

**The Horse**  
**and**  
**Hayes Gate.**  
  
**By**  
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It is January 2008 and something I have sometimes omitted in the past is that I have not always included the date on which I have written the various items, now this information could be of interest to the reader at some future time. Of course I realise that in the modern age that written items such as this done by pen on paper will be regarded as a very outdated method, but to give a clue as to my age, I was at school in the 1930's so it is the only way I am able to make a record of my experiences.

I know that all human beings are individuals and so also are all animals as I have found by working with animals all my life. At one stage when I was first involved with farming with my father who bred Friesian cattle as I also did when I was farming on my own account, father went in for pedigree Friesian cattle breeding and the Friesian Cattle Society provided what we knew as sketch cards, they had printed on them the plain outline of a calf, both the left and the right hand sides and also the head and when a pedigree calf was born we had to enter on this card the exact black and white markings of that animal; and no two calves were ever exactly the same. This was something in the animal world that I used to marvel at.

At shearing time usually in the Month of May, at the end of the day when the ewes and lambs were turned back into the fields, there would be pandemonium as the lambs tried to find their mothers and the ewes tried to find their lambs as all the ewes looked the same after shearing and very different to their appearance before they were shorn. But eventually natural instincts would prevail and families would be reunited and peace would return.

It has never been a wonder to me why I have spent so much time writing items such as this or why I was as content with my life as a farmer, although life has been quite hard and difficult at times I have enjoyed my life. As I wrote just a few lines previously how all animals are different and so are we human beings, and what a good thing this is as well, how boring it would be if we were all exactly the same. In farming especially mixed farming no matter what the weather or what the time of the year if one is so inclined there is always something useful to do. Even when I retired from the actual running and responsibility of the farm, there was always something useful I could do on the farm.

The other day when looking back at previous writings of mine such as this, and there are about forty of them, to my surprise there was nothing specifically about horses although horses have often been referred to. So as they played such an important place in my young life I thought that even now and let's face it in my advanced age, the memory business is strange and it does affect older people in this way, things from many years ago are remembered more clearly than recent events, this is especially so with names. By my parentage I could well have had a horse's collar for a cradle. My grandfather "Jones", Tynewydd Farm, Abercarn, kept horses on the farm and he was also an agent for the G.W.R. (great Western railway), and this was printed on a Float (a horse drawn cart) that we had at Green Meadow Farm and I hope to refer to this later on. Grandfather kept a lot of horses and my father and some of his brothers did the hauling from the goods trains that came into Abercarn Station to the intended recipients of these goods. They were paid by the ton and he used to say that they disliked handling furniture, they had to be very careful not to damage it; but a load of furniture did have any weight in it. It is not for me to make out that my father was a wonderful man but he was a good horseman, he was quite fear less, far better nerves than I had.

Then my mother who to my great loss I did not know because she died when I was just two years of age was a farmers daughter, a Parsons from the Maerdy Farm at Coedkernew, Nr. Newport, she rode with the Tredegar and Curre Hounds, she rode side saddle as ladies did in those days, for many years her saddle was in the loft at Green Meadow, my father left it there when I took over the farm, then one day I sold it to one of the sort of men who would buy anything and I have always regretted that sale. Also kept in the cupboard at the top of the stairs at Green Meadow were my mother's long leather riding boots with the special wooden stocks that were used to keep them in shape, my father also had a similar pair. Both my parents rode to hounds and there were riding crops kept in the draw of the sideboard downstairs, the one my father used was quite short but it had a leather lash, my Mother's riding crop was wooden but with a special leather cover, I had a smaller crop with a red wooden stock, but they all had bone handles, there were also two bone racing canes used when mother used to ride in the Point to Point hunt races.

I went out hunting a few times but I was not very keen on it and my father did not go hunting much either. If he had a young horse that he had bred, before it came time to sell it he would take to a meet and then he could say that it had been hunted, my step mother never got on a horse. Also with my mother's riding habit there was her special hat, rather like a mans bowler hat, and the brim had a split in it this was done when she had a fall from her horse one day. I remember the hat quite well; I wore it one day as a kid to a fancy dress party dressed as a vicar. I am writing on the horse as I knew them on the farm, my generation were the last before the internal combustion engine in all its many forms replaced the horse as the source of power on the farm.

In this modern age there are many uses for horses, the horse in Pageantry for Royalty and other events, polo horses also horses for hunting to a degree, even here at Merrylea the Curre hounds often go by with mounted horsemen, they do give Winifred a great deal of pleasure to see them although a real country woman she never rode a horse, although her father was a good horseman, indeed we have a silver cup he won at the Point to Point, I often wonder did they meet, that is my wife's father and my mother because the cup was won at the Tredegar Hunt Point to Point and they were the same age.

Growing up on the farm in a country lane where to carry out work on the farm that needed more power than could be provided by the human hand then this was where the horse was used, or to get to somewhere quicker than walking or if the distance was great then again the horse was used. I do remember that my father had a motorcycle and sidecar and also a very early motorcar with a canvass hood. We had a rather eccentric neighbour who had a very early bicycle with solid rubber tyres. Still dealing with the use of the horse, in the modern age, horse racing both on the flat and steeple chasing or jump races are very popular and a lot of money is involved. Pony clubs are very popular especially with girls and young ladies. Show jumping is brought into the depths of the cities by television and again this has a very large following.

I will try and deal with the horse on a working family farm that is up until about 1940, that is now over sixty years ago. The types we had on our farms in the Chepstow area were, the heavy horse, the half legged or vanner (*editors note; there is extensive information on the internet regarding "Gypsy Vanner Horses", they have their own*

*breed society, and they are the result of using a hunter stallion on a Shire mare*), the hunter, the cob and the pony. There were in different parts of the country different breeds in these different types, but I will write as it applies to the Chepstow area. The heavy horse as the name implies were used for the heavy work, they were usually Shire horses with a very good temperament, they were tough but with a bit too much hair “feathers” around the bottom of their legs, this did attract itch mites, they did improve in this area by selective breeding, and I believe a bit of Clydesdale blood got into the breed somewhere. The first horse that I remember at home at Green Meadow was a mare called Jolly and she had a rare complaint, she had a Fistulous Wither, this was on the top of the shoulder, it is a running sore that will not heal and to work Jolly she had to be fitted with a special breast collar, I have only ever seen one other case and that was in a horse at Usk Agricultural College when I was a student there. Then there was Lester who had a diseased ovary and got spasms of bad temper, we went up the field to catch her one day and she turned on my father, kicking and squealing and he was crouched on the ground. He said that he had lost his silver pocket knife that day during this incident, I looked for it for quite a while later that day but I never found it. Next came Bonnie a bay mare and we bred a good foal out of her called Royal, he was half legged. Then there was Bright, an iron grey coloured mare, all these were of the Shire breed. We used Bonnie and Bright to haul a four wheel wagon to haul hay which father and I would cut out of ricks that we would have made on our land on Caldicot Moor the previous summer. The hay was cut with a hay knife into large slabs, we would put a good load onto the wagon, rope it down and then haul it up and over the railway line at Caldicot Halt and head for home, we would put a shoe on the wagon wheel to go down the hill at Mount Ballan, this would act as a brake. When we got to Crick those horses would put up their heads, they knew we would soon be home.

