

# **THE WAR YEARS**

**by Derek and Alan Wheeler**

At the out break of war, Mum, Dad, Alan, Joan and I went to Aunt Sue's. Her husband owned a pub in Writtle, which is where we went for a long weekend, ostensibly for our parents to discuss the threatening situation which had arisen, and could so change their lives.

There, we children met for the first time our two cousins, Jill and Joan. They were the offspring of Mr Baker, Aunt Sue's husband, Aunt Sue being his second wife. There was a son in the family also, Ivor, he was blood related, being Aunt Sue's son from her first marriage. It was here I had my first taste of beer, going round the empty bar in the morning, after spending my first night there, sipping the dreges from the abandoned glasses remaining around from the night before. I did not particularly enjoy the drinks. I did, however, enjoy the game of pin marble which I was introduced to.

When it sank into the population that life could be dangerous to Londoners, there was a lot of effort made to supply everyone with a gasmask. We were taught to put this ugly rubber contraption over our head in the shortest possible time, then sit and breathe in it. This was not easy. Later they added another piece to the front, a further filter, which made it even harder to breathe. The worst of it was, it was fitted into a small cardboard box about six inches square, and that went into a square hold-all with a shoulder strap, then we had to take this everywhere we went.

Soon Alan and I found ourselves, along with hundreds of other kids and teachers, on a train leaving for Woodbridge in Surrey. This was our first time away from home alone together. Many were the tears shed, mostly from the mothers, but not I think from Alan and I. At Woodbridge, Alan and I were billeted with a banker and his wife who made us say our prayers before eating, very proper. She, this respectful lady of the house, ensured we went to the toilet every morning prior to going to school, waiting outside the outside toilet patiently until she heard the toilet flushed. Many a time, if I couldn't go, I'd sit there making

appropriate noises, before pulling the chain to put the good lady at ease.

Nothing much seemed to be happening on the war front, so when our parents came to visit us evacuees on my ninth birthday, we pleaded home sickness and prevailed upon them to take us back with them, with partial success. They took me, and left Alan. Alan of course was not well pleased with this arrangement, neither was I, but money was short and fares would have to be paid, so Alan couldn't go home just yet. As a bribe, a small consolation, he received my birthday present, a bicycle lamp. Alan, of course, was subsequently collected, and we were once again together, back in Forest Gate.

We were not alone in this situation, many other families had faced the same situation, and reacted exactly the same as our parents, collected their offspring. So we returned, but not I think for long. The bombs started falling, fathers were getting called up, compulsory, to join the forces. Many mothers were now working in factories, so most children in London, and many other big cities, suddenly found themselves parting from their parents to places unknown. With our overcoats on, gas-masks hanging on our shoulders, suitcase tied up with string, a label with our name and address round our neck, and a whole list of instructions, we once again waved farewell to our parents at Paddington station, and headed to pastures new.

The train was full of children and people in uniform. Once again Alan and I were to leave our parents. I remember little of the journey despite having very limited experience of travelling in trains.

We arrived at Dulverton and from there some of us travelled on to the village of Brompton Regis. Here the village elders distributed us to various addresses in the vicinity. Alan tells me he nearly got billeted on an eighty year old woman in the village, but as I would not be separated from my brother, they decided two children would be too much for one old lady and found different accommodation for us on a farm, three and a half miles from the village. It was called Rugg's Farm and owned by a Mr and Mrs Heywood, along with a daughter Lorna and a son George. Lorna was sixteen, George about twenty years of age. It was

quite a large farm, around three hundred and thirty five acres, having cattle, sheep, pigs, fowl, ducks, geese, two dogs, Toby and Martin, and a cat Tibby. There were also two ferrets, and a couple of horses, Tidy and Short.

The farmhouse was very basic, with slate floors, a well for water, and a primus lamp for light. There was no running water, no electricity and no gas, there was however a phone. There was also an enormous fireplace, within which resided a log fed iron stove. I may have been only nine but I could write a good letter. Please take me home I wrote, there are flies everywhere, and it smells so. This time it did not work, London was getting a very dangerous place to live at, so our parents refused. Dad was driving buses at the time and mother was soon to work in a munitions factory.

We soon quite liked the farm life. We cut ourselves a good walking stick each, and made a whistle out of hazel, George showed us how, then fitted out with a pair of old Spats, (every male wore them) old boots, and old jacket, we fitted the scene perfectly, except for the accent. I swear we were there for six months, before we fully understood every word spoken to us. Oh arr, young varmint etc, being typical phrases it took time to absorb.

School was in the village hall, and the village as I've written, was several miles away. Alan and I had to leave at seven thirty am to arrive at school by nine, and it would be five thirty before we got back to the farm, after departing school at four pm. We would have to carry a satchel with our lunch, two jam sandwiches each, and a piece of cake, and of course the accursed gas mask. It wasn't heavy, but three miles or so is a long way, so we would take it in turns to carry the holdall. Once Alan refused to take his turn to carry this satchel home, and just dumped it on the road. We must have walked a quarter of a mile before I gave in, and went back for it. Another fight, of course, ensued.

Although two years younger than me, Alan could always hold his own in a scrap, not caring how he hit me or with what. Feet, sticks, farm tools all were weapons he use against me if so inclined, whereas I always only used fists. Once he broke a pitch fork handle on my neck when we were fighting on a fully loaded hay cart, knocking me to the ground from a height of eight feet or more.

We soon forgot and forgave, however, and worked harmoniously on many childish projects together, without any discourse.

There was a large quarry on the farm. We had the use of a wooden wheelbarrow and crowbar. Along with other tools we made and found, we split rock from the quarry face and constructed walls and a den. Here, we spent so many happy hours. We made hand grenades from mud obtained from the stream by the quarry. These we baked on a fire, they made splendid bombs when they were dry. As they landed, after being thrown, they burst into a cloud of fine dust. We made bows and arrows too, much fun. On our fire, Alan and I would cook such delicacies as potatoes, apples, even chestnuts. We would walk to a local derelict farm building, rummage and find treasure for our den at the quarry, like old pottery, steel bars, anything we could use to help split the rock from the quarry face. We even found a rifle once, in a tree at the quarry, the wooden butt had rotted away, but by flattening the end of the barrel, we made an excellent wedge, ideal for splitting rock.

