

Accidents

Anyone who has worked on a farm all his or her life is lucky not to have had an accident, either minor or serious. I knew one man who was killed by a bull and another killed underneath a trailer when he was taking off an axle and the blocks collapsed. Another was electrocuted by beekeeping equipment. Someone at Leaves Green was killed by trying to get a tractor to grip by putting a plank under the wheel. It did grip but ran him over. When at Norheads we had a lad who had his eye kicked out by a horse when he was bringing it in. And in those days there was very little compensation.

A land girl on a threshing machine lost her leg by putting it in the drum, as it started up without warning. Luckily this did not take place on our farm. She was on the top of the machine and in her hurry to get off she put her foot into the drum, a very rapidly revolving piece of machinery which was below the level of the top of the machine. While feeding the thresher, the operator had to stand in a well, so as not to fall in. I did a lot of feeding and the only danger was the dust and flying things, especially peas or beans as they came out like bullets and could penetrate two or three layers of clothing. We wore goggles made of wire mesh. These were not only strong, they didn't steam up.

I once pulled the rope on top of a trailer of hay and found there was more slack than I thought there would be. I landed on the tractor and had to have stitches in my leg. One of the men on the farm cut himself badly on his knee with a billhook. He was doubly unlucky because, on another day, we were in the field taking a pin out of the steering part of the tractor. This was very tight and I was hitting it with a sledgehammer which glanced off and hit poor Lionel on the nose, which meant he had to have a few days off. Another time I was carrying a sackcloth up a ladder when a rung broke. This could have been serious as this cloth weighed about 3/4cwt. Another time I was chasing a rat by the woods when collecting

threshed wheat, and ran into a barbed wire fence, just missing my eye. I still have the scar today.

One of the hirers of chainsaws showed me his shoe when bringing back the saw. He wasn't wearing safety boots and had cut right through the front of it. He only cut his big toe. Another inch closer and he would have lost all of his toes.

I used to take risks which seem stupid now. When playing in the cold I often put the tractor in the furrow and, if in a big field, got off and walked. Another dangerous action was, when feeding cattle in the winter, to start the tractor at one side of the field and climb on the trailer to throw off the hay, then get on again before reaching the other end. Also at one time I was knotting the bailer twine when the string broke with the PTO still engaged. I realise how silly this was. If the trip mechanism had come on it would have been easy to lose an arm.

Once opening a sack of barley the knife slipped and went straight into my arm, just catching the artery. We bound it up and by the time Eva had driven me to Headcorn surgery I had lost a lot of blood and was quite faint. The doctor stitched it up but not very successfully and it came up like a balloon at every pulse. I had to go to the hospital to have it re-stitched and I had no pulse in that arm for some time because they sewed up the artery.

Another nasty accident was when I dropped the trailer drawbar on my foot. The drawbar had an angle iron underneath it, which slit the bone in the big toe into three pieces. Dr Tower came and we managed to get the wellington off. He looked up at me as he was sitting on the floor seeing to it and said seriously, "You may lose your nail." I was quite happy with this as I had thought I might be losing my foot.