In those days of low prices farmers did not specialise as they do now, they did not want to have all their eggs in one basket and on those farms that had some arable land they would plant some corn, after harvest some would be left as stubble or ploughed to let the frost to get at it and break the lumps down. I learnt to plough with horses, with a good team of heavy horses that knew their job on a fairly level field without any rock in decent weather. It was very peaceful with only the sound of the plough harness, the

stones on the plough board and the ever present seagulls. I would have to steer the horses with the plough ropes and steer the plough. This involved walking all day at the end of the day having ploughed an acre I would then wend my weary way home. Then in the spring the horses would be used to haul the farmyard manure out to the fields ready for the root crops, to work the land that had been ploughed during the previous autumn and winter ready to plant the spring corn. Also in the spring we would roll and harrow the grassland fields. There would then be a short spell until it was time to start the haymaking, the hay would be cut with a mowing machine pulled by two horses, then to aid the drying it would be turned with a swath turner again pulled by a horse, probably a Shire horse. Then the most popular method was to rake the hay into rows, and then fork it into cocks, every time it was moved it helped the drying process and when it was dry enough it would be pitched onto four wheel wagons and hauled to the rick-yard by two powerful horses and built into ricks for storage. Two men would be needed to pitch the hay onto the wagon and one man on the wagon would arrange the load so that it did not fall off on the way to the rick-yard. Another method that was used was to use a sweep to gather the hay to the rick if this was made in the field in which the hay was grown.

There would then be another spell until it was time to harvest the corn, this again meant two powerful horses hitched to a five foot cut, reaper and binder to cut the corn and tie it into bundles known as sheaves. On a warm late summer day cutting a crop of standing wheat without any thistles was a pleasure but in contrast a crop with thistles or if it had been flattened by storms, this could be difficult and was not a pleasant job.

Once the corn was cut the sheaves would be stacked into stooks, usually six sheaves to a stook touching at the top but with the bottoms apart to allow the passage of air to dry the corn, they would be left until they were dry enough to be stored in a rick or in a threshing barn, one of the traditions was that oats had to be left in the stooks until they had heard the church bells rung on three Sundays. Again the four wheel wagons and two strong horses would be used to bring the corn to the rick-yard or barn, the sheaves pitched onto the wagon and the load made the same as in hay making. So now we have come again full circle for the work on the farm for the heavy horse.

Then we come to the reproduction of horses, in the Chepstow area there was The Chepstow Heavy Horse Society as written earlier, the groom I remember was named Ivins who brought the stallions to the farms to be mated with the mares, he would travel a given route and a fee was charged for this service. If I remember correctly a mare would come into season nine days after foaling. After foaling, usually in April or May, the mare would be put back to work with the foal kept in a safe shed, we had to keep an eye on the mare to make sure she did not bolt back to home to her foal, but we had to be sensible and not keep them apart for too long. In the days of the horse the male foals were known as “colts” and the females “fillies”. In those days there was a man in the Chepstow area known as “Davies the cutter” and his job which he was good at was to castrate the colts, and then the foals would have half their tails cut off, this was known as docking, this docking is illegal now. Having worked horses on the farm long tails made life difficult, one problem with some jobs when walking behind the team and controlling them with the plough lines, these were thin ropes the horse could swish it’s tail and if it was long they could get their tail over the plough lines. Different farmers had various systems; some would wean the foals in the autumn, run them on until they were two years old and then break them in to work. Just in passing I have of late been to an Agricultural Show and there were a couple of Shires brought to be shown as an attraction, they are the same breed as we used to work but these Shires brought to the show were a lot bigger than the ones we used to work and I believe they are too big, I think about 16 or 16.2 hands high is the best size.

On those farms where the foals were kept after weaning, they would be put into a dry lying field and in bad weather fed some good hay, the second winter they would be treated much the same, the foals and yearling colts would run together and then in the spring and summer as two year olds they would be broken in, and I used to think that the Shire was a good sensible breed to deal with. The breaking in of horses is a job that needs time and patience, my father said that the mouthing was the most important part of the breaking in, for this the bit on the bridle was special. It had three metal keys on it and the young horse firstly was fitted with a slack rein the horse would play with it with it’s tongue, this would be done in a safe shed for about an hour a day, then after a few lessons the reins would be gradually tightened and the horse would as we used to say,

“give to the bit”. To go with the bridle would be the “mouthing tack”, a simple strap around the belly with a cropper to the tail, the rein to the bridle would pass through a brass ring on the belly strap and the rein would be gradually tightened.

Breaking a colt to harness was a job not to be rushed, short regular lessons which we usually did in the evening. One of the best jobs to start a young horse on was with an older horse pulling a set of drag harrows on a piece of ploughed ground, this was not too hard and there was not a lot of noise. The young horse would then be gradually introduced into more general work until at six years of age when it would be capable of doing any of the jobs on the farm that required the power of the horse. At six years of age if the horse was not needed to be kept for work on the farm they would be taken to Hereford Horse Sale to be sold for a variety of uses not necessarily on farms, often they went into the towns, the breweries used horses to pull the wagons to deliver the beer to the public houses, and they would do other similar work in the towns. It would be a bit sad to see a good horse go from the farm but in those days of financial difficulties they would provide welcome revenue. Some farmers would take the weaned foals to Usk October Fair; this was held every year on October 29<sup>th</sup>. unless this happened to be a Sunday and at this fair all types of weaned foals would be offered for sale.

Going back to the breeding of Shire horses, the old farm at Broadwell, where in fact my sister was born in 1921, there was a change of tenancy, these were difficult times and there was a farm sale and a new tenant Mr. Will Arthur, a son of Mr. L.H. Arthur, of Redwick really changed things, he even had a telephone installed, the number was Shirenewton 6, he ran cattle lorries and he kept a Shire stallion. I remember one stallion Redwick Heirloom and he was followed by Redwick Secundus, I always remember the groom they had, he was from up country, a Mr. Foster. It was about this time, the mid 1930's when people like the Arthur's were bringing about change to the countryside, especially in the area where I was born. Long before the M4 cut through our lovely countryside I heard an engine running at Broadwell and I ran across the fields to see what the noise was. There I found Reg, the lorry driver with an old motor car that had been adapted to cut grass.