Our leisure was spent in other ways too. The letters from home were regular, and invariably came in the form of a roll of comics, with a letter inside from Mum. We always replied with a letter, a thank you note, and impart some updated information on what we had been getting up to. The first time mother received a letter from Alan, it had been written on his behalf by Lorna. In the next correspondence we received, mother made it plain, she wanted Alan to scribe his own mail, 'He's quite capable of writing himself', mother assured Lorna. I would read the comics and letters out loud to Alan.

Once a week, George had to go to Home Guard duties. He'd hop on his cycle, and away to the village, looking very smart in his uniform, in enormous contrast to the way he normally dressed whilst working on the farm, where he, as we kids, literally wore rags with a flour sack over our shoulders. When he went, it was strangely lonely. It was surprising just how much our life revolved around him. Alan and I would follow him up and down the fields as he, Tidy the horse and Short, the elder horse, ploughed, or raked the land. Ploughing a single furrow each time accompanied by his two faithful dogs. It would take perhaps three days to plough an average

field, every furrow was like a ruled line. Refreshments was the odd glass of cider, which we kids joined in, and quite liked. Draughts and cards, was another pastime that whiled away the hours. There was a wireless, accumulator driven, but this was on mostly just for the news, ('Here is the news, and this is Al Barbidale reading it'). On Sundays, there was a special room we would all go to, after Church and after dinner.

There was a coal fire, instead of the great log fire in the dining room. Here Alan and I would, if we were lucky, listen to Granddad, (Mr Heywood), tell of the time he was in the Boar war. Being told those bloodthirsty stories, was something Alan and I really looked forward to. This was a time also, when Aunt, (Mrs Heywood), and Lorna, mostly played cards with us. It was Sunday afternoon, the Lord's day of rest, when sometimes George would get out his banjo, and entertain us with a selection of his favourite tunes, accompanied by us boys, and Martin the dog, who with Toby, was, on the rare occasion, permitted to enter the dining room. On a Sunday afternoon, the elderly couple would usually retire to another room in the afternoon, leaving us boys to amuse ourselves, that's why we were so pleased to have George entertain us if he didn't have to go out. He was courting a girl in the village, but it wasn't too serious, he saw her infrequently. In the Sunday room there was a piano, but it was so hopelessly out of tune it was unplayable, so regretfully I was unable to continue my music practice.

Mr Heywood was about sixty when we first met him, a fairly big man with a cavalry moustache, a trilby hat, which he never seemed to remove, spats, and large stick he took everywhere with him. He usually wore a waistcoat over an open necked shirt, and corduroy trousers. He always seemed to smoke a pipe and we loved him. Aunt was old looking, very small, under five foot I think. Always wore dark clothing, with a sackcloth apron, she never stopped working. She had a bent finger from a mangle accident, but it didn't prevent her darning every night the clothes and socks we boys holed during the day.

When we got up in the morning, Granddad had made the fire, Aunt had prepared the breakfast, Lorna and George had started milking by hand the cows. Breakfast would be porridge with a

dollop of cream in the middle, followed by thick bacon, scrambled egg, often goose egg, or should I say gander egg, and crumpet, an unsweetened salted pancake. Then off to school with our jam or marmalade sandwiches, and gas mask.

Rugg's Farm was a two story house, with a front door near centre front of the house. The front door was left open all day, no fear of intruders here those days. Two large white flint stones flanked each side of the porch. Facing the house, to the left of the door, was the window to our large dining room. In the garden, there grew a herb which effectively cured constipation. The two windows to the right of the door, fronted the Sunday best room and the apple room. The floor of the latter being the place all our orchard apples were stored, laid out in rows, no two touching. They made delicious pies. In the middle of the house was the pantry, the cold room. Here in salt baths was a lot of the meat. Rabbit and fowl, hung on hooks, and bowls of whipped cream were stored on shelves, along side butter. After milking, the cow's milk, over and above that needed for our own use, would be put in a chum, which was collected daily by the milk marketing board. We, apart from using it indoors for our own consumption, fed it to suckling calves.

Quite a lot would be separated (decreamed) using a hand turned machine called, surprise, surprise, a separator. This machine cleverly divided the rich milk into curds and whey. The butter milk, being used for cooking, the cream, boiled to make clotted cream, then worked on to turn it into butter, we didn't go a stage further and make cheese. All this took place in a small room at the foot of the back stairs, under which lay a large barrel of cider, kitchen?

The main stairs led off from a beautifully tiled hall at the front of the house. Up the back stairs, next to the corn room was the bedroom Alan and I shared. Opposite was George's bedroom. This was also the room a tin bath was placed in, when Alan and I had our weekly bathe, attended to by Aunt. I don't know who carried all the hot water up those narrow back stairs from the enormous pot over the log fire, but it wasn't us.

At night we kids could hear the rustle of mice, running inside the walls on their way to the corn room. Our room had small panes of glass in the

frame. One small square pane had been broken and removed. Every night one of our cats would crawl through and join us in bed. We liked the company. Awoke one morning to find the cat had given birth to kittens on the pillow. Aunty was not amused. She threw them out of the window. Beneath our window was the flat outhouse roof so they didn't fall far. The cat kept trying to return them to the bedroom, but Aunty would have none of it. Fortunately Alan and I rescued the kittens and took them to the barn, where we made a nest for the litter. Most survived.

Another time, we awoke to hear scampering under our bed, it was a live mole, a present from our cat. We started with a cat called Tibby, of course, an excellent ratter and mouser. She soon lost one front foot, when she went rabbiting and caught her pad in a gin. Nevertheless, she carried on with just one huge claw remaining on her ruined paw. She was the only cat allowed into the parlour by the huge fire. The other animals dogs, cats, were not allowed this privilege, a flaming log, as some found out, would be aimed at any animal foolhardy enough to chance it's luck, by Granddad.

Despite the tranquillity of Somerset, the sleepy lanes overhung by a leafy ceiling of beech and sycamore branches, the rolling patchwork fields, with small woods and coveys, wherever one looked, there was a basic cruelty not seen by the casual observer. The flocks of sheep, in the fields, all have to go through a trench of liquid poison. This is to discourage the sheep's worst enemy after man, the bluebottle. Also, the sheep's tails were docked, and just as likely to end up on the farmers' plate the next day.

