*(Mike’s memories Book3part7)*

Having covered the location and the character of living at Thorn Moor I must explain some of the work encountered to keep life turning over. I will call it meat management. It starts with my father bringing home a small piglet and placing it in the pig house as it buries itself in the new straw. From then it is well fed with pig meal supplement, potato skins and all manner of items grown in the garden. After a period of time we have standing before us not a little piglet but a very fine animal weighing in at 15 to 16 score. This represents a matured animal with well matured body fat. From that day things began to happen. An item that looked like a very sturdy stretcher with standing legs about 2 feet high was recovered from one of the sheds, cobwebs and all. It was scrubbed with boiling water with the everyday scrubbing brush. The back house complete with the water trough was also scrubbed down. A small mounting of small logs were positioned beside the copper boiler and the container filled with water ready for boiling. Four hazel nut sticks about half an inch in diameter were cut about 1 foot long, skinned of bark and placed in the stone water trough for use on the day of action. I was soon to find out their use. An ash stick was shaped like a yoke used by milkmen with 2 very sharp pointed ends and were positioned in the back shed where all was to happen. To a small boy of approximately 8 years the impending action could be felt.

The day came and word must have been given to Mr Partridge of West Pitton Farm who came with a canvas bag containing a full kit of butcher’s knives hanging from his bicycle handlebars. Mr Partridge looked over the equipment at our outhouse and nodded approval. Ten gallons of water was now boiling. I was told to go indoors and help mother and not to come out until collected.

The carcass of our pig was lying on the wooden stretcher having been washed down with the cold water hose. The carcass was lifted further into the backhouse and plied with boiling water at intervals whilst the men were vigorously scraping off the very course hog hair which continued until the whole body was white. A slit was cut in each rear leg and the newly made milkmaid yoke was attached by pushing the points through the leg slits. A pulley was attached and the whole body winched, back legs uppermost, to the ceiling crooks. From that position Mr Partridge demonstrated his butchering skills. He removed the stomach and entrails, put them in a galvanised bath and placed the whole contents in the stone trough of cold running water. It was at this point that I gained knowledge of the use of the 4 prepared hazel sticks as mother prepared to clean the intestine to become a remarkably clean item with all content washed away.

By evening the body had been completely jointed except for one quarter which was collected by Roy Partridge who had walked from West Pitton, a distance of 6 miles, sat down and talked of the daily problems, had a taste of the chitterlings and agreed that they were very tasty. Despite me having watched the cleaning of them I only then discovered their function and as a small boy could not entertain taking a bite. The time was 10 pm and Roy wrapped up his quarter of pig in a hessian sack, tied some binder twine at each corner and positioned it over his back, wished us good night and walked out into the moonless night to walk the 6 miles home loaded down with pork! They made them tough in those days.

Mother put the remaining joints of meat in a large wooden vat and mixed up a solution of salt brine and poured in enough brine to cover the joints to preserve them and added a round wooden lid to keep the meat free of dust and dirt.

I feel the leaves were breaking into colour and the sap flow to the leaves was rising up so when October arrived the sap of the trees and smaller bushes were in retreat.

Father would action his hedge and fence maintenance plan in such a way as to steep 120 yards of hedge. This entailed cutting out untidy growth of brushwood, cutting down the enlarged and out of condition wood stumps but retaining the useful saplings about 3 inches in diameter and naturally positioned when laid over would if possible form a continuous handrail appearance and as hoped when the small branches grew the length of the sapling turned vertical would then form a continuous hedge growing vertical. The art of cutting and bending a sapling was to cut a V block in line with the desired direction. The branch is required to lay over and hold down with a wooden crook fastened by an unrequired tree branch. The hedge earth bank itself will have been found to have been damaged by the retained sheep, cattle or early rabbits. This would be corrected by rebuilding the shape by cutting and repositioning the earth that had slowly slipped out into the field. The best implement for this job is a Devon shovel manufactured by Morris of Dunsford or Finches Foundry of Sticklepath near Okehampton. All excess timber was put into piles according to need. The heavier trees and limbs up to 4” in diameter were trimmed back and cut to about 9 or 10 feet lengths. Cuttings and brushwood were made into faggots and the heavy tree stumps left separate. So at the end of the hedge laying operation all the faggots were returned to our house and were built up into a small square wood rick that was thatched with green pond rushes to keep them dry. The heavy 9-10 feet poles were firstly formed as a tripod and all remaining poles filled in to form a wigwam. These poles would dry out over the months as the wind would blow through the expanded legs at the bottom and the rain would run off the new vertical surface,