Going back to horses, at home in most years we had a foal and as I remember, the date when it was expected was noted and a sure sign that the birth was imminent was that

beads of wax would appear on the ends of the teats and if all was well early in the following morning the foal would arrive. Something I always remember was that the mares had a small udder, quite unlike a cow, the mare's udder would have two teats but each teat has two holes or channels. Of course I have not dealt with the subjects as fully as it deserves, but this is just a little bit of history.

I will now write on the "half legged horse", (*see previous editor's note about "Vanners"*), not a breed in itself but a cross breed, but it was a very useful type of horse and often found on the mixed general farm in this part of the world. The general mixed family farm in this part of Gwent was in the mid 1920's to 1930's safer financially than the specialized farms, money was very short and if you kept various types of livestock and grew a bit of corn the chances were that one of the enterprises would give you a reward so there was merit in this mixed farming. The point to remember is that there was not the knowledge available in those days that there is today of how to deal with pests and diseases and weeds. Part of the farm would be under the plough and this meant that there would be straw available for bedding to make the farm-yard manure, there was no such thing as slurry; there were not many concrete yards. Once the threshing machine had come and gone there would be a bit of tail corn, that is the small or broken grain that would be sieved out by the threshing machine as unsuitable for sale and if it was included in the sample offered for sale it would reduce its appeal so a lower price would be offered. This tail corn would be fed to the farm yard chickens, so nothing was wasted, the better sample if not required for stock feed on the farm would be sold.

There was the farm-yard manure which would be spread onto the fields to be ploughed in to provide the fertility for the root crops, mangolds, potatoes, swedes and sugar beet. If corn was grown it was important to alternate or rotate the corn with root crops to keep the land clean, that is to prevent any build up of disease and also in root crops the weeds would be hoed out to keep these undesirable plants under control as at that time there was no such thing as chemicals to spray on the fields to control pests, diseases and weeds. This is where the benefits half legged horse came in, there were some jobs where a big heavy horse was not required, in fact a neater horse with smaller feet yet still with a docile temperament of the Shire horse was better. Once the land had

been worked down in the spring ready to plant the roots, the half legged horse was better to pull the seed drill because it would be lighter and have smaller feet. Then the half legged horse was for the same reason better to pull the horse hoe through the rows of root crops to cut out the main of the weeds, and if this job was done well it made it easier for the men to hand hoe and single out the plants when the time came to do this. This singling had to be done at just the right time, the plants had to be big enough to stand on their own, but if they got too big it was not easy to separate out single plants and it then became a soul destroying chore. Although this was hard tedious work when well done it was a job that gave much satisfaction.

When it came to hay making there were certain lightweight swath turners that a lighter horse was more suitable to pull, and after the hay had been gathered any waste was frowned upon and a job I was fond of was to rake the field with the horse rake. This was a machine with two wheels and arched tines mounted between the two wheels that would be pulled up and down the fields by a half legged horse and at regular intervals a lever was pulled, the tines would lift up and the hay that had been raked up would be left in rows across the field to then be loaded on to a wagon and hauled to the farmyard.

Man through the ages has always tried to make life better and easier for himself, some aspects of haymaking were hard work, because by and large the weather was hot at haymaking time and making the hay rick meant that the hay had to be pitched by hand from the wagons onto the rick with pitchforks, and as the rick got higher the work became harder. To overcome this man invented the pole elevator, we had one at home and I will do my best to describe it. The main part was a pole rather like a telegraph pole placed upright on the long side of the rick and held upright by four long guy ropes. From the top of the pole there was a long steel arm with a pulley wheel at either end, then there was a long steel cable from the ground and passing over the two pulley wheels, at the lower end there was a grab, like an upside down letter U with two sharp steel points. The wagon loaded with hay would pull alongside the pole and the man on the wagon would thrust this grab into the hay and then pull a lever that turned the two steel points horizontal, then there would be a horse at the other end of the cable who when he went forward pulling the cable would hoist the grab full of hay onto the rick, and when the rick

maker shouted OK the man on the load would pull the long rope like a plough line which would tip the lever on the grab, the points would go vertical and the hay in the grab would fall onto the rick, the horse would be made to back up, the grab would return to the load and the process would be repeated until the wagon was emptied. If the horse was used regularly to operate this pole elevator he would often do as required by voice commands, but for sake of safety a man to lead him by the bridle, this job was usually done by a farm boy. It does all sound very complicated and I hope the reader will be able to understand the principle of the equipment. However the pole elevator did work very well it made life easier and it was just the job for a half legged horse, and as a youth I spent a lot of time leading the horse back and forth, we had a horse, Royal was his name and he was very good at this job.

These half legged horses were very useful to have on the farm especially for any light hauling jobs, such as taking a feed of hay out into the fields for the outlying stock, hauling fencing posts and other material and equipment to the site where it was needed, their temperament was like the Shire horse and if there was a young half legged horse coming on there was always a good trade for them at Hereford Horse sale, they were known as Vanners. At these sales they would often be sold for non farming work, bakers or butchers might buy them to collect or deliver their goods. Perhaps in this day and age the demand for this type of horse is no longer with us.

Now we come to the hunter, very often I have read books written on a subject that I know very well and all my life I have tried not to be boastful and when I am writing items such as this I try not to be boastful, but I write what I know to be the truth. I have not travelled very widely and having lost my mother at an early age, I was too young to have any memories of her, and folk used to say that I was my father's shadow and farming and the countryside have been my whole life. I have seen some very rough times, I have seen successes and I have also seen my share of failures, but I have never regretted the life I have led. But if anyone treats me in a way that I do not think I deserve to be treated then I do not forget it. At home when I was young there were two hunter mares, Lucy and Bessie; I do not remember Lucy ever having a foal but Bessie did, there was one foal called Rose, she was in a couple of Galloway races ridden by a local man

Ray Chappel, there was also Prince a chestnut foal and Maymorn foaled on May 1<sup>st</sup>. It was not easy to get the services of a thoroughbred stallion, some years ago Sir Edward Curre kept one at Itton, I am fairly sure his name was Furoe, Sir Edward tried to encourage local farmers to breed a few foals for the hunting people. I find it a bit difficult to put Hunters as a breed such a Shires; the nearest that I can arrive at is the Arab horse. On the one hand there is the racehorse bred for speed and the ability to jump fences, and then there is the hunter of good temperament to carry a young lady, perhaps eight stone in weight or a portly huntsman of fifteen stone. In the horse breeding world by cross breeding it is possible to breed a hunter suitable for any person, purpose or occasion, but this takes time of course. The mare has to be mated with a suitable stallion, the foal grows up and if it is a filly it has in turn to be mated again, it takes time but it can be very interesting in being involved in the breeding of horses.