Despite being dipped, flies still attack some sheep, so the farmer has to visually examine his flock every day in the spring and summer. This is where the dogs come in. With a cry of 'Get afore them', our dogs would swiftly round up Granddad's sheep. Once trapped in a corner of the field, the animals could be captured individually, and given a closer examination. To get a frisky sheep, one grabs it by its back leg, traps its head between one's legs, facing the rear of the animal. From this position it is very easy to examine the beast and medicate if necessary. Normally this would happen if, on our farm, George spotted a sheep with a wound or greasy looking patch, or rubbing itself. If trouble was spotted, the beast would have

liniment poured on the infected area, fingers would fiercely rub the solution into the wound and fat maggots would fly out in all directions. After the area was cleared of the grubs, the wool would be sheared close to the flesh which would be honeycombed with small holes, then a sulphur tar would be spread over the damaged tissue. Job done, always successful. The reason the sheep's tails are docked is the wool on the tails would become contaminated with it's dung and become victim to the bluebottle.

Male sheep were neutered, one good ram will service a large flock. Two would fight. The aim, as in cattle, is to improve the stock. Another painful job, and castration is painful for any animal, was ringing the noses of the pigs. This is a C shaped double pointed nail, brass, which is clamped through the nostril of all free range pigs. Pigs use their noses as ploughs, or shovels, and rip up turf and fruit trees, looking for roots to eat. The ring makes it painful to continue this practice.

Another cruel happening, whilst we were evacuated, was how rabbits were caught. The easiest and favourite way was using a gin. This snare, made by the local blacksmith, consisted of a pair of steel toothed jaws with a strong spring to draw them shut held open by a flat plate of metal which, if depressed, released a catch allowing the jars to snap shut catching and trapping that which had depressed the metal plate. First from new, the traps would be buried in the ground for six months to get an earthy smell. Then they were set outside the rabbits' burrow where, the educated eye of the farmer could tell, the resident was most likely to tread. The gin would be set and covered with a fine layer of soil, then the next morning, a visit to the collection of traps would normally supply six or more rabbits, a couple of legs only, perhaps a pheasant or rat, or even on rare occasions, a cat. In my time I've seen many animals caught, sheep, cows, foxes, stoats, weasels, and many birds. Rabbit was our main meat food. Fortunately, Alan and I loved rabbit and after a large meal of it, with potatoes, turnip, carrots and gravy, we would represent our plates, and get, the same again. Nothing was wasted. I even used to eat the head, brains as well. Not the eyes or ears of course.

As far away from the war as we were, the radio kept us in touch with what was going on. The

school also encouraged us children to do our bit to help the war effort. We would collect strands of wool caught on twigs, quite a lot really, often helped by a large handful borrowed from the farm's stock. This we would take to school.. With a hundred kids doing the same, there was quite a lot collected. Another thing, we also collected hips and haws. These berries were used in the production of medicine, I believed. Alan and I also collected scrap iron. We collected a huge pile from miles around. A scrap dealer offered Granddad money for it. He asked us if we wanted to sell it, we said no, it's for the war effort, and that's where it went, I hope. On the day Rudolf Hess turned up in this country, George, Alan and I, were walking near the quarry with our two dogs Toby and Martin, constant companions, when we found a small dog. It seemed very lively but most of its hair was missing. We adopted it and called it Rudolf. A month or so later, George was replacing a ring in the nose of a large pig. I was clasping it's neck between my knees. When the pointed ends of the C sank into the pig's nostril's, it took off I was taken at some speed, astride it's back, backwards. Hanging on for grim death, I was unaware of the route the pig was taking through the orchard, as all I could see was two laughing figures receding in the distance. So it came as somewhat of a surprise when the back of my head came in violent contact with a low branch of one of the more substantial apple trees and dismounting me. I was very dazed and upon seeing Rudolf the dog, asked how we had come by him. Memory of his find, had been eradicated from my memory.

Life, could on occasions be dangerous for us evacuees. Frank Smith, a schoolboy of some twelve summers, met his death on the cycle he was so proud of, speeding down one of the steep hills which surround the village of Brompton Regis. He lost control and collided head on with the baker's van. We children all went to the funeral, many tears were shed. It was ironic the boy was sent to the country for his safety, only to die there, not by enemy hands.

Alan and I had our own share of mishaps, both cutting our hands rather badly on the same day when we were lopping the heads off turnips. Another time, when we were cutting saplings down with a sharp tool like a scimitar, known

locally as a hook, Alan got in the way of the blade and received a blow to the ankle. He had to have his boot cut off. He still has the scar now.

Alan also had a badly swollen hand for some time. The nurse used to cycle from the village frequently, to bathe and squeeze the pus out. Then a large thorn popped out, well over half inch long. The hand quickly healed after that. Alan had been completely unaware he had this thorn imbedded in his flesh.

Near escapes were many. Once I was on Tidy the horse, galloping bare back, as we always rode, no reins. Alan was behind on another horse Short. My horse stumbled on a the uneven ground and fell over, throwing me to the ground. Every ounce of breath left my body, and I just lay there on my back. Alan on horse back immediately behind, hanging on like grim death, leapt over me without touching me. That was the horse's thoughtfulness, not Alan's, we weren't that good. We had little control of our mounts when we were on them. I used to lock my legs around its neck, Alan would usually be sharing the ride with me. The horse had often been encouraged to gallop by a slap on the rump, from George. Falling off, at first, was common. Often I'd end up upside down, but still hanging on. The horse would slow up, it's head going lower and lower with my dangling weight, then when it stopped, I'd just drop off.

Working in the quarry, way up a tall ladder we'd made from saplings and wire, I split a large slab of rock from the cliff face. As it fell, it took every rung out of the ladder below the one I was standing on, leaving me on two stilts. Another time Alan slid off the top of the quarry, he was lucky to get away with a sprained ankle.

The most painful accident I've ever suffered occurred when Alan and I were lopping branches off a tree that George, and we, had felled with a crosscut saw. Alan and I were alone. I chopped at a branch which was bent, under some pressure from the weight of the tree itself. It sheared off smashed into my face. I know what it means to be dumbstruck. I couldn't talk or move, just stood there feeling my eyes close with the instant swelling. Alan was saying 'Speak to me Derek'. I couldn't say a dickey bird. It was Christmas Eve. Christmas Day, I had two black eyes, one eye

completely shut and the other barely open, just a slit.

I had a bee tangled in my hair, once. Now I had this fear of wasps, hornets and bees, since I'd been chased by a swarm as a child, the fear lingered on. George came to my rescue, scooping the bee out with bare hands. I was most thankful, very brave, doubt if I could do that.

We loved the animals around us. They were a constant source of fun. Martin the dog, who would wait for a hen to lay an egg, then pick it up in his mouth and carry it unbroken to a private place before eating it, if he could get away with it which he often did. Tibby, the eldest cat, with only one super claw remaining on her damaged paw, would stand on her back legs and use that claw like a scimitar against the dogs if they came too close to her grand kittens.

