*(Book 2 Part 5)*

One day an army tank was delivered and Worthy put it to good use: climbing up the apple trees until they toppled over with the weight enabling them to be removed with the roots attached. The area of land would be cleaned leaving deep pits that had held the removed root system. A big single furrow plough called a Paraine buster was used to plough the whole field thus levelling in the earthy surface for crop plantation. The passing seasons saw many trailers made with wonderfully strong frames with jacking systems attached and sold to farmers far and wide.

The month of March 1950 took a change when a motorcyclist rode into the yard, a well travelled man, with a line of small flags advertising the country visited decked with very well made pannier boxes and motorcycle spare tyres around his shoulders. This was John (Jan), Worthy’s older brother who had left Celon on Boxing Day and ridden his Triumph 500cc motorcycle to England to be demobbed at Plymouth naval base from his duties as a Chief Petty Officer – another story told in a motorcycle magazine in the 1980s. The ambitious man then commenced to build a lorry square framed on a trailer frame. When asked the plan I was told “I am building a caravan home for my family and going to position it in the little orchard behind this workshop and in due time it was completed and positioned in the location desired. His wife Elsie and very young son David took up residence.

Life continued with me keeping a watchful eye on the wonders of John Preston Butts’ thatching and bee skip making skills watching with wonder at the engineering activities. Life took a different pace when one day a giant low loader arrived and proceeded to unload a used yellow Caterpillar D7 bulldozer. Worthy this is now nine months that followed and saw activity in Hole Farm workshop as the new regular business of trailer making was replaced with bulldozing hedges for farmers.

I remained at home and as a growing lad of 12 or 13 was tough enough to help with duties at home, such as walking up to Big Pennypark and with much pride used the large heavy hay knife to endeavour to cut out the hay square for the cows to feed, hoe turnips, cut hedges and clean out the cow sheds when needed. Sadly John Preston Butt passed away in his sleep in April at the age of 90. From then on I never used John Preston’s tin shed as I felt the shed and its contents were for a past world of natural skills when everything could be made from nothing and to introduce any other items was not correct. So it remained a shrine and I used my workshop set up in the still room next to the main house. I shall never forget one Saturday afternoon when I was helping farmer Burridge at Rydon Farm leading his trusty carthorse pulling a weed hoe between rows of new growing potatoes when news arrived that Worthy Anstee had had a catastrophic accident with the Caterpiller D7 bulldozer. This fatality changed the lifestyle of many people for some years to come, just as it had changed my attitude on the day I had rode in to Hole Farm on the home built tractor. Engineering was going to be my technical passion with its Caterpillar and leading manufacture company for outstanding engineering and reliability over the countryside.

Devon life continued in the usual pattern with the normal fall of snow over January and February. I have particularly separated my experience of the worst winter of 1947 when I was 9 years old. I awoke one morning to snow falling heavily and standing 4 inches deep. My Grandfather John Preston was still with us and when he came down for his breakfast at 9.30 am said “I’ve seen worse than this when the River Exe froze over and they roasted an oxe on it” and he promptly moved and sat on the old settle wrapped around the side of the open fire and continued with breakfast already prepared by my mother. The snow continued to fall every day with the same response from John Preston until Friday morning by which time the level of the snow outside had reached the bottom quarter of the kitchen window and was level with the far banks across the orchard making all tree trunks appear short. The snow was still falling with extreme cold making the flakes smaller. This continued until nightfall and with darkness the temperature changed and we realised that the small snowflakes were indeed misty rain. We had no idea what was going to be the result of this condition but we did next morning in the full light of day the countryside was beautiful and looked like a tinsel town with all the trees and bushes encased in ice. The falling misty rain continued all day. Consequently the encased ice bushes became heavy and nature gave way to the weight and at intervals big crashes could be heard in the woods and hedges as branches broke off under the overbearing weight of the ice encasement. The crash was closely followed by a continuing sound of tinkling bells as the ice particles broke into pieces as they cascaded through the remaining ice encased trees. When you picked up the beautiful branch to examine it the heat of the sun soon melted the ice encasement and you would be holding a very wet and just a normal looking branch. The temperature raised and spring entered our lives.

Some evenings would find me stalking the hedgerows with father with his trusty double barrel 12 bore shot gun under my arm looking for a rabbit to change the menu from beef and pork and later in the season helping father to receive the open hogsheads of newly pounded cider juice always discussing the quantity of the apple crop this year. Every few weeks would find us racking off the cider. This entailed draining off the clear clean liquid into a clean barrel and leaving the cloudy to ferment out further. We would finish the racking period with about four hogsheads of clear cider and 1.5 with cloudy cider to use at a later date.