The breaking in of the hunter type of horse is an art in itself, more involved than the breaking in of the Shire and other horses to go to work. The most important part of the process I always thought was the mouthing, no matter what the breed or the purpose for which the horse was to be put, to have a horse with a good mouth that would respond to the reins was essential. In my youth I spent a lot of time with horses and throughout a long lifetime I have made mistakes and I have watched others make mistakes. My father was in Newport Cattle Market one day and he bought a thoroughbred horse that had been in races, he had bunched tendons and his one front leg but it did not affect him. The horse came home, my father did not know anything about the horse and father being quite fearless he put a saddle on him and rode him; after a few weeks he said one day we will put him to work. The horse had a name Drudigal, we put a collar and light chain harness on him and as with a young Shire horse we hitched him to a log that we had out in the field for this purpose, the horse stepped forward and as the chain tightened Drudigal reared right up on his hind legs, fell backwards, crashed to the ground, blood poured from his nostrils and he died on the spot, this was an example of the stupidity of man on the part of my father who tried to use an animal for a purpose other than that for which it was bred.

Although having spent a lot of time with horses and that was only natural brought up how and when I was, and looking back it was possible to breed in many ways, for me it was only thoroughbred breeds and Shires. Looking back it even applies in this day and age for a Hunter the most important part is a good mouth, good feet and a good temperament. It should be possible to breed a good horse crossing a thoroughbred with a Suffolk Punch, a Welsh Cob or even with a Welsh Mountain Pony. Just to try and do justice to what could be a very wide subject, in the days before motor transport there was what was almost a member of the family, this was a special horse, that would have been a mare or a gelding that would have been kept until they were about twenty years of age or even older, their job then was similar to the use made of the family car today. I will try and describe the vehicles or carts these horses were expected to pull.

There was the Crank Axle cart or Float, it had two large wheels and the axle was not straight it was cranked, so that the body of the cart was nearer to the ground to make it easier to get livestock and passengers into the cart. We had one of these at home and it was used if we had pigs or calves to be taken to Chepstow market and quite often on the return journey we would call at Chepstow Farmers in Welsh Street to collect a few bags of cattle, pig or chicken feed. These premises are now a Greek restaurant but the original doorway is still there and in a wrought ironwork frame at the top of the doorway is the name of the original founder "A.E. Mullins", who had established the business that was taken over by Chepstow Farmers.

In the 1920's Chepstow Farmers was run as many such establishments were by a very dedicated staff, they were not highly paid, but were like the building almost part of the structure. That doorway is where we would back the cart in to be loaded, inside there was a small sliding window and at this window we would give the order for the goods we required to the secretary, also in the office would be the manager, at that time it was Mr. Tommy Reece; the secretary Miss Hopton would look across to the manager to get the OK, a precaution necessary at that time as money was very short, then if all was approved Hubert, the store-man would supply what the farmer wanted. Chepstow Farmers was owned by local farmers and other interested people; I found it a very good company to deal with, they had a shop in the town and also they owned and ran a bakery.

I can remember as a schoolboy that they used to deliver bread twice a week to our farm at Green Meadow, the loaves were unwrapped and brought to the door in a large bread basket, on the floor of the delivery van were clean sacks and if I was at home as the baker went to the house with a few loaves of bread I would get a handful of fresh breadcrumbs from the floor of the van where the loaves had been, these were very tasty. Here again the van driver was part of the establishment, his name was Harry Brazier, we knew him as Harry the Bread and he courted the cook from St. Pierre House and they did eventually marry.

The pattern of so many things in these modern times is for everything to get bigger and I remember Chepstow Farmers as a cooperative serving the needs of the local people and farmers but in time they were taken over by a larger Farmers Cooperative. In the early days Chepstow Farmers would supply animal feeds to the local farmers who collected it and took it home to their farm by horse and cart but as time went by they changed to making the deliveries by lorry and one of their first lorry drivers was Jack Dunn and he did this job for many years driving a three ton lorry. Now it is so different with much larger lorries and much of the animal feed being delivered in bulk and it is blown into storage bins. These large lorries often travel along lanes that were originally designed or evolved for the horse and cart, they were not designed for such heavy loads and the condition of these roads does deteriorate as a result.

Similarly the milk is now collected from Green Meadow by large bulk tankers, but these and the feed delivery lorries are dwarfed by the monstrous vehicles that we now see on the motorways. Economics dictate that everything now has to be big to survive. This also applies to farms, the small or medium sized family farm is disappearing, and the farms are being amalgamated into bigger units.

The other evening I watched a programme on the television about the “Broiler” industry supplying poultry meat to the mass of human beings in this country, these really are meat producing factories to satisfy the requirements of the population with cheap poultry meat so different to my memories over seventy to eighty years when at home there was an apple tree growing at the back entrance to Green Meadow and my father would kill a couple of cockerels that had hatched out under a broody hen and that had

been running about the farmyard, he would kill them with his penknife and would hang them by their legs to the lower branches of the apple tree and I or anyone else who was available would pluck the feathers off these chickens, great care was needed as the skin could easily be torn when pulling out the feathers, the chickens would then be dressed, that is the internal organs were removed and then they would be taken in a market basket on the bus to Newport produce market to be sold to town customers.

Maybe I have wandered from the subject of the horse and cart, but the farm trap with the two wheels was a bit different to the float, when the lady of the house had to go shopping she would use the reliable horse and handy small trap with average sized wheels with a straight axle, which meant that there was a need for steps on the side of the trap to enable the passenger to get up and sit on the seat which was across the body of the trap.

Now that we are dealing with the cob type of horse there is another type of vehicle that was around in those pre-motorcar days, it was known as the “Governess” cart, we had one at home but I do not know where it came from. I do know that my mother was a keen horsewoman and for its day this “Governess” cart was a very good vehicle, it had quite large wheels and it looked quite sophisticated, the outer band on the wheels was of solid rubber and this made for smoother and quieter travel on the road. It had a little door with a stepper at the back to get into the car as it was called, there were seats both sides of the vehicle and these seats were padded and with a smart cob that would trot smoothly it was a very pleasant way to travel in warm dry weather. With little if any motor transport and being fairly high up in the cart passengers had a good view of the countryside and journeys were made in relative comfort but they were not so good in the wet and the cold. Here I have written about the Welsh Cob or a cross breed with a Hunter Stallion, the type of horse that was kept more like part of the farm or the family.