We went with George to a farm about four miles away to collect a ram the Heywood's had bought. On the way back Alan got rather tired. George put him on the ram and he rode back in style.

On one occasion, I, as usual in front with legs locked firmly round the nags neck and Alan firmly holding on to my waist, was being taken at an unusual speed across a large field, the horse having been encouraged with a slap on it's rump. The bolting horse was heading for a five bar gate opening onto the small lane which meandered between 'our' fields. There was no way we could stop this horse, it was wearing no reins and there was no way it could have jumped the five barred gate. Someone was watching over us, because dear Granddad appeared before us at the gate, waved his arms in the air with his stick in one hand and hat in the other. The frightened horse skidded to a halt.

George taught us how to put chickens to sleep. Having caught the bird, if you tucked it's head beneath a wing, holding it there, then gently rocked the bird side to side in your hands, the fowl would fall asleep for about five minutes. We liked this Alan and I. One day we really went to town on the chickens. We spread some grain on the ground, then picked the chickens up one by one and put them to sleep. We had about a dozen snoozing when aunty came out, and told us off, inferring the hens would not lay eggs that day because of our pranks.

I think the best fun we had was rabbiting with George. With dogs, a load of green string nets and two ferrets in a sack, we'd go to a rabbit warren which we knew, from the rabbit dung, was occupied. Then we'd put nets over all the rabbit holes we could see or get at, put a ferret down the hole and wait. It would not be long before a rabbit came bounding out of a hole, often one we had not netted, in thick brambles. Then the animal would either run down another hole, often netted, or across the field, zigzagging, with the dogs in hot pursuit. Toby nearly always caught any rabbit he chased. Martin the other dog would give it a chew as well. George would then take the rabbit from the net, or dog, swiftly break its neck, then disembowel it with his knife. The dogs were happy to eat the entrails, the rest went back to the farm. A good session would bring in half a dozen or so rabbits. Aunty would skin them, if they were for our consumption. The pelts would be nailed an old back door. The same treatment was given to the mole skins taken from the corpses of the unlucky victims trapped in our lawn. Pelts were sold to a man who came regularly in a van, purchasing any rabbits, fowl or eggs we could spare.

Butter, Lorna sold in the village.

A job we fell into on one occasion was to collect a large wooden wheelbarrow from the carpenter's shop in the village. This we did on our way home from school. Alan and I gave each other rides on the journey home. Another interesting incident concerning this carpenter occurred. He had made new shafts for a hay cart and they were fitted. The cart was in the field opposite awaiting collection. The shafts, of course, rested on the ground and acted as a brake. The field sloped away from the road towards a stream at it's foot. The shafts faced downhill. An evacuee got between the shafts, and raised them with the result the cart started moving. As it gathered momentum, the boy dropped the shafts. They luckily dug into the ground, and the great four wheeled hay cart reared up into the air, ending up with just it's rear wheels on the ground, the shafts propping up the whole front. It stayed like that for several days, a very good advert of the carpenter's workmanship and materials. Shortcomings with any of those qualities in this case, would probably have resulted in loss of life.

Ask almost any Somerset man about cricket, and he'll rattle off scores, bowling averages, names, and history of his local team, on and on until the sun goes down. As Londoners like football, the 'Swedes', sorry Somerset folk, have adopted cricket. So I suppose it was hardly surprising that finally all this interest should get to Alan and myself. There was one or two problems though. Some good points too. For one, we had a field, we had a lot of them. This was an asset your average Londoner severely lacked. The rest, however, was what we didn't have, no bat, no ball, no stumps, no team.

Not to be thwarted, I collected the faithful hook, (chopper like a scimitar), and headed for some very damp ground. Here grew our willow tree, and like George Washington, I felled it. After chopping off a bat length, Alan and I retired to the barn with our hook and our trusty penknives, boy scout variety. We split, cut, and shaped a cricket bat. It did seem a trifle heavy, but it was the right shape. Requests for a ball, any ball was greeted by sad shaken heads, So all that work for nothing? Oh no, 'We'll make a ball' I said. Back to the fallen tree to hack off a ball sized log. Now we split, chopped, and cut away at our little log, and behold we had a wooden ball. What a ball, What facets. No light weight fairground wooden ball this. This was the cannonball of cricket balls, glistening, with highlights all over it, hard, and very heavy, but it was roughly the right size. Stumps and bails was a piece of cake after the work we had put in on the other cricket gear. We had no cricket pads to protect our legs, we'd a bat for that.

A lovely sunny day saw Alan and I pacing out the twenty two yards pitch length, banging in the stumps, and arguing who was going to bat first. I won. Alan sent down a bowl with wicked accuracy, and I, with more luck than judgement, whacked it with the bat. Where the ball went I don't know, but my fingers were humming like a tuning fork. Back to the drawing board. The shock of a one piece timber bat, to one's hands, when contacting a ball like iron, has to be tried to appreciate. I cut off the bat handle and cut a deep V in the body of the bat, where the original handle had joined. Made another handle with a deep V to mate into the bat. I cut up an old cycle inner tube, and put rubber between the V insert and the handle. Another piece of tube went on the handle. Then with

Granddad's drill, I drilled two holes about half inch, through the bat and handle, and doweled it with Granddad's oak dowels, used in gate repairs. The results looked good, and when we played cricket again, proved very successful. We spent many happy hours with George, playing with our home made cricket set. For years I carried a constant memory of those games, with a crooked tooth, received from one of Alan's deliveries, which I failed to intercept with my bat, but did with my mouth.

After a year of walking to school five days a week and church on Sundays, another walk, the latter with either Lorna or Aunty, the authorities decided the distance was too far for little lads to walk. They laid on a car and chauffeur. Mr Stoneman, a farmer neighbour a mere two miles away with five children of school attending age, got the job. For a while, we would all cram in his vehicle; on the floor at the back was my position. Coming home this way from school one afternoon, on a bend, one of his boys fiddled with the door handle and I, with my back against the door, did a back flip and cart wheeled down the road. This accident drained the colour from my cheeks and removed quite a lot of skin from my thigh. Of course, Mr Stoneman said I must have been touching the handle, but then he would say that obviously. The result of this incident was to ensure Mr Stoneman made two trips each way. So now we got to school half hour too early and, after school, we would wait in the porch of The George public house until he had delivered his offspring home and returned to pick Alan and me up. He favoured his family both ways, this was always his sequence. We had just been collected one late afternoon when a brewery lorry had brake failure as it pulled into the pub grounds, a very steep downward stony slope. It crashed where Alan and I always waited. Another time, as we were being driven home to Rugg's, a wheel overtook us. It was ours, and had come off the car.

