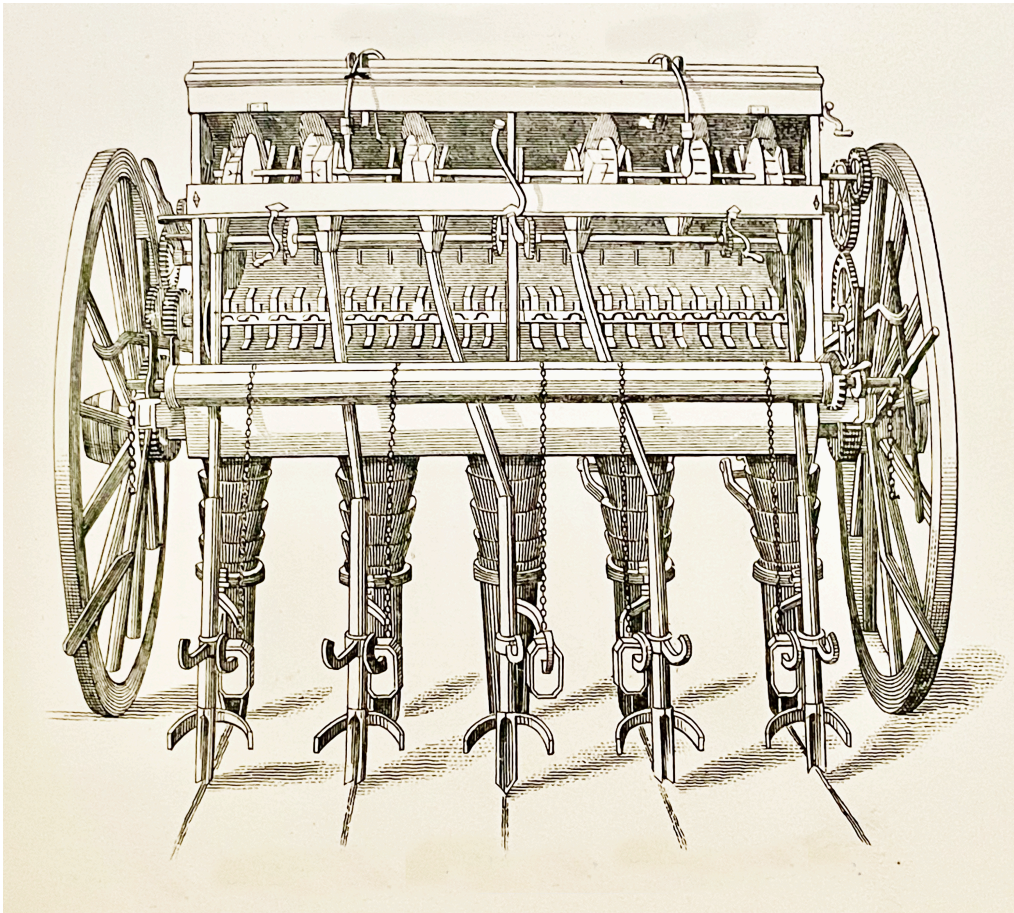


Crop, Stock & Pests

Crops grown on our farm before the war, around 1930-39, were mixed; twelve or fifteen acres of barley for feed, one acre of strawberries, one acre of runner beans, twelve acres of various brassicas and peas and two acres of mangolds¹.



A drill for sowing mangolds

Kale and mangolds were grown for winter feed. The mangolds could weigh up to 28lb. These were pulled and top trimmed with a tool like a small bagging hook or sickle, and then either clamped in

¹ Mangolds originally came from Germany and are also known as mangel-wurzels. They are related to sugar-beet, but larger and reddish-yellow in colour. There are several different theories as to where the word Mangold comes from. The National Encyclopaedia of circa 1900 says the reason the word Mangold was originally used is unknown, but it was at length corrupted into *Mangel*, which is the German for scarcity, so that *Mangel wurzel* means *scarcity root*.

the field and covered with straw, or taken to the farm buildings to be stored and used after Christmas. They were usually chopped for the cows with a spade or put through a root cutter. After Christmas the sugar content had changed and it was better for the cows.

The kale was usually marrow stem. It sometimes had stems three or four inches thick which were juicy inside, hence the name. Kale was used up to Christmas and was cut by hand using a machete or something similar. It was cut every day and put out in the fields when the animals were let out. This was an extremely wet job, as it seemed to be always either raining or freezing. Either way you seemed to get covered in water as the crop was about four feet high.