To me it would not seem right not to mention my pony, Meg. I often wondered if my mother had lived how different life for me might have been, seeing that she was such a keen horsewoman, even as I sit here in the study writing within view of the Curre Hunt Kennels and looking at my mother’s photograph with two Shire horses with ribbons on their bridles and probably taken on some occasion such as a ploughing match, this would

have been something special even for those days, but she used to compete in those events.

My stepmother was a very good person in many ways but far removed from being a horsewoman. My pony that we called Meg was a real Welsh Mountain Pony, she had been bred by a man by the name of Davies, and on the left side of her rump was the letter “D”, and I would think this had been branded on to her with a red hot iron, this was very plain to see in summer but in the winter her winter coat made it more difficult to see. My writing is not so good today, I do not know why there is no reason that I can think of, and perhaps it is just old age. Meg was a tough pony about twelve hands high but she could gallop like a racehorse, I had a saddle and a good bridle, but I did not have any special riding gear like a safety hat. I have a feeling that my stepmother did not approve of me and my pony riding. I went out hunting a few times with the Curre Hunt, in the real hunting tradition. I remember on one occasion when the fox ran to earth and as was the custom the fox terriers which were part of the hunt were put down the earth to get the fox to bolt, just imagine the courage of the little dogs, in a fox’s den in the pitch dark and to corner a fox who was no gentle creature, the mounted followers and the hounds waiting a short distance away and me on my pony jabbering away to some other kid on his pony and there was a mounted local farmer who did not have any family and he shut me up in a very strict fashion because to get the fox to bolt everyone had to be quiet so that once the fox was out the hounds could take up the chase. I have never agreed with this part of the hunt, it could be said that all hunting is cruel for the fox to be killed by a pack of hounds, maybe there is an element of cruelty in it but the fox is a cruel animal; if it gets into a chicken house it will kill chickens for fun, but once the hounds catch a fox it is soon killed so it does not suffer for a long time. My view has always been, once the fox runs to earth that is the end of the chase and it should be left to live and to run another day. I was never all that happy myself when hunting, I would rather just ride around the lanes or gallop across the fields. I did not have the smart riding hat and clothes that are seen nowadays.

All the time I was with horses I never got hurt in any way. I do remember going in what we called the front field at home, it was a long sloping field and as a child I went

with my father to fetch the Hunter mare, Lucy we caught her at the top of the field and my father put me on her back and with that she bolted full gallop for home and all I had to cling on to was her mane but I stuck there and I did not fall off. The only other occasion that I feel I was lucky, and I feel I have written this before but please forgive me for adding it here, it concerns the only animal my father ever gave me; we were at Usk October fair, always held on October 29<sup>th</sup>. and there was this little Shire foal, a weaned filly, father bought it, I think it cost him £15 and Mr. Stone bought one or two horses at the same sale, I can not remember the name of his farm but it was in the Shirenewton area and my father asked the haulier if he would take my filly to Mr. Stones farm with the horses he had bought and the haulier agreed but my father was not prepared to pay the additional cost of taking my foal home. The filly was unloaded at Mr. Stone's farm and I had to lead her home with just a halter. By the time I got to the village of Shirenewton, this was in the early 1940's, there was a lot of traffic, people leaving the Dinham Munitions Factory and there were a lot of these cars on the Shirenewton to Crick road and as it was getting dark they had their lights on and because of this I had quite a job leading the filly. I was very glad when I got to Runston and turned into the old lane to Hayes Gate and when I got to the top gate of our field and let her into this field and walked home.

In all the years I was working with horses, cattle and sheep, there was not much danger, with machinery including a saw-bench and chain saws, I have had a few near mishaps. With the filly I was given, we did in the fullness of time brake her in to harness and to work. At Green Meadow one day I was using her in the dung cart in the little yard that had a concrete floor and it was on a slope, I was leading her through the gate and down the slope and I just could not stop her and the shaft of the cart brushed past my chest and straight into the wall, if I had been just a few inches nearer it would have crushed me like an eggshell. It was no one's fault just one of those things that does happen from time to time. The filly grew into a useful mare and went to Hereford Horse sale and made £60 which I invested in what was a new farmer's cooperative store, "Monmouthshire Farmers Ltd". This organisation has over the years been amalgamated with other farmer's stores and is now part of the "Countrywide Farmers plc", and my

investment is still there, but strange to say it never did me much good as there was very little dividend or capital gain.

I have never been very enthusiastic about investments in the farming business, I would rather invest in property and when I was able I bought the land at Runston and I invested in stock and machinery which I was quite happy to do. When I started to farm on my own account I had to borrow money and I promised myself that if my health held good I would succeed. I milked my own cows seven days a week without a break for ten and a half years, and I did make money but I never forgot this promise to myself to succeed.

The other class of horse I was brought up with was the Welsh Mountain Pony, as I think I wrote earlier I used to ride a real pony although it was not actually mine. I always admired the true Welsh Mountain Pony. Meg the pony I used to ride, we later broke her into pulling a little cart, there is a little story about this so called little cart, it did originally belong to Dr. Cropper who lived at Mount Ballan, it was his so called gig, I do not know how my father obtained it, anyway it was in the 1930's and my father took the original axle and high wooden wheels off this gig and replaced them with wheels and an axle that had come off an old motorcar; this lowered the body making it more suitable for a twelve hand pony. It was in the mid 1930's when we were milking by hand and sending the milk off to a dairy in seventeen gallon churns, these were taken to Hayes Gate to be picked up by a lorry. So on this first day that we did it with Meg and the new rubber tyred cart, we had a workman called Dai Goulding and the churns were loaded up and off we went, that is Dai and myself. There is a downhill slope in the old lane from the farm, this we knew as Strawberry Hill, and then there was a corner at the bottom of what we knew as Moseley's Hill, and for some reason just before we got to this corner Meg bolted, one wheel ran up the bank and this tipped the churns, it also tipped Dai and myself out of the cart and there was Dai trying to stop the pony and being worried about losing the milk. We continued to use Meg on this milk churn run but we did watch her quite closely after this episode.