Talking of wheels, on one of our safaris to derelict buildings around our area, we found a large iron wheel. It had fat spokes, was cast iron and very heavy, about four foot tall. Alan and I rolled it back to Rugg's. It was a new toy for us. With all the hills around us, we were sure of lots of fun. We rolled it to the top of the lane alongside the farm and, with our sticks to guide it, set it rolling down the

hill. It gathered speed and left us standing. Down the lane it pelted then, to our horror, coming up the hill was a little black Austin car. We wouldn't see more than two cars a day, and those we'd know and expect. This was a stranger. The lane was all of eight foot wide, the car maybe four foot six inches, but somehow the wheel slid by. Alan and I were over the hedge and away. Never did hear anymore about it, we must have given someone a nasty fright. We rescued the wheel and had much fun with it on farm land before it disintegrated, spectacularly, near the quarry. Bet the remnants of that wheel still remain in the stream at the foot of the hill.

Mum, Dad, and Joan visited and stayed at the farm. Mum, done up to the nines in high heel shoes, short skirt by Somerset standards, big hat, and I do mean big, was perhaps a bit of an eye-opener for the church-going Heywood's. Dad, on the other hand, modestly dressed with a new trilby hat was more acceptable. Our parents were given a large bedroom to the extreme right of the house, a room, indeed an area, Alan and I had not been encouraged to explore. It was very Victorian, with a huge wardrobe, dressing table, cabinets and bed, but very clean and smart in an old fashioned way. The chamber pot was under the bed, same as in our room, and the water jug and basin were in full view. There was a beautiful white sheep skin rug on the floor, everything in complete contrast to the room Alan and I shared. We shared a three foot wide bed. There was a small dressing table, with a bowl on it, a stack of comics on the floor and, of course, the china potty beneath the bed. No curtains, no rug, no wardrobe, no room. Our clothes, and that's boasting, such as there were, were kept in George's room opposite. We had one decent outfit, quit a bit on the tight side, which was for Sundays and school. For wear around the farm, we wore rags and adult's hand-me-downs. Coat with pocket torn and hanging, shirts with no collar, cuffs well worn, socks and jumpers a mass of darns, and leaky boots. Not from the bottom but from the top. It's so wet everywhere. To be honest, wearing rags around the farm worried us not at all but, for other occasions, we would have preferred better fitting clothes.

Dad lost no time getting to know George and making arrangements to go to the pub. He was a

little sad to discover the nearest ale house was in the village, three and a half miles away. He arranged to borrow Lorna's cycle and, with George, made the journey to The George Inn to quench his thirst. We took Mum, Dad and Joan for a walk round the farm. 'Bloody birds' exclaimed Dad as a large salvo from a feathered friend landed with uncanny accuracy on his new trilby. Mum was being very careful where she walked. High heels and cow dung are not very compatible. After a big tea, when we were all spoilt as usual with large portions and with cream on the cakes, Mum decided to have an early night. She was used to electricity.

George and Dad set off for the pub. George told us later that Dad kept wanting to go the wrong way on their return from the inn. He could be stubborn, Dad. George gave up trying to convince him, and cycled off the correct way home. Only then, did Dad accept he might be wrong and chased after George in some panic I should imagine.

Joan got a ride on a horse and we showed our parents our own home, made with our own hands, in the quarry. We built a fire and cooked a few apples, but I could see they were not impressed. They were Londoners through and through and too old to change. Somehow it was a relief when they went back. They did hire Mr Stoneman to take themselves and us to the cinema at Minehead before they left. This being the one thing Alan and I missed from the old life, apart from my piano, of course.

If there was one thing Somerset had variety of, it was weather. When the sun shines it is wonderful. On a clear night, walking across the fields, the sky seemed a mass of brilliant stars, the moon giving a pale lemon glint to the leaves on the trees, and dewdrops on the grass gleaming like precious stones. On a bad day, the heavens would fall, and if we had to go out in it, we'd throw thick a flour sack over our shoulders put on one of Granddad's big hats and grin and bare it. As well as wet and windy weather, there was the snow. The animals didn't like it, but Alan and I did. Out would come the dung cart. A few bundles of hay would be chopped from a hayrick and loaded on to it and off we'd go with either Tidy or Short between the shafts supplying the pulling power. Once to the fields where the hungry animals were, we would



unload the hay, which was well received by both sheep and cattle.

There would be snowball fights with George verses Alan and me. We once made a giant snowball which still partially existed the following June. When the rains came down non-stop for days, the rivers between the farm and the village would flood making the road impassable. Then there would be no school for us.

On one such occasion, a corner of a field just behind the farmhouse became a lake. We got the tin bath Aunty used to bathe us in, and used it as a boat. We got drenched, but what fun we had. We always enjoyed ourselves.

We had our own garden at the farm where we grew shallots, radishes, and lettuce. Also, we would collect hazel nuts and bury them in our garden in a sealed tin, the nuts having first been salted to prevent decay.

Salt was very important on the farm. First there was the salt stone. This brown salty stone was in the barn. When the animals were in the paddock within the barn, they would lick the stone. They needed some salt for their health. Alan and I also licked the stone. Second, the meat in the larder was kept from going bad by being laid in a bath of brine. Other meat would hang in the enormous chimney where it would become smoked, another method of preserving flesh fit for human consumption.

The cream was in bowls in the larder, and it was not uncommon to find a drowned mouse in its depths. The cream was never discarded. No one seemed to get ill. We also cleaned our teeth with salt and soot combined, no one bought us toothpaste. Injuries were taken very matter-of-fact here. A cut, which in London would need three or four stitches, was simply treated with a mixture of sugar and soft soap, and bound with a small bandage. The wound would heal and be forgotten in no time. Constipation, from which I suffered badly one time until I was sensible enough to tell Aunty, was swiftly relieved by a few leaves, obtained from a bush in the front garden, mixed in warm water and which I was given to drink. Nettle stings we rubbed with dock leaves, which seemed to alleviate the pain. Dock leaves substituted for toilet paper on those occasions Alan or I were caught short in the fields.

Newspaper, torn into squares, was used in most toilets in those times, including Rugg's.

