

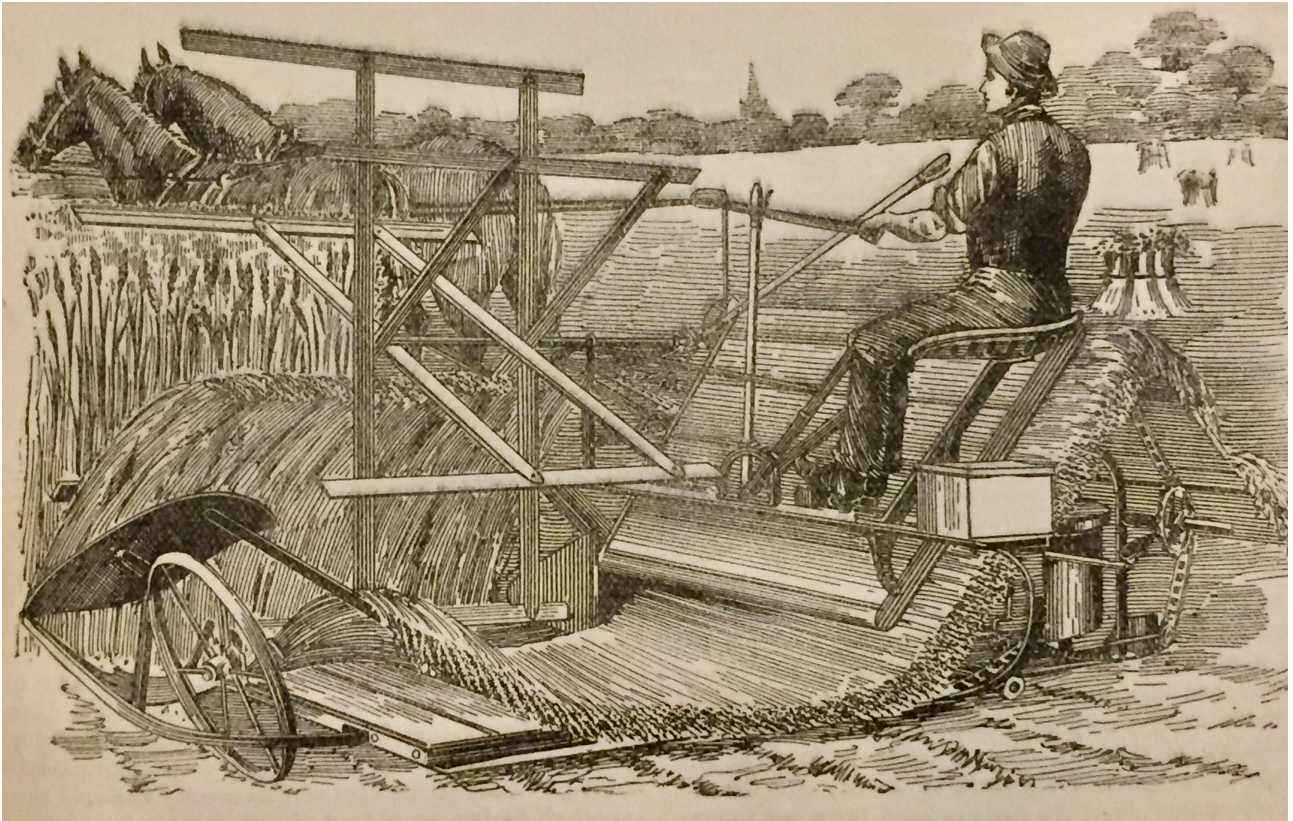
## Ploughing

**T**hree cart horses were kept on the farm - a Suffolk Punch, a Shire horse and a Clydesdale. These were on the whole very placid and well-behaved, much better than the milk ponies! The Suffolk Punch was smooth, without long hair around its feet, so it stayed cleaner.

There was a water carrier made out of a large wooden barrel, which must have held well over 100 gallons. This was a weird contraption which had two struts fitted to the shafts, which were crossed over the ground to hold the whole thing on an even keel. It was essential to put the horse in before filling this, as it became totally unbalanced. One day the carter left his carrier by the tank filling with water, thinking he could easily get the horse in before it got too full. However the water pressure must have been good that day as the barrel had a lot of water in it. It suddenly went base over apex and the whole thing disintegrated beyond repair.

The hay was cut with a two-horse mower and it was turned by a horse-drawn turner, of which there were various types. A horse-pulled rake was then used to make the rows. This was hard work. There was a large handle on the rake in front of the operator. This had to be pulled each time the hay was to be left in a row, and it was very heavy as all the tines had to be pulled off the ground together. If it was a good crop this had to be done many times a day, and it could make your arm ache. It was essential to pull the release handle at the right spot to make a row, otherwise it was difficult afterwards, especially if the hay was being swept. The hay was then cocked up by men with small forks. These hay cocks were about 6 feet wide and had to be built properly to run-off rain. They were usually left two or three days if the weather was fine.