There was a chap, Les Owens who used to come out from Newport, he was on the dole, but he had a bit of mechanical knowledge and about that time, the mid 1930's

father was tinkering with vehicles. We were busy milking, but for some reason they had not left us enough empty churns when we had taken the milk to the lorry at Hayes Gate in the morning so we sent Owens down with Meg to collect the empty churns from Hayes Gate. I thought I heard him come back but he did not appear immediately, but a short time later Owens walked into the cowshed and when asked where he had been he said he had collected the empties but that he had fallen off the cart, I would think that as he was not a horseman Meg must have bolted and he either lost his nerve or he did in fact fall off. What I must have heard was Meg going by the farm at full gallop, so off we went on foot towards Crick looking for Meg and the cart. When we got to the main Newport road at Crick we found Meg and the cart, the cart was wedged against a telegraph post but fortunately no damage was done. I always felt very sorry for the ponies that had to go down the mines, a pony would be born on a hill farm and when it was just a few months old it would be turned out to live on the mountain then when it was old enough it would be broken in. When it was broken in it would be sold to a horse dealer who in turn would sell it to go with others down the mines, a complete contrast to the life it had known running free on the mountain. Down in the bowels of the earth these small ponies were ideal to work in the shallow tunnels pulling wagons that had been dug out from the coal face and loaded by hand onto the wagons, it must have been a horrible life for both the men and the ponies. In contrast a pony brought up by someone with means, for their daughter and kept in comfortable conditions well fed and housed would enjoy a very pleasant life.

To sum up the horse in this modern age here in the UK we still have a couple of Shire horses at our local show, just to parade in the main ring as a spectacle for the general public to see. I always think that they are bigger than the Shires we used for work on the farm; probably they have had a more luxurious early life. In our cities, especially in London horses are very much part of the pageantry and these also have a very different life style compared with the life of the horses we used on the farm. The hunter is still very popular it is used for hunting, and to carry the hunt supporters, we still have packs of hounds, the local pack the Curre hounds as I have said before they often pass by our home here at Merrylea. One of the main uses of horses these days is for show jumping and the game of polo. Then there is the very popular business and sport of

steeple chase and flat racing. So throughout the ages the horse and man have been partners, I should think they have changed quite a lot from the days of the early caveman days, and when a king said “My Kingdom for a Horse”.

Horses that I felt sorry for were the horses used in the 1914-1918 war when Shire horses were taken off farms and sent to France to pull the gun carriages through and out of the mud, for me to have ploughed with these same horses on a peaceful autumn day in the British countryside although it was hard work it was done in a kindly way. But for men and these horses to have to face the horrors of war was I would think like a living hell!

It is easy with a pen to get all romantic, but if we pause for a moment, in this day and age, even today the countryside has more in common with religious and Biblical times than our cities do, with all the crime and violence that occurs there. On the television which is a wonderful medium in this modern age but sadly abused with too much crime and violence portrayed as entertainment; only last evening, January 31<sup>st</sup>. 2008 during the news it gave a glimpse of a city in China with all their people, it was just like a colony of ants, how they can live like that is beyond my comprehension. But there I am a countryman having been brought up and lived all my life in the country and very content with a simple life.

Having dealt with horses and how we used them on the farm, it may be of interest to describe the harness we used, it is so easy for someone like myself, born and bred on the farm and from an early age in regular contact with the various forms of harness that was used for the job to be done, putting on the harness was so natural to us it was just like putting on a pair of boots it was second nature. Something that comes to my mind, in the 1939-1945 war, ploughing up orders were issued and these had to be complied with and with all the difficulties of that time there was a shortage of labour, many men having gone to fight the war, but there were prisoners of war (POW's) sent to work on the farms, we had men of several nationalities. There was a prisoner of war camp at Bulwark and from here the men were brought daily by lorry to the farms, I remember one of these POW coming to the farm at milking time and at that time we were milking by hand, any way I wanted him to go up the field to fetch a horse and the only way I could

get him to understand was to show him a picture of a horse, they could not understand English and we could not understand their language, these POW's came from all walks of life.

If we just dwell on what was a vital part of horses and the uses they were put to, the harness was a vital part of life, and for the horse to be ridden the saddle and bridle were the elements of their harness, and for the working horse the collar and bridle were very important. Probably the most important part of the bridle was the bit, this was the means by which the horseman's wishes were conveyed to the horse, and in fact it was the steering wheel, the means of controlling the horse. As I wrote earlier the mouthing or training of the horse to accept and respond to the bit was of great importance, the time spent with a horse training it was vital. For riding once you have the correct bridle and a well fitting saddle; then the skill of the horseman and the ability of the horse become evident. I did not do much riding once I got to my teens, any spare time was spent working, I never had a proper pair of riding boots, but I must mention that something I never approved of was "spurs". Now they may be necessary with some horses on occasions. I have never been to a race meeting and I have never bet on a horse, that is hard to believe but it is true from someone with my love of horses. When I was at home I worked but was never paid and when I went into farming on my own account that was enough of a gamble for me. During my lifetime I have gambled many thousands of pounds on livestock, implements, machinery and land and was happy to do so.

For the working horse the collar and bridle had to be right, the bridle was a heavier version and usually with "blinkers" so that the horse could only look forward. The collar has to be the right size this is vital and especially with a young horse or maybe a horse that has been off work for some reason because, if it does not fit properly the skin that meets the collar can get very sore, my father used to bathe them with his own remedy. The main part of the collar was made of leather but the part that was against the skin was of a special material, collar "hemp" it was a white fabric with quite large black squares and the area between this hemp and the leather was packed with straw, of course being in regular use this lining had to be renewed as over time and with wear it would deteriorate. As with many aspects of the farming world the art and craft of the

wheelwright was necessary to keep the wheels in good condition and the blacksmith skills in making and fitting the horse shoes and other ironwork either doing repairs or fabricating new equipment was essential. Another important person was the “cutter”, whose skill was needed to castrate the male foals; geldings were much more manageable than stallions. Another important person in the countryside was the saddler whose job it was to make good fitting saddles and collars and also to repair saddles and collars when necessary. The saddler would also make and maintain all the many leather straps that made up the vast amount of the various forms of harness that were needed. The plough harness was quite simple, then there was the chain harness for the horse that was hitched up in front of the horse in the shafts to help pull a heavy load, there was an assortment of straps and chains for the horse that were hitched up to a cart or wagon or a light trap. Going back in time, I would say about sixty to seventy years, when we had POW’s and other labour who were not used to farm work, to see the difficulty they had putting the harness on a horse to go to work, showed how much skill the experienced horseman possessed, this is not said in an unkind way but it is only to be expected. For someone like myself the horse’s collar was like a cradle, the basic job of putting a collar on a horse which is wider at the bottom than at the top means it has to be put on upside down and then immediately turned with the narrow part at the top to fit the horses shoulder, also the lining has to lie against the horse. Even to a learner the fitting of the plough harness is quite simple, but the cart harness is quite a bit more complicated.