In the distance, from the farm, we could see a line of mauve hills. These were Haddon Hills, upon which grew small purple ground fruit, like a small grape, called locally whortleberries. They made delicious pies. Lorna took Alan and I on a rare trip to these hills, where we stuffed our faces and collected baskets full of the fruit. These same hills were occupied by the American forces later in the war. When, they left, they buried all the things they couldn't take with them. Many of the villagers for miles around were digging away only hours after the 'Yanks' had departed and making finds of blankets, clothing, tools even tinned food. It was better than a gold strike.

Although miles away from the war's targets, a solitary enemy plane did drop a single bomb about two miles away from Rugg's. It could have fallen anywhere but, by chance, it fell right beside the road leading to Upton, a village as far away as Brompton, to the left of the farm where Clifford, another Heywood son, had a farm and where we occasionally went to church with Aunty for a change. Local farmers claimed they had been shaken out of bed, and people came from miles around to view this act of war. In fact it was a very small bomb, and did no damage what-so-ever.

Apart from school, we had very little social life with other children. One exception was Terry Stevens. He was billeted on a farm also not too far away. He had a pair of roller skates. Alan and I would meet Terry of an evening on the brow of a hill, about half-way between the farms. Here, we would take it in turns to sit on one skate and roll down the lane from top to bottom. The lane had a hard tarmac surface, smooth as a babies bum. Traffic was non-existent in this time of fuel restriction. How we steered those skates with our backsides, our legs stuck in the air, I don't know, but we did, and great fun it was. It didn't do any favours to our clothes however, they really suffered. Most evenings would see Lorna or Aunty, patching our clothes. Even we boys darned our socks and Lorna taught Alan to knit.

I seemed to feel the cold a lot and got into the habit of reading whenever I could. I would sit on the stool by the great fire in the dining room, actually sitting beneath the enormous chimney. The log fire would be in the middle, and opposite

my wide stool was the black shiny cooking range with its own small log fire and collection of large iron pots. From this unlikely setting, Auntie made the most delicious food.

Alan never took to reading books, and would go out in all weather with George, leaving chilly Derek with a book by the fire. Granddad started calling me the parson, because I always had a book or comic in my hands.

We helped in all things around the farm now, except milking. Here, the cats would sit licking their lips as George and Lorna drained by hand the great teats of the eight or nine cows, milked twice daily, come what may. George would often squirt us with milk, but it was the cats and dogs who really appreciated it, opening their mouths and catching and swallowing the warm white liquid with uncanny accuracy.

Alan and I would help George saw down the odd beech or sycamore tree and then saw it up, using a crosscut saw (one with a handle each end), into foot long lengths. These would be split with an axe. It always surprised me just how much wood one got from each of these foot long tree trunk logs. This split wood, and short cut branch logs, was used for the kitchen range. Branches, cut to three foot long, would be used to stoke the dining room fire laid on two iron decorated fire dogs. Burning, they gave out a good heat. I spent a lot of time just gazing at the glowing embers. The fantastic pictures one can see in the flames and hot coals is a sight rarely duplicated in this modern age of central heating and gas fires.

We walked with George, following the horse drawn machinery, up and down every field we ever sowed, ploughed or reaped. We helped with gathering the hay and all the other crops. When the thrashing machine came, complete with tractor, to steal the grain from the stalks, we would be there encouraging the dogs to catch the rats, which appear in great numbers as the cutters reduced the square of a corn field to a room sized area. Then rabbits, rats, mice, would dart out every which way, very few escaping the teeth of our dogs.

Every so often, we would go to a market. Often with the dogs driving a flock of sheep before us. We would, in all probability, ride in the dung cart pulled by one of our faithful horses. There, at the

market, after the sheep had been sold, George or Granddad might purchase a calf or pigs. Any animals such as these would travel home beneath a net in the dung cart. Alan and I might well walk if room was not available. We were used to that.

On one occasion upon arrival back at Rugg's, we pulled into the court (area before cowshed and stable) when one of us allowed our cargo of small pigs to escape. They shot everywhere at great speed. One went into the cowshed where milking was taking place, badly frightening the cows. One cow expecting twins snapped her neck chains and subsequently one of her calves was born dead.

Lorna used to feed the animals in the immediate vicinity of the farmhouse. The geese, ducks, and chickens would come running when she came in sight. Another job was feeding the calves. Soon after birth the calves were separated from their mothers because farmers want the rich milk for themselves. Of course, the calves had to have some, they were too young to graze and, as they can't lap as a cat would, the only way to feed them, while they are so small, was to put one's fingers in the bucket of milk and allow the calves to suck them, drawing the liquid to their mouths with the suction. This did not hurt us, so Alan and I often helped out with this chore.

Every six months the biggest pig would be dragged, protesting loudly, to the outhouse behind the farm house. Its great belly nigh dragging on the ground, it would squeal. Once Granddad had roped it up to a beam and cut its throat, it really let rip. Gallons of blood seemed to come from its body before it died. Then the carcass would be scalded to remove the hair on its body, gutted, sawn the length of its body and the meat hung in the chimney, or salted in the larder.

It's a cruel life, but a way of life these God fearing people saw no wrong in, and was a tradition, like deer hunting, unchanged for centuries. Although fox hunting, badger hunting and even deer hunting took place while we were at Somerset, the few occasions we witnessed the hunt was very brief; we could not hope to keep up with the hunt on foot, the hunters being on horse back. The hunt for rabbits and pheasants, however, we saw on our farm. Local farmers, on an agreed day, would turn up complete with guns and dogs, well trained, and kill the game where ever they could. Then all return to our farmhouse, where an enormous meal

on the great table would be laid out. Everyone would have their fill with cider and port to follow. No one would believe there was a war on and food was rationed.

During this period, Mum and Dad were bombed out. First, a bomb opposite smashed the doors and windows, and drove the precious piano right through the front room wall into my bedroom. Then, the land mines in adjacent Station Road where the Warner's lived, ruined the house beyond repair. Aunt Win, who lived a few doors away, was impaled on iron railings. Mum and Dad also suffered injuries. Uncle Len, one of mother's brothers, invited my parents to stay with him, but his wife, 'hard hearted Anna', as Mum called her, made a big fuss about it, even though our parents were in obvious distress. Shortly after, Mum moved into Aunt Ethel's, an elder sister of hers. This was also about the time Dad went into the navy, on M.T.B. boats.

