably, St Mellons and the milk round. But Auntie Gwen was surety for the overdraft he always had in the National Provincial Bank in St Mary Street, Cardiff. I took that job over early in the war, after I'd paid my university loan back and had saved £150 in Post Office certificates.

Auntie Gwen was lucky that she had a career. Sewing was the common lot of the spinster in the family. It was the only really useful thing she could do to make a living. One lady - some sort of family connection - came regularly to stay with us for a week or more and spent the whole day sewing: sheets from sheeting, old sheets turned side-to-middle, pillow cases, everyday dresses, back-to-front pinafores for Mother (out of a granny print that has since become popular again). patching and so on. A Mr James and his middle-aged daughter lived in the cottage in the bridge field alongside the river. Miss James took in sewing. Each year she did some plain sewing for the family. She remade a caracule cloth coat of my grandmother's into a peplum jacket which my daughter still has.

One useful caller at the farm was the 'Johnny come fortnight', a pedlar, frequently walking but sometimes with a bike. He would carry the usual haberdashery articles but also a few items of adornment - brooch, hair slide, apron, pinafore. J.E. Jones, a well-known men's outfitter in Blackwood, started this way.

Mr Anstey, a Magor farmer, took over the tenancy of Ruperra home farm in the middle twenties. All his sons lived in turn in the farmhouse and farmed the land. Cefn Llwyd was always an open house; rarely was the outside door locked. Mother, especially, enjoyed company and gave visitors a great welcome. Most weekends visitors from Cardiff and elsewhere called and always stayed to tea. They always said it was a joy to get away into the country. Mother and Marie would have been very busy but work would always stop for conversation and tea. In summer this would be on the front lawn, weather permitting.

The welcome included the Anstey sons who frequently walked across the dividing fields or biked around the road (three times as far) to spend the evening with us, sometimes twice a week. I remember Edward, Bob, Owen, Ernest and Colin: there were more. As one married and was set up in a farm elsewhere, the nextson took over at Ruperra. It was very lonely for these young men, having come from a big family. At Cefn Llwyd, they always found congenial, welcoming company. We had many a happy evening in a wide circle around that kitchen fire. We had an old grandfather chair with a coracle-like back and hood which visitors hung their coats over. (It's now at the Museum of Welsh Life in St Fagan's.) I used to hide behind the coats and listen to the adult conversation when I was supposed to be in bed. Later, I was allowed to stay up but I suffered frequently in having to give up my chair to an adult. Hence the present, one Christmas, of a low-seated wicker chair, a substantial structure which has since made a very useful nursing chair and is still being used by my grand-daughter: a credit to the Blind Institute workshops in Newport, Road, Cardiff. And we had lots of visitors to stay. As well as Auntie Gwen, my brother-in-law's sisters came when they wanted to get away, and several of Mother and Dad's relatives spent their holidays with us.

Of course, we sometimes visited friends and relations - Llwynhaid, Mother's family home at Llanwensan and her sister's farm at Gigman Mill near Cowbridge, the Bakers at Spring Court and the family at Highcroft. But we didn't visit the local farms, except the Davieses at Church Farm, Llanedeyrn. Mother's open house hospitality is what we now think of as traditional farmhouse hospitality, but few farms entertained visitors as she did in those hard times.

Mother was a very strong-minded lady - like most of the women of her family. The Harrys were proud of the fact that they had once owned their farm, Llanwensan near Peterstone-super-Ely in the Vale of Glamorgan. In the eighteenth century, when the family were down on their luck, the farm was bought by the Aubrey estate but the family continued there as tenants. There are records of the family in that farm going back at least 450 years. Mother had much more independence than most farmers' wives of her time. Dad rarely went away. Apart from a week in Scotland with relatives on two occasions, I can only recall his overnight visit to his mother once or at most twice a year. But our relations and friends in Cardiff were always so pleased to visit us. They were sure of a welcome - it was such a hospitable house. Mother loved company. But as for me - well, I couldn't get away soon enough.