In the days when the horse was the main source of power on the farm a dedication was needed to keep the horses fit and the carts and implements for the many crops and jobs maintained in good condition, this dedication and service was not always recognised and rewarded as it should have been, but reprimands were forcefully given when a job was not done correctly. Of course in the modern mechanical age it is no different, it could be said that my generation born in the 1920’s were the first generation to experience the introduction of mechanisation, we started with the Standard Fordson tractor sent over to the UK from America to help in the war effort. These tractors had a small tank that held a gallon of petrol used for starting the engine, then when the engine had warmed up it would be switched to TVO (tractor vaporising oil) and this was held in a larger tank that held seventeen gallons, it was started by turning the engine with a

starting handle that was fixed permanently at the front of the tractor radiator. These tractors had three forward gears and one reverse gear, they did not have a cab but they did have a quite comfortable seat, but when driving these tractors in bad weather I have got very cold and wet on many occasions. These tractors were just a pulling machine, they did not have any hydraulic system, they were really an iron horse, but here is no doubt that when the Min of Ag brought in ploughing up orders and stock farmers to plough up 40% of their land to grow corn, these Fordson tractors were a great help to do the ploughing and to work the land to a tilth suitable for planting the corn and for pulling the corn drills to plant the seed. I still read the Farmers Weekly and they feature arable farming very much and the sort of tractors and equipment that is on offer and the amount of money involved leaves me astounded at the starting gate but I do admire the people who use these modern tractors and equipment.

Being a stock farmer I have worked with animals all my life and I have noticed that animals operate mainly on memory, and when compared to animals human beings are different, they are able to work things out, and then human beings vary quite a lot in many ways, and quiz shows demonstrate how very good some people are from a memory and ability to recall knowledge from their memory very quickly point of view, and they are very clever in that respect. Now if these people were put in a position where decisions had to be made with no prior knowledge they would be at a loss. In this modern age of ours there are some remarkable innovations for the use of mankind, television which sometimes portrays how cavemen lived, yet I often wonder how correct they would be if they did have a true record.

I am sure that animals have changed quite a lot over the years in that man has bred animals by selection to meet his own needs, as for mankind, we have probably changed as well, we have grown in stature I notice even in my generation people are getting taller. As I sit here on February 4<sup>th</sup>. 2008 it is quite a decent day after a rough wet night, the garden is too wet to work on and I have some trees to cut down for the wood burning fire in two years time but I can not get on with this as I have had a bit of trouble with the chain saw so it is away being repaired but I hope to have it back soon. I am fortunate in many ways and I do give thanks for my health and the ability to still be able

to do the things that I do. It is also satisfying that the farm where I was born is run by our youngest son and our grandchildren are growing up there, it is early days yet, the youngest grandchild is just nine years of age, but I have a feeling that farming may not be their way of life. When I look back to that time when I was a lad how very different it was, the farmyard was very different, very little concrete, the yards were just rough stone, chickens were part of the farm life, in the early morning the cockerel would be crowing, a hen would be put to sit on a dozen hen eggs or six duck eggs for three weeks until they hatched. Before the days of weed-killer chemicals there were always nettles growing around the farmyard, and it was not unusual to find that a hen had stolen a nest and laid a dozen or so eggs with the idea of sitting on them these are the chickens natural instincts, sometimes the first we knew of this was when she appeared with her chicks but there was always the risk that the fox would find her before the eggs had hatched; she would have some protection from the fox as there would always be the farmyard dog running around at night. The usual size of a flock would be about fifty hens and a dozen ducks, it was a happy life for the poultry and the eggs were free range, the cockerels would be killed when they were about three or four pounds in weight and the duckling drakes would be killed when they were about four or five pounds.

As with most things in life there is a plus and minus aspect, the poultry were part of everyday life, but there was a time when their life had to the end, in several ways, young cockerels were killed, plucked and dressed for market, and the hens and ducklings would also be killed plucked and dressed for sale. When plucking young chicken the pluckers had to be very careful there were areas where the skin would be very easily ripped and this would spoil the appearance of the chicken, and with ducklings they had to be killed at a certain time, when the development of their down and feathers enabled them to be plucked properly. It is very difficult in this modern age to compare things from a monetary point of view; years ago a pound in cash was very different in its value to a pound today.

My father used to pay local rates and Martin Smith the rate collector came to collect it, it was just over £3 per year, and my Council Tax here at Merrylea is now £1700 per annum. At the farm we had a young lad living in, his hours were as required and he was

paid five shillings (25p) per week, a man working full time would have received £1 and twelve shillings per week (£1.60p). There is no doubt that in those days working on the farm was much harder and conditions for working were much more difficult and unpleasant than they are today. But life was more down to earth, with closer contact with the earth, when ploughing with a team of horses there was the pleasant aroma of the freshly turned soil, there were unique sounds with each job, the stones on the plough board as the plough cut through the land, the clink of the plough chains and the ever present seagulls feeding on the worms in the freshly turned earth. Other jobs had their own sounds, the harrows and the spring tine cultivator, “Ransomes”, was a good make.

Then in the spring with a pair of horses pulling the chain harrows across the fields of grassland, there was the unforgettable noise and again the special smell from the fresh young grass, and visually the straight lines up and down the field were very satisfying especially if you were going across a slope where it was quite an art to keep these lines straight. In the summer when the grass was ready to cut for hay, with two horses pulling the mowing machine, this mowing machine needed to be well maintained with good points on the fingers to push through the grass, a well sharpened knife and the horses keeping a steady pace, again you were very near to the freshly cut grass with its pleasing smell and there would often be a variety of butterflies attracted by the wild flowers. This was much easier than when previously the grass would have to be cut with a scythe, requiring much manual effort but with experience a rhythm would be developed to make the work slightly easier. There is no comparable satisfaction with the modern tractor with the high speed spinning knives to slice off the grass and the operator shut away in his tractor cab. Mowing with horses was usually done in the early part of the day or in the evening when it was not too hot and when the flies are not so troublesome to the horses. Then when the cut grass had dried and was fit to haul to the barn or the rick in the field there was again a pleasant or unique smell.