At school, I seemed to be getting on quite well with my lessons. Not only did Miss Allison, our teacher, teach us the three R's, we were taught dancing and singing. The authorities must have decided about then to take some interest in the evacuees. A small prize was offered for the best essay on the subject of thrift. I know I wrote pages. The Heywood's were a wonderful example, hardly ever spending a penny, growing practically all their own food and not over paying their labour. Anyway, my essay was the winning entry and the organisers practiced their subject, awarding me a few savings stamps to the value of fifteen shillings.

The B.B.C. notified the schools that they were interested in hearing the best child singer each school could produce. This child would be recorded singing, judged against the competition, and the best would be transmitted on the radio. There was very little singing talent in our school, but I often did stand up and sing in class.

Miss Allison seemed to think I filled the bill. I practiced every day on a carol type song until Miss Allison felt I was good. Came the great day, in the street before all the villagers in front of the school, a little discussion took place between Miss Allison and the B.B.C. people. It seemed the song I had learnt so well was not quite what they had in mind and did I have another I could replace it with. It was all very disturbing, but I rallied round and, with no backing what so ever, agreed to sing

something else. 'Fire away', they said and I let rip with 'Bless 'em all'. At the chorus I beseeched everyone to join in, which they did. There was clapping but I never did discover if the B.B.C. used the recording.

Shortly after this, the children of my age had to sit our eleven plus exam. Much to my surprise, I was one of only two children to win a scholarship. A girl called Jean Judd was the other successful scribe. As there seemed to be a lull in the bombing of London at this time, and with me winning the scholarship, Mother decided we should come home to London and I should go to High School. She came and collected us and we wished the Heywood's goodbye. We were invited back whenever we wished. George prevailed on Alan to remain, but he came with Mum and me, back to the Smoke, not that he had much choice.

Home in London was now Christchurch Road, Ilford. A semi-detached house of decent size near the bottom of a long road with a school in the middle. Very near was Valentine's park. Alan was installed in Christchurch School, and I went to Ilford County High, which was a bus ride away in Barkingside, not Ilford.

From being nearly the brightest child in a school, it was somewhat shattering to discover that at this school, most lads of my age were at least my equal and generally much better educated. I soon settled down, however, and the present of a cycle on my twelfth birthday gave me so much more freedom.

Mother was now a clippie, (lady Bus conductor). Sometimes I'd meet her as the bus I went to school on was on her route. No trams here, electric trolley buses, and boy did they accelerate. Running for the bus once, I just got one hand on the rail and the bus really took off. I hung on and the next moment my little feet were slamming down at a prodigious rate. When we, the bus and I, reached about thirty miles per hour, no kid, someone gave the driver the three bell signal and he did, as instructed, an emergency stop. The next moment, my foot was up the platform, up the next step, and I was steaming down the corridor between amazed passengers at a considerable rate of knots, to slam against the panel behind the driver, with all the go knocked out of me and red hot feet.

London was a complete change for me from Somerset. Looking back now, this was a period of my life when I was bored. There was the odd air raid at night. In the morning, doing a paper round, I would find shrapnel. This was the remnants of exploded shells, fired at German aircraft, and raining down on the roofs and streets below. The nose caps were especially prized. Alan and I had quite a collection. When a German plane was shot down, crashing on the flats at Forest Gate, near where my friend Roy Sayers lived, Alan and I went to view it. The wardens and police said touch nothing, but we returned to the house with live machine gun bullets and an intact signal lamp complete with coloured glass. This was as nothing compared to the collection of intact incendiary bombs, live, which we had.

This is the story. Joan, my young sister, was evacuated and billeted at her Grandparent's at Nine Ashes Blackmoor, Brentwood way. Every so often, mother would take Alan and I to visit her on a Saturday. We'd stay the night and return on Sunday. We quite enjoyed this as we also had cousins there, Dolly, John, and Heather.

One day upon arrival, we boys were shown an old Morris van in Granddad's rather large garden where an incendiary bomb had fallen, gone right through the bodywork, and punched a round hole through the woodwork without igniting. Our cousins told us a string of bombs had fallen right across the field behind the garden, and this had been the first bomb. Some adult had, of course, removed it but we thought we'd look for some more. Anyway, we were spectacularly successful. The bombs had fallen on very soft moist soil. They had driven into the ground about a yard, then the compacted earth had sprung the bombs back, so that the fins showed some even lying adjacent to their entry hole. We captured quite a lot and smuggled them into our suitcase.

When Mum took us home on the coach, the bombs, unbeknown to mother, accompanied us home. I used to unscrew them, take off the nose cap and tin. Inside the magnesium case was a grey powder. Inside the nose cap, a tiny amount of a green powder. Experiments proved the green was explosive whilst the grey powder was slow burning. I'm glad now, I never thought to experiment with the magnesium cases.

Our garden was a wilderness with weeds and neglected vegetables growing everywhere. At one time, Mother even had a few chickens, and a rabbit. One day while Mother was at work, Alan and I started a fire in the garden. On a metal stand set in the flames, I was boiling a milk bottle full of paraffin. The milk bottle, had a thin metal lid on it with a small hole in the middle. As the fire heated the bottle, gas from the paraffin escaped through the hole in the lid and was ignited by the fire. This resulted in a blowlamp like flame shooting out of the top of the bottle. We quite liked this experiment but Mother came home unexpectedly and didn't share our views. She emptied a bucket of water on our experiment. Silly girl. The cold water broke the glass bottle and the boiling paraffin went up with one great flash. Mother's eyelashes and curly hair (Shirley Temple stile) at the front, was reduced to stubble in a flash. In a flash, I'm killing myself. She chased us, me and Alan, down the street with a broom, but of course she didn't catch us.

Weather in London differed completely to that in Somerset. We had fog. One Saturday, Mother took me and Alan on a coach to visit Nan at Nine Ashes. Joan was with us. She had come back to visit us at Ilford for a short holiday and was being returned to her Gran. The fog descended at Romford and volunteers were walking before the bus, leading the driver. It was in the evening. The driver of the vehicle finally gave in and said, he could drive no further. We all had to get out and walk to Brentwood. A man carried Joan, and the rest of us walked in convoy, led, and this is true, by a blind man. We made Brentwood police station, which was before the town really started. The Police phoned about and received the information that the fog had lifted ahead and buses were running there, so we finally did get to Nine Ashes.