There was a lady staying at the farm in the early days when grandfather was farming. She was very dubious about using some words. When one of the men came to the door and asked what to do, she went in to ask and was told that the hay was to be cocked



*A two-horse mower*

up. She thought this rather vulgar, so she told the man to heap it up. When Grandfather went out after lunch he found huge piles of hay. On asking the reason he was told that the message was to heap it up, so that was what the men did!

Men put the hay into wagons with pitchforks (larger than hayforks with 8 or 9 foot handles and large prongs), or a sweep was used and a stack made in the field. The sweep was a series of long wooden tines set in a frame with a horse on each side for propulsion. This was quite an art to drive. The hay was swept up to the stack where a device called a devil pole was used to get it onto the stack. The horse pulled a cable which raised the grab. When on the stack the man operating it pulled the cord and released the hay.

The stacks were used in the winter. They were very tight as the hay was compressed. It would get very hot as we were making it - we had to be careful it didn't catch fire. It was a thermal thing; the slightest amount of damp would lead to it heating up. My cousin Peter had a stack that was getting warm. The Okeys, who had something for everything, had a great big thermometer, about six





*A devil pole*

feet long, and stuck it in to see how hot it was. The thermometer had markings: warm, hot, turn. It went right past them all to the end, so we thought it would be best to leave it, as we figured if we turned it, it would catch fire. In the winter the centre was all charred. But the cows loved it! It was lucky it didn't catch fire, as some of them have spontaneously gone up in smoke.

The art was to make the stack the correct size for the hay in the field. The stacks were thatched. They were then cut out with a knife in winter. It was hard work. The man on the stack put a long needle in the hay, cut it with the hay knife, then turned it over and threw it over the edge onto the ground where a second man would tie it up. The needle had a large ring on the end, so it wouldn't get lost in the hay. The hay knife was about three feet long, with a handle. It had to be kept very sharp. Steps were cut up the rick as the hay was removed, so sometimes we would be very high, up to twenty or thirty feet.



The trusses were two foot by three, with the aim to make each truss half a hundredweight. If it was being sold, steelyards<sup>1</sup> were used for weighing.

When I was in my late teens or early twenties, I was working with Tom Tyre, who was a strong trade unionist. Tom was keen to make me give up, as I was the boss's son and he was anti-boss. As soon as I put the needle down it came whistling back up. I was determined not to let him beat me. By the end of the day we had done 55 trusses of hay and carted them into the lorry. It was unprecedented. No-one had ever done so much before. He was trying to wear me out!

The corn was cut with a self-binder pulled by two horses and either put in the big barn to be thrashed later or built into round stacks which were thatched. Sometimes oats were kept whole and the whole sheaf was put through a chaff-cutter or later on, a hammer-mill.

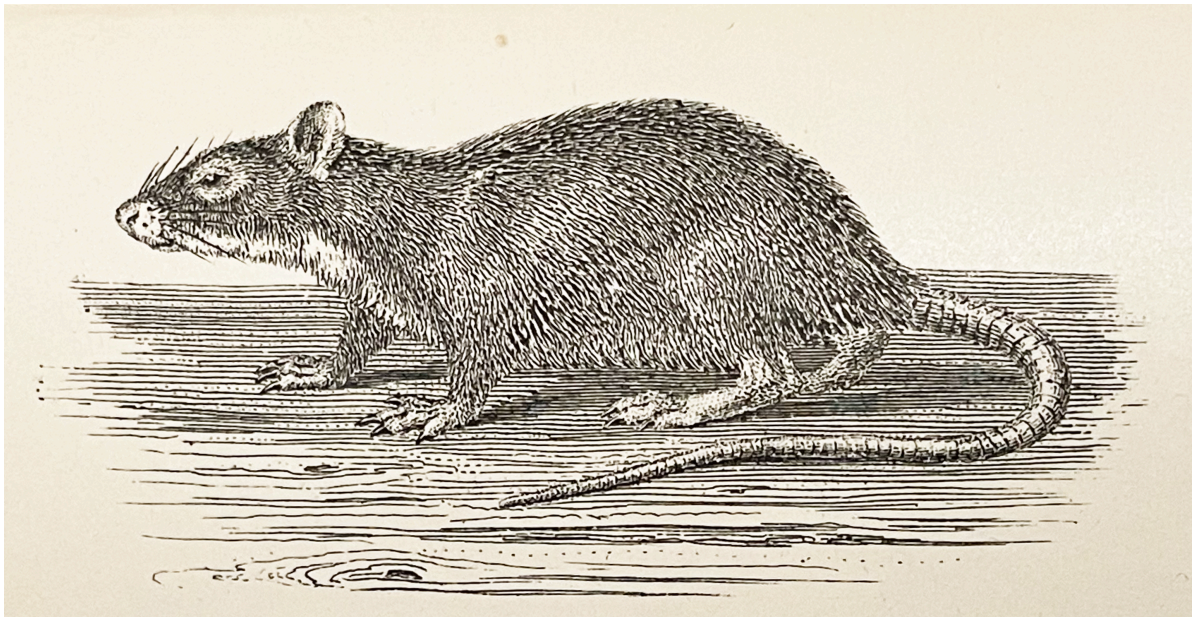
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<sup>1</sup> An apparatus for weighing that has a short arm taking the item to be weighed and a long arm along which a weight is moved until it balances.