Time drew near for Dad and I to have a discussion about work and the direction I would take. Dad made a phone call to Jack Saunders of Whiddon Down and a date was set for me to attend one evening. We caught the Okehampton bus and duly arrived at Whiddon Down. My first impression was The Post Inn on the left with a long green shed running quite a distance on the right which was a blacksmiths shop coupled to a wheelwright shop combined. Little did I realise how much time I would spend working the finer arts of ironwork and canvas drive belt manufacturing in the shed. We walked down through the yard with green corrugated workshop standing on each side and met Mr and Mrs John Saunders who I found to be a very quiet unassuming gentleman. It was agreed that I should commence work one week after leaving school (a week to adapt to the life change). It is said that help arrives from the most unexpected places. My uncle, Les Stevens, who lived at Red Ridges, Cheriton Bishop had offered to give me a lift on the back of his motorcycle from Hooperton Cross to Whiddon Down and return in the evenings so I cycled to Hooperton Cross, jumped on the pillion seat of my Uncle Les’ motorcycle and was delivered to outside the long green blacksmith’s shop. I was met by Mr John Saunders who teamed me up with another fine gentleman named George Endacott, the main water works man for the depot using a short wheel base Land Rover as a service vehicle. My first job of the day was to attend and replace a set of knotter bills in a corn binder standing in a field of the parish of Spreyton. I was so delighted to contribute to repair as my small schoolboy hands could find entry into the system and line up the drive gear roll pip with the knotter bill shaft. These hands changed over the early years of engineering as finger joints look like ball bearings and the right hand thumb looks quite flat due t constantly coming second to the hammer on a miss-hit to the chisel head . Much and various work was carried out throughout the region with some standing out in my mind as very hairy in some instances. We were called to Wood House in South Tawton, a fine house with quite a past history. The fault was to correct a malfunction in a very deep fresh water well. It was reputed to have a depth of 90’ from surface cover to the bottom of the well. It was so deep it used a secondary foot valve system to lift the water to the surface. To achieve access to the problem George Endacott bound and lowered 2 full length ladders with rope to serve as one down the well and slid the sturdy wooden batons through the top rung to hold whilst a third full length ladder held vertically by 2 men while George again bound tight to the 2 ladders already down the well. On completion of binding, the 3 ladders were then lowered further and the sturdy wood bottom was slid in position to secure 3 full length ladders. A rope was tied around George’s waist and the loose end tied to a nearby post. Then unbelievably George entered the open well. I watched through the well opening until my hero looked minute in the gloom. Great care was taken by me not to allow any stones to fall as George was only wearing a cloth cap and a stone falling from that height would have been catastrophic. All tools were lowered by rope in a metal bucket. The faulty bucket system was removed and the item repaired on the back of the Land Rover. Some time after I thought the physical endurance of George Endacott was remarkable as he descended and ascended the 3 full lengths of ladders and held on to its location at the bottom whilst repairs were executed. Had I kept a diary its day should have read “A funny thing happened at work today”. The job in question was to attend a newly constructed or sunken well that had been lined with two cement rings and install a new suction pipe the source of water which was very good. So the well depth would be approximately 28 to 30 feet. The surface of the water was approximately 6 feet from the surface of the well and having newly dug was still cloudy but clearing. George unloaded the trusty double ladders and set them down into the murky water. Tools and components were loaded into the roped galvanise bucket ready for me to haul in when all was ready. George continued to step down the ladder until he was in a position 6 inches above the surface of the water. He then gave the signal for the bucket of tools. I turned to pick up some and then heard an almighty splashing and coughing. Looking into the water I was greeted with George’s cloth cap floating on the surface together with the top end of the ladder. Unknown to George the ladder had stopped 6 inches off the bottom and rested on the small fragile ledge 6 feet from the bottom of the well and had given away under the weight of George and the ladder and continued to the well bottom, When I looked in the well George’s cloth cap was floating around accompanied by George’s head resurfacing with eyeballs that were so fixed that they looked like they had just emerged from a Soho strip club. George recovered and we immediately drove off the site to George’s home at Throwleigh for a complete change of clothes and to dry off. It was a good job the Land Rover was constructed by sheet aluminium as the volume of water draining through the bottom and the side door was continuous on the journey to Throwleigh. The incident passed and I was aware the subject was never discussed again and was left to die with the time. We were instructed to attend the age old pub of Uncle Tom Cobley at Spreyton and vent the well when a few days of repair work could be executed.