Alan and I, joined the Boys Brigade. It wasn't a bad club, but it meant we had to go to church Sunday and also play soldiers marching up and down. There was a clubroom with various games for the lads. We made friends with two of the boys, the Proctors. Their mother was a friend of our mother's, having worked alongside her at Plessey's munitions factory. I remember one morning, preparing to go to school, when the sirens sounded and we heard the whistle of

bombs falling. Dad grabbed me and Alan and pushed us to the floor. The bombs sounded quite near. They landed on a Coop close to the Boy's brigade club. Shrapnel punched right through one of the steel poles used to hold up the trolley bus power lines, half inch thick steel.

I had seen very few actual new bomb sites. Alan and I revisited our house in Talbot Road, which had taken such a beating. I was hoping to find some of my possessions, but a workman stopped us going in saying it was dangerous. I lost everything there. Very little of our old home seemed to have arrived at Christchurch Road, certainly none of my stuff.

Mother now had a boarder upstairs at Ilford, a young married woman with a small baby. Her husband being in the forces. At our Forest Gate house, we had a gentleman boarder, a Mr Smiddle, a German. He bought me a toy car which would go, or stop with voiced request. When the buzz bombs started falling, we began sleeping in the shelter in the garden. Sometimes in the day now, the sirens would sound and we'd look in the sky and see the little plane with smoke coming from it's tail, wending its way towards us with it's distinct engine note. Then the engine would cough a few times, the smoke would cease, it would be out of fuel. Down it would glide, onto some unlucky person's home. It seems surprising now, but raids and bombs never worried the kids, we just ignored them.

At school, I struggled on, but never enjoyed it as I had at Somerset. It was a good school, modern, a large building, with a huge sports field, but I missed the intimacy of the school at Somerset. We took the war effort more seriously at Somerset too. There, even the school turned part of it's sport field into a vegetable garden, which we dug two spits deep to grow vegetables for the needy.

I used to ride to Dagenham on my bike to see Dad's parents. They loved to see me. Often, if he could, Dad would take us by bus to visit them. From there to the Robin Hood pub, was not unusual. Adults, inside drinking, us boys, outside eating Smith's crisps or a big biscuit to keep us occupied.

Come the summer holidays, we had six weeks off so it was arranged that Alan and I should go and visit the Heywood's at Somerset. They wanted us,

and we wanted to go. I don't think our parents were sorry to have a break away from us either.

We arrived safely, and were met by Mr Stoneman in his car and driven to Rugg's, where it was as if we'd never left. We revisited the quarry and all our old haunts, but declined the Sunday Church. After all, we were on holiday. We again helped with haymaking and, as we were bigger, got more involved with farm work in general.

Fresh from London, we now appreciated the little luxuries of life, like sweets. With our money, we got Lorna to use all the families sweet coupons for our benefit. Sweets were rationed like most things, furniture, fuel, food, clothes etcetera. We each had a book with coupons, allowing just so much per person. At the farm, we still had a meat ration. All the week we would live off the land, eating rabbit for dinner, but weekends, we might well have beef using the meat ration coupons. We didn't go short of much food on this farm.

In London, I used to go to the Coop and collect all the weekly food where the bill would average two pounds. There were only very small amounts of most basic foods allocated to each of us, but our combined rations didn't look too minute. Here at Brompton Regis, little was purchased from the grocers except the tea, cocoa, sugar, sweet, salt, and meat ration. Nobody seemed to buy clothes, there was no local shop selling them, and of course they were also rationed.

We hadn't been on holiday at Somerset long, when we received a letter from Mum telling us once again we had been bombed out of our house. Apparently a buzz bomb had fallen in the nearby park, removing the roof of the house with the subsequent blast. Alan and I felt no sorrow about this. Here we were on holiday, no school, lovely.

However, now we were here we found we were expected to work a bit harder. Len, another of Mr Heywood's sons, owned a farm by Mr Stoneman's place across the fields from us. As the war was on, labour was hard to come by, cheap labour especially. Len had an Italian prisoner-of-war working for him and his schoolboy sons, but he could always use more help. His wife was in poor health. He put a proposition to us. He'd pay two shillings for three days help each week from either one of us. We agreed, and Alan and I took it in

turns. Jobs could be anything from cleaning out cowsheds, to hedging.

I had a nasty shock one day when I opened his cowshed door. A cow had died in the night, and it's head fell on my shoe when I opened the door. I remember we dug a hole in the ground, not very deep because the rock is only a little way beneath the surface in a lot of Somerset. Well, we buried the body in a grave about three feet deep. Then had some childish fun jumping on the grave, listening to the dead cow emit wind from it's rear end.

One job I received was to return a horse to a farm about three miles away. I just had a halter. By road it would have been about three miles, but as the crow flies, much nearer. I could see the farm across the fields. I thought I'd be clever and save my legs and go cross country. This was a strange horse. Without a saddle and stirrups, it was sensible to lead him, too risky riding him. I got through a few neglected hedges with the horse in tow to gain access to the next farm in line to my destination, then it was through farm gates. I could see the farm, but to get to it I had to descend a fern covered hill. This hill became steeper and steeper. I was horrified to see the horses back legs were now in front of its fore legs, so steep was this hill. The horse towered way above me as I'm trying to lead him down this frightening slope. The ferns were waist high and I was afraid of one of us falling. Backing down the hill as I was, I suddenly came across a barbed wire fence behind me and immediately behind this wire was a shear drop. I and the horse were on the very edge of a quarry. Don't panic Del! I still don't know

how I, a thirteen year boy, managed to back that horse up that fern covered hill then turn him round and lead us back to safety without one of us falling over, but I did. As I've said before, someone was watching over me. I retraced my steps and walked the horse the long, but safe way home. I kept my adventure to myself.

They tried but failed to make us go to school at Brompton Regis. We had a long drawn out holiday, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves until the inevitable letter came saying Mum had another house in Barkingside, and we were to go home.

Other memories come to mind. The dead cow was not the only large deceased animal I was to come across during this brief return to Somerset. By the rookery, where I once lost a half crown, we found poor Short our eldest horse. There were still two horses on the farm though as Tidy had given birth about a year earlier.

There were many snacks growing wild and free in the hedgerows and fields at certain times of the year of course. Wild strawberries, chestnuts, pig nuts, whortleberries and lovely mushrooms. We sent Mum some mushrooms once, she said they had maggots in them when they arrived in London. Alan and I buried our tools and knick-knacks in a grassy hollow at the quarry. We took a last long look at our tree house, our den and our stone defensive wall then sadly left our beloved quarry knowing in our hearts we'd never play there again. We said our goodbyes to those folk we had shared our time with at village dances and whist drives, but there were so many children we had known, we never even got to see the second time round.