When binding the grain crops, the string was usually tied more than halfway up the sheath. If too far up it could slip off and the base of the sheath would spread too far. If tied too far down, the top would spread and could not be neatly stooked. This was important as the oats were usually left out for two weeks after cutting. The reason for leaving oats out so long was because they were cut green, as the straw was quite good as cattle feed. When we had a hammer-mill driven off the tractor the whole sheath was put in and milled.

When I was about 15 we were loading corn on a fairly steep field and I turned to go downhill. The tractor gathered speed and I thought perhaps if I pulled the throttle wide open it would hold it back more, forgetting that I had got the clutch depressed. The people in the wagon, including Rod, thought I was trying to go faster and was probably a bit crazy. However no harm was done as the bottom of the field was relatively flat and we came to a standstill, much to the relief of the people on the wagon.



We were obliged to kill rodents by law, as during the wartime food was precious. When making the stacks fine meshing was put around the area to catch rats and mice. It went all the way around everything, including the threshing machine, so that when the rats and mice came out they could be caught. We put buckets half full with water that the mice would jump into and drown. The dogs would kill the rats. I only ever knew one stack where there weren't

any rats, and that had a weasel in it. When the weasel ran out we could see all these rat bones in the stack. The weasel got away!

Men with guns were stationed to kill rabbits as they ran from the diminishing area of corn. Sometimes a long net was used. This was 50 yards long and had a big mesh on one side and a small mesh on the other, so that when a rabbit ran into it, a purse was formed and the rabbit caught. Sometimes forty rabbits could be caught from a ten or twelve acre field. My job from about twelve years old was to look after this net, and I soon learnt to break the rabbits' necks. Pigeons could also be very destructive on green stuff and were shot from hides with decoys to attract them.

I stayed on at school until 1941 when I was 16, and then I worked on the farm, mostly driving the tractor. I worked with Ruth, who did half a day after her stint at the first aid post at Biggin Hill airfield. This way we could get more done and the tractor, although slow, was pretty tough.

Mechanisation was gradually taking place and a horse-driven elevator came next. The horse went round turning a turntable which drove the chain pulling up the slats holding the hay. One day one of the workers put in another length of cast iron rod to raise the elevator. This was a fairly substantial piece of iron, with teeth which fitted into the toothed wheel which was turned by handle to raise the elevator. This particular worker put in another section of rod but didn't wind it up high enough, with the result that the horse turning the turntable caught it and snapped it in half. The whole elevator collapsed. Quite dramatic. Back to the devil pole until another elevator was bought. Later we had an elevator driven by a small petrol engine, which was quite efficient.

There were other changes of course. With the advent of war more crops had to be grown. There was a shortage of birdseed and anyone growing buckwheat could make a good profit, although actually it was not legal. The fines were quite small, and one man at Oxted grew some every year and just paid the fines. We grew some one year and were warned off. It was a tricky crop to grow as it was very short and difficult to make into a decent sheaf. We carted it from the field and stored it on bare ground to dry out for a week.



We bought a hammer mill which ran off the tractor pulley by means of a balata<sup>2</sup> belt. This had to go round very fast, and the International tractor was too slow. So Rice Bros of Oxted made a wooden piece to increase the size. Later the Fordson did run faster but it still had to be driven flat out. One day the belt came undone and the metal joiner caught the operator under the chin and knocked him out for about three hours. After this it was my job to use this machine. I don't know whether this was because I was more careful or just expendable. The mill made a colossal amount of dust. The ground grain was blown into a cyclone and dust came out of the top, which was not outside, so of course the whole of the room was terribly dusty, especially when whole sheaves were put in.



*Eva beside a haystack*

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<sup>2</sup> A tough, durable, robust belt made from heavyweight cotton fabric impregnated with high quality rubber compound.