On Saturdays two loads were cut so as to avoid doing it on Sunday. This took all morning. A horse and cart were used for this until an ex-army lorry was purchased in 1945. This was a three ton Ford V8, run-flat tyres, four-wheel-drive and very thirsty. But fun to drive. This was then used for carting both kale and mangolds, as well as manure (after which it was washed out).

One year when we stored the mangolds indoors, the men decided to turn the clamp over one evening, in their own time, to look for rats. I was about fourteen at this time but was allowed to stay up until 10pm to join in. We caught about forty rats from this clamp. Most were killed by hayforks and some with dogs. This shows how many rats were in the place in spite of having about twelve cats.

Other cabbage crops grown were Savoy, January King cabbages, and Brussels sprouts. All had to be picked in the winter. It was very difficult to pick Brussels with gloves on. The art was to keep picking after the first few minutes when hands appeared frozen, to when they became warm and stayed that way all day. Winters at that time were very cold, especially at 700 feet above sea level.

We kept 30 cows and followers², and one bull. Some pigs were kept, two or three piglets to slaughter weight, and about 50 ewes and a ram. Very little artificial manure was used. Clover was grown

² Young stock

between cereal crops and ploughed in after one year of cutting for hay, being good green manure.

There were two carters, two cowmen (milking was by hand until 1938) and three farm labourers. Three milk roundsmen helped in the afternoons and evening when required. We had three cart horses and three milk ponies. As the milk rounds normally finished by about 2pm, the ponies could also be used for hoeing between the cabbages and as extra help for haymaking. The roundsmen were also free for extra duties.

The milk-round ponies were mostly fairly good tempered and would move from house-to-house on the word of the roundsman. It was more convenient than getting in and out of the van and starting it up. One of these ponies, a mare which came from Belgium, was very nervous of puddles. It must have been frightened before we got it. Father thought they probably used to hit it on a head with a bottle to train it. One day when she was on the milk-round a car got a puncture and the tyre hissed. She bolted for home spilling crates of milk on every corner. She could also be quite vicious. When in her stall in the stable she would wait until you were alongside and her foot would come out like greased lightning. You also had to watch her teeth when putting her collar on.

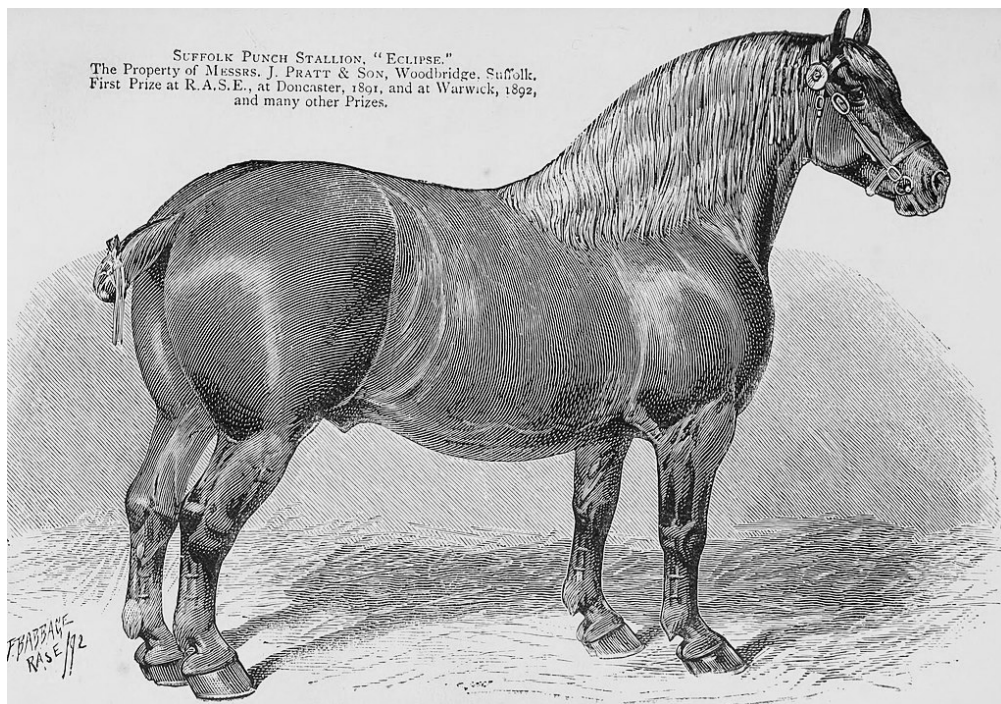
The cart horses were on the whole very placid and well-behaved, and very strong. The Suffolk Punch³ could lift up a 2 1/4 cwt sack of wheat in his teeth, which I had seen him do when we were drilling. He would do this at the headland where we put the bags at intervals, filling the drill with a bucket or scoop as it got empty. He would only pick up the bag and put it down after turning round to go back across the field, which meant we had to pick it up ourselves and put it back against the hedge.