In January father would start selecting wood that had been stacked against the east and south side of the wigwam as it was considered that the cold east winds would dry the wood free of sap. Enough was cut into logs for the hearth fire as a faggot was partially removed from the rick and positioned ready for use as every day kindling. The large tree stumps were axed and split with metal wedges to become the correct size to use as a hearth back stick for all day burning so as we see, nothing was wasted.

A period of interest raises its head for the month of May – hay harvest time. The fields of grass were grown to waist height so spring breezes would send waves rolling and cascading across the surface of the tall waving grasses. A tractor would arrive with a grass mower and cut the field leaving wonderful patterns of cut grass. As always we hoped the weather remained dry with sunshine to keep the air warm to convert the green and very moist grass into dry quality hay. This was escalated by using a hay turning machine to lift the grass into the light fluffy rolls allowing the warm air to breeze through speeding up the drying process. Checks would be made until the hay was considered correctly dried. Word went out and the team of neighbouring farmers and farmhands would gather bringing the desired equipment to assist with the labour saving of the harvesting process. First on the scene is normally a hay pole delivered on a trailer with 2 wood poles approximately 6” in diameter connected together with a steel sleeve. It is raised to stand vertical and held in that position using 4 excessively long heavy ropes attached to 4 heavy steel securing pegs. Hanging from the top of the pole is a yardarm with a pulley at each end. A rope runs through this unit. At one end is a hinged 4 pronged hay lifting fork whilst the power rope is threaded from one wheel through the yardarm down the hay pole tree to a pulley block at the bottom ready for the lifting power to be connected, normally to a horse. The tractor or hay sweep is coupled up so the team would consist of 2 men to build the hayrick, 2 men to load the hay pole grabs and one to lead the horse. There would also be one man or boy to drive the hay sweep. Any extra help was not turned away and most important part way through the day mother would arrive with the most important full harvest basket and kettles of tea. I remember one season I would have been about 14 years old and the day had just started when one man building the hay rick said to me, “Come here and help me build the rick. If you do as I say you will be able to build a solid waterproof hay rick”. I had no idea what he was talking about until the hay was constantly pitched to us from the ground. Picking up and repositioned in the desired spot with the constant command from my teacher “keep the centre full”. Particularly he kept his eye on each corner and expressed strongly this command that the corners should slope out. He told me that a well-made rick should look like the well risen surface of a well baked bread loaf. The hay sweep is a large long pronged rake bolted to the front axle of a tractor. It is then driven out to the field and carefully run up the hay rows one at a time until full. This was considered when the top of the load was level with tractor radiator top. Harvest duty completed and Uncle made a visit on the week or so after and thatched the rick to face the wind and weather.

Life progressed and extra work was taken on board as extra fields had been added together with extra milking cows to boost the smallholding income Father at this time had changed from working at Yeoford and was involved with the Forestry Commission attending to forests in Devon – Fernworthy and Bodmin Moor.

One day in October life at Thorn Moor made a radical change when Dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. We sold most of the milking cows retaining one for our home use from that then until Dad passed away and Thorn Moor was sold.

It was out of bed earlier to hand milk the cow and clean up the yard, then journey to Whiddon Down for my daily workload of agricultural engineering. Evenings were taken up with carrying out work required on the seasons requirements. My life and mind made a big change when I met the love of my life, Vera. Fortunately the meeting was 7 months before Dad’s passing. So we both could sit by our fire and talk at length to each other. I responded to an advertisement requesting a service engineer. I was offered and accepted the job and it was agreed for me to join them when the time was convenient. In due time the farm was sold, I got married and after the return from my honeymoon I started working in the engineering rebuild section of Bowmaker Plant Ltd the Caterpillar dealer, a great advancement in the engineering field for me as the onsite lecture room together with Company roving lecturers was able to keep all service engineers in the loop with all aspects of this product.