We used to ride the ponies bareback. One day cousin Frederika was visiting. Rod was sat on a pony, and as a joke Frederika gave the pony a mighty thwack and it shot off. Rod fell off and landed on

³ Pictured on page 42. Photo credit <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

his backside, but the shock went up to his brain and he was ill for several days.

Father was very good with horses. He worked with horses in the first world war in France. He used to ride his ponies to gymkhanas, but never won a prize.



Our horses had a strong homing instinct. Father sold a horse once. He sent it off on a lorry to a long way away, but the next morning it was back in the yard. It must have remembered the way!

There was always a bull kept on the farm. Sometimes this could be quite nasty. One evening when I was about five years old the bull, a shorthorn⁴, got out by charging down the door. He proceeded to turn over the manure heap and toss the wheelbarrow about. Father went out and couldn't make him move. We watched from the bedroom. The bull sounded quite mad and was roaring.

Men had to be called from the cottages. One was carrying a huge length of iron, which he couldn't possibly have raised quickly enough to protect himself should he be charged by an enraged bull. When told this, he said "They don't like iron". Eventually the

⁴ Pictured on page 43. Photo credit <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Shorthorn Bull

bull was cornered by the barn. He turned and knocked the door down and went right through, taking out the other door on the other side. He then lifted up the gate to the field and carried it in his horns and dropped it in the middle of the field.

After some time the men managed to get the bull into the top cowshed and chain him up, without anyone getting hurt. Meanwhile my mother was preparing the bed and ready to call the doctor as she expected someone to get hurt.

In retrospect we had been cruel keeping the bull in a dark shed with no company. Once he was in the top shed he was happy as he had the companionship of cows twice a day after milking, and all night during the winter.

On a neighbouring farm a bull had to be shot after it had killed the farmer. My father said he had had to shoot one some years previously as it had turned so nasty that no-one could go in the field with it.

A bull was always kept up until the time that artificial insemination became widespread. At Norheads my father changed from Shorthorn to Ayrshire to improve the herd. He didn't like Friesians,

although these were becoming more popular. He thought the milk was lower in butterfat, which was true in some cases.

We had one bull which was tethered and had to be moved on a daily basis. The tether was arranged so that the bull couldn't quite reach the pin in the middle, which was put into the ground.

To move the bull to a fresh patch the idea was to approach from the opposite side to him, beyond reach should he turn nasty. The spike was then pulled up and moved away to a new position. It was best to do this fairly smartly so that the arrangement was anchored firmly once more, otherwise the whole caboodle could be dragged around the field. This was a one man operation so was no good calling for help. I was always a bit dubious about this as these animals are very strong and it was usually my job.

On one occasion Rod and I had to put a mask on a bull, which was in a field with some cows. The idea of this mask was that the bull could not see anything if his head was down, therefore not so likely to cause trouble. This time the mask, which was made of thick leather, had come loose. We couldn't catch this animal in the field so tried it with a cabbage, which one of us held through the gate while the other slipped the bull pole-catch onto the nose-ring. We managed this and had to open the gate and get inside the field to fix the mask. We both hung onto the pole and were dragged backwards for some time before managing to stop. When you remember the pole was only attached to the nose ring, it shows how strong these animals are.

Later artificial insemination was used. This had two advantages and some disadvantages. For a start the man who came wasn't usually fierce. Also different bulls of known pedigree were used. The disadvantage was with the heifers, as these had to be fetched in when on heat and sometimes they were missed if they were in an outlying field.

One day the dairy herd at Norheads was just coming in for milking when the cows were spooked by the geese kept in the run by the stables. They all went berserk, running through the collecting yard and out through the far gate, knocking it down in the rush. Two fell

over and had hoof marks on them where the others had continued and run straight over the top. This was a true stampede.

One spring when we let out the young cattle they went mad, running round the field and straight over the fence into the next field. They were about eight months old, half Ayrshire and very skittish. One of the men said they were going lickety-split, very descriptive. We had a terrible job rounding them up. We lassoed one in the pond. One disappeared and could not be found anywhere.

The next day Rod went looking for it and found it on the next farm, about three miles away. Rod went to get it on his motorbike, but had to leave his bike there while he walked the bullock back, then had to walk back again to pick up his motorbike. He was not best pleased!

My grandfather kept sheep and when looking at them early in the morning he always had a glass of milk with a raw egg beaten into it, topped up with a generous tot of whiskey.

We children kept rabbits. Rod went in for Dutch two coloured. These had a straight line across the back, white in front and blue behind. There was one in the litter we looked at which was badly marked and the breeder said I could have it for 4d. I bought this and called it Patch, and it had some good litters, which were sold for meat after fattening.

The first guinea pigs were kept in a run on the lawn. Mother had a Sealyham terrier which broke in and killed them. After that I built a hutch up off the ground, which kept them safe. This Sealyham terrier⁵, which was a pedigree, had not been housetrained and was very dirty indoors, having been brought up in kennels. Eventually it was sold and went to America, where it became a show dog, as it was up to show standard.



Up until the war I was busy catching

reed of small to medium-sized terrier that originated in a white-bodied, rough-coated breed, developed in the 19th century by W. H. Edwards at Sealyham House, Pembrokeshire.

moles. Traps were set in the fields adjacent to the lane where I rode to school on my bicycle. Sometimes these were put in a saddle bag and left at school until it was time to come home. One year I caught 80 moles and stretched the skins out to dry. These were pegged out to 8" x 5" and, when dry, were sent to a furrier to be cured and made into coats. The mole was the only animal whose fur stood straight out from the body and was much prized by the makers of expensive coats. The pocket money received came in very useful.

I had a competition with James Greenlees to see who could catch most and he won by six moles. James had always looked rather pale although he could hold his own regarding cycling and work, but he was taken ill at 22 years of age and sadly died.

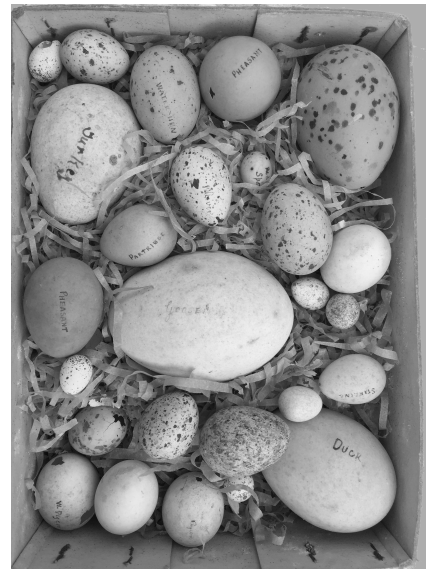
After the beginning of the war they had a lot of problem with foxes at Biggin Hill. My father used to catch a mole and put poison inside, which the fox would eat whole. This was a very effective, if not exactly humane, method of pest control.

I never saw a fox until during the war. Prior to this we had shooters on the estate who kept the numbers of foxes and badgers down. Badgers were a worse problem than foxes when it came to protecting chickens, as a fox would only go into a run if there was a way in, but badgers would rip boards off the shed to get to the chickens.

As I got older I was expected, when not at school, to help with ferreting, which I hated. Sometimes the ferret would kill in the burrow and not come out, and occasionally they would bite. It was usually either raining or freezing. The men would put a sack across their shoulders and sometimes over their head as well, to keep out the rain. These sacks were closely woven and quite affective for this. On a good day when things were going well the rabbits would come out into the purse nets placed across the entrances to their burrows. We quickly learnt to wring their necks properly so that they were quickly dispatched.

One method of rat catching I invented, but never had success with, was to put a brick in a large churn with two inches or so of water.

The lid was removed and the top of the churn was covered with brown paper. A piece or two of meat or other bait was put on the paper. After two or three days the paper was cut at intervals round the sides so that the weight of a rat would break it. The rat would fall in and sit on the brick and holler, rat fashion. Other rats would be curious and jump in. Although good in theory, this never worked for me.



A method that did work was used in the house. There were rats in the coal cellar with holes partway up the steps where they could get through into the rest of the building, making well used rat-runs. My father put some barn tar on these runs. The rat is a very clean animal, so they licked off the tar on their feet. This was ingested and it killed them. This seems cruel but was probably no worse than other poisons such as warfarin, which thins the blood and causes internal haemorrhaging.

The pests on the farm, besides rabbits and rats, were pigeons, sometimes in large numbers, which did a lot of damage to cabbage crops, and also blackbirds and thrushes, which ate a lot of strawberries. Huge flocks of sparrows would descend on corn crops, especially wheat, and eat and spoil a lot. Father used to use some very fine shot for his 12 bore, number eight, and it was possible with this to shoot into the flock and bring down twenty or thirty birds at one go.

We were allowed to roam all over the farm looking for birds' eggs, and newts in the pond, and there was never any talk of danger, either from falling from a tree or from the poachers. This gave us a great sense of freedom and apart from my mother being continually ill I had a happy childhood.

Both Rene and I, and to a lesser extent Rod, collected birds eggs. I had quite a collection, over 50 different ones, but never had a cuckoo's. We'd take all the eggs of any birds which were a nuisance to crops, such as blackbirds, thrushes and starlings, and

of course wood pigeons. Other birds, like tits, robins and wagtails, had only one egg taken out of the nest. The plovers, which were very plentiful, laid eggs on land which was being cultivated. As children we collected eggs from these in front of the machines, and these eggs were very good to eat, being richer than a hen's egg. The small eggs were very difficult to blow. I blew them with a thin straw, and sometimes you could leave them out and the ants would clean them out for you.

Looking back, some of this seems cruel, but of course many things were different then. Today a lot of this would not be acceptable.

There were many rabbits on the farm. When a shoot was held for all the local farmers on Boxing Day over 200 could be shot. Hessian sacking was cut into 3 inch squares which were soaked in creosote and dropped into the holes of rabbit warrens one or two days before Christmas. In those days Christmas and Boxing Days were holidays, but the men were expected to come as beaters for the shoot for a little extra pay. After the shoot there was always a big meal in our dining room.



At Norheads we used to chase rabbits with a 3 ton lorry, which was an ex-army lorry got through Frank after the war. We'd go round at night with someone on top with a bright light, and someone with a gun. We put a bar on top so that we wouldn't fall off. We had complaints from the village. They complained to the police because we were doing it after half past ten.

Before the war pheasant eggs were collected by the keeper. These were hatched and reared by broody hens in small coops along the rides in the wood. About 1000 were reared each year. The keeper shot anything which could harm the birds, and foxes were very rare as they were shot on sight. These pheasants were naturally quite tame and had to be coaxed into the air by various means, including

erecting fences in the wood to make them fly so that they could be shot.

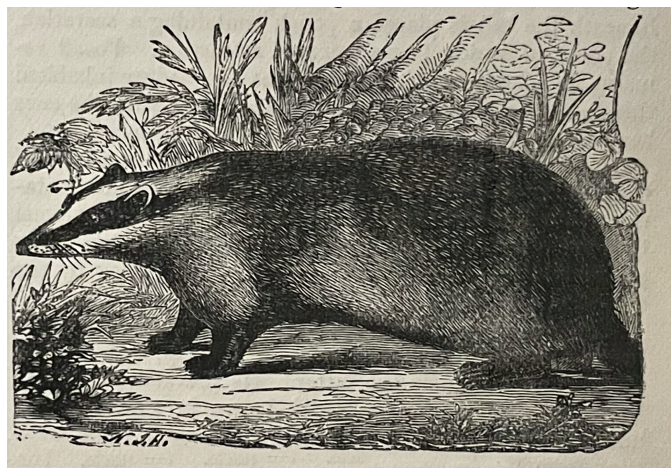
Lots of birds were shot in those days which would not be shot today, and in fact some are now protected. Not only sparrows but also chaffinches, blackbirds, thrushes, greenfinches and jackdaws. Hawks though are still shot by gamekeepers today.

In about 1946 or 47 a Harley Street surgeon, Mr Cooper, used to come shooting at weekends. One afternoon a rider came off his horse at a jump whilst drag hunting. The others left him lying on the ground unconscious. My father and Mr Cooper, the surgeon, came across him lying there. Father rode his horse back to the farm where I was.

The only way we could get this man back was with the three ton ex-army lorry, which was loaded with mangolds. This vehicle was a four-wheel-drive and could go almost anywhere. Just as well as the ground was very soft and the gateways especially muddy. We threw some straw on top of the mangolds and heaved the still unconscious man on the top and drove him back to the farm. Mr Cooper sent for his doctor's kit and gave an injection while waiting for an ambulance. This chap was very lucky because no ambulance could have reached him where he had fallen. He made a full recovery.

Another day a flock of pigeons flew over and Mr Cooper shot down seven. He thought he had had a good day until he realised they were tame pigeons belonging to my brother-in-law Frank Cook. The only time Frank made a profit!

We shot foxes and badgers and had the skins cured. One of these we gave to Marjorie, and Frank still has it after all this time. Once we decided to get the fat off a badger's skin by using a wire wheel driven by an electric drill with a flexible drive. This was not



successful. We did it on the kitchen floor, but had to throw the skin out in the end. Two or three years later we were decorating the kitchen and found the ceiling was covered with small pieces of fat.

Before the war people would go to work in London and leave their dogs roaming. The dogs would form packs and attack anything. When I was about eight I got home from school during lambing time and there were sheep and lambs all torn to pieces. From that



My father in the snow

time on we shot any dogs that came onto the farm, at one time burying six in one hole. After a bit there were no more dogs, as people realised it wasn't a good place to let their dogs roam!

Father was only 5'6" but would tackle any poachers, big or small, and would confiscate their ferrets and nets. The poachers did take some ferrets back from the cages when we were having a party. These social gatherings were for the neighbouring farmers who would come and have lunch in the dining room, provided they could stand the smoke.

In about 1944 or 45, my father came across three poachers. They said "Now we've got you!" and knocked him down. However he managed to extract the truncheon he always kept in his long trouser pocket. He hit one on the head and kicked another where it hurt. The third one had had enough and ran away, so the dog Taff bit him.

At the end of the week two of these characters came back with a pathetic tale of not being able to work because of the wounds. He gave them back their ferrets, feeling sorry for them. The 1st world war changed my father's life. I think it was why he had no fear of poachers; he used to say "The bigger they are, the harder they

fall". In later life I spoke to people who said "We used to poach all over the place, but we never went near Old Stoney's farm." His reputation for being tough was legendary.

Beside the continuous nuisance from poachers, there were trespassers who would often camp by haystacks, where they sometimes smoked. We lost two haystacks due to people smoking, which was heartbreaking after spending so much time constructing them. Once the fire had started there was no way of putting it out. The firemen couldn't do anything, because the water was nowhere near. On one occasion the firemen leant their wooden ladder up against the smouldering stack and it went up in flames.

Rod and I used to go around on a Sunday looking out for trespassers. One Sunday I came across two cars, but there was no sign of the owners - they were around the corner having a picnic. One of these vehicles was a very smart sports car. It still had the keys in the ignition, so I drove it a few hundred yards up the road and left it there.

When I came back I found these two chaps and told them I'd moved their car. The owner was furious - he was obviously very fond of his vehicle. I said "You'll find it further up the road, and I've been good and left you the keys." They didn't come back!

One time Rod came across a bubble car and saw two people making love inside. He rocked the car back and forth. Another time, when some people had driven into a field shut up for hay, my father locked the gate and made them pay to get out. They were quite disgruntled!

On another occasion we had created a stack of hay and had done so very badly. It had been rained on a lot, so had dipped in the middle. My father came across a couple who had climbed on top and were making love. He told them they had damaged the stack and made them pay.

Once we had Gypsy horses put into the sanfoin (which is similar to lucerne) in a field called twelve-acres, which was in the valley a long way from the house. We brought these into the yard and



charged then 10 shillings (50p) each for six horses, to get them released. They weren't particularly happy about this, but as Rod was there we were quite strong handed and although outnumbered, we were paid.

The next year eight horses were put in the same field. We decided that this time the price would go up to twenty-five shillings (£1.25) per animal.

The gypsies kept coming up all day and wouldn't pay. They would then go away for a conference with the others, who waited just down the lane. One of them suggested that he would pay for his horse and take it. Obviously once the gate was open they would all go. We told them that if the horses weren't collected that day they would be fed with hay and locked up, and this would add to the expense. At last, when it was almost dark they paid up, and we didn't see them again.