Then came the corn harvest and the horse drawn reaper and binder we had one made by “Hornsby”, and progress could be good if it was a fairly level field with two good strong heavy horses, sunshine was needed and a good standing crop with not too many weeds in the bottom of the crop and this all helped to make this a satisfying

operation. Wheat was usually the best crop to cut as it usually stood better. The reaper/binder that we had was a second-hand machine that my father bought in Chepstow Market, and it was my job to use it. To my mind a horse drawn reaper and binder was a remarkable machine, it had a five foot cut, and I got to know it quite well and if I had two good horses and I was in a clean crop that was standing up well it was a fascinating job. The reaper binder when it was set for cutting the corn was too wide to go through gateways or along the lanes so you were able to take two wheels off and swivel it around to become a narrower machine for moving from field to field. There was a seat to sit on and a hand lever controlled the height of the flails which pushed the corn flat as it was cut by the cutter bar, this corn then fell onto a revolving canvass which carried the cut corn toward and between two other canvasses and there was a special beater whose purpose was to tap the cut ends of the straw so that you had a tidy bundle, it arrived at the packers which packed the corn into a tidy sheaf, and when this sheaf was of the right size a mechanism was tripped and a semi circular needle carried the binder twine around the sheaf to the knotting mechanism which knotted the twine, a knife then came into action and cut the twine to give the finished sheaf. A clamp held the twine in the semi circular needle ready for the next sheaf. After the sheaf was tied two arms came into operation and discharged the perfect sheaf, and although it sounds complicated the whole process worked very well. It was a remarkable machine and in those days before there was any crop spraying to get rid of the weeds it was not always a fair test with thistles etc that could make the process more difficult and also unpleasant for those who had to handle the sheaves. Growing corn in those days was very different to the methods today with the combine harvester.

Years ago to grow a clean crop was quite an achievement, needing good horses, a reaper in good condition and a man skilled in the operation of the reaper. I quite liked the job of stooking especially oats if the crops were free of thistles, from the stooks the sheaves would be pitched onto a four-wheel wagon hauled by two horses, later tractors were used to pull the reaper and to haul the wagons. The loaded wagons were then hauled to the barn or the rick; the sheaves would be unloaded by hand using a pitchfork, they would be stored in the barn or the rick until at some future time when they would be put through the threshing machine. It is so different today and modern methods do

enable the general public to buy cheaper foods than would be the case if the methods of years ago were still used today due to the high cost of the physical labour that was involved.

I am old now but I love my country and I am very proud to be British, yet I have a great fear for our country in the future with the population increasing at the rate that it is, and the disturbing fact is that people are coming here from foreign countries where no attempt is made to control the birth rate, this is all creating a need for ever more houses and motor vehicles and the awful fact is and I have seen it so often that good agricultural land is built on and lost for food production for ever. It would be far better to help these immigrants to improve their living conditions and food production in their own countries.

Anyone happening to read this may say of me, well you and your wife had five children and so we did but my wife loved them all and for my part they each had the opportunity to choose what they wanted to do in life and for my part I was quite happy to work to provide for them until they became independent. As on many occasions with this writing of mine I am inclined to wander from the original subject in this case horses, but I would add that there is not one other member of my family who has anything to do with horses.

There has always been changes in farming as there has in other walks of life and it could be said that these changes have mainly been for the better. The change from the ox drawn wooden plough to the single furrow metal horse plough as used during the time when I was a youth, then on to the old Standard Fordson Tractor on spade lug wheels pulling a three furrow trailer plough to the present day large tractors pulling multi furrow reversible ploughs, that is ploughs that when they reach the end of the field hydraulically the plough is lifted and turned through 180 degrees and a new set of plough boards come into operation and the tractor returns back along the furrow it has just ploughed; the acreage these machines can plough in a day is quite remarkable. As a boy the accepted way to get milk out of a cow was to sit down on a stool near the cows udder with a bucket and by squeezing and pulling the teats the milk was squirted into the bucket; now we have moved through various types of milking machines and we now have cows milked by a robotic machine as they go through the parlour, these changes are to me like

living on a different planet but these developments are the realities of the way methods have progressed.

As a child it was quite normal in spring to have a hen running freely around the farmyard with her brood of about twelve chicks, and this compared to the modern broiler units, or the large laying units where chickens are kept in many tens of thousands and they never see the light of day. This modern way of keeping poultry is necessary to satisfy the demand for cheap food to feed the population living mainly in the urban areas of our country. It is probably a fact that the people who own and run these large enterprises make a profit and their customers are provided with relatively cheap food so all should be happy, but the question I ask is, do the animals suffer? As far as chickens are concerned, it is hard to judge with broilers in large controlled environment houses if they are happy, they are kept in a warm environment and provided with the right food and they do thrive but what about their natural instincts to forage in the open air for grubs and insects etc. With laying hens in batteries, here again they are kept in comfortable conditions with a well balanced diet, but when I compare this to the hen in the farmyard with her brood of chicks all clucking quite happily I wonder if the battery hen has by breeding lost all their natural instincts, here at Merrylea we keep a few hens, they are fed laying pellets and corn and they have a dry weather proof house to go into to lay their eggs and to roost at night; during the day they are free to range over a little paddock and even in wet and cold weather they spend most of their time outside scratching on the ground or in the grass for food despite being well fed, they are happy and they lay their eggs everyday, if a hen is not happy she will not lay, so it is reasonable to say that the hens in battery cages must be happy, if they were not they would not lay as many eggs as they do.

As with many other forms of animal husbandry, methods in this modern age are very different to the methods that I grew up with, the changes in my lifetime in the way milk and beef are produced have been quite dramatic and in the main the conditions in which these animals are kept has been an improvement both for the animals and for the people who have to look after them. Yet when we think of the horse and that is what I am supposed to be writing about, the life of the horse has very much changed and by and

large it has improved. One aspect of the life of the horse that has not changed is horse racing, and maybe I could be thought of as a softie and my thoughts are formulated from watching horse racing on the television, I do not attend race meetings, but to see these horses coming to the end of the race and a good horse galloping flat out with the jockey mounted on the horses back who then brings the racing whip down hard on the horse to get that bit of extra speed to win, how cruel is this whip when the horse is clearly doing its best?

With horse racing today like many other sports there is a great deal of money involved and what human beings of both sexes will do for money is to me quite unbelievable, it is said that “money is the root of all evil”, and this may well be so in many instances and yet even in this modern society of ours how can we operate without money. I often wonder how are values set in the business of farming. For example, the amount of capital outlay in a modern dairy set up to milk cows is so vastly different today compared to the time when I started farming. As I wrote I think it was in “Working to Live or Living to Work”, on the subject of milking cows in the late 1920’s. All that you needed to buy to get the milk once you had the cows was a bucket, you could make the stool. In this modern age with an up to date set up the ultimate is a Robotic Milking Set-up, and here we are talking in hundreds of thousands of pounds, the price of the end product, the milk in it’s different forms has now become more realistic, we are in 2008 and in the recent past the price of milk was in some cases below the cost of production.

Milk production as in many forms of farming is a high risk business, cows can and do die, someone has to know and understand the many aspects of the profession and also to be on duty seven days a week and there is a lot of capital tied up in the job. There are very many well paid professions in this country where granted they have to know what they are doing, but they usually work a five day week, they have long paid holidays, early retirement on a good pension and the only capital they require is a ballpoint pen. The sense of values in this dear old country of ours is all wrong, and now that we have all the immigrants flooding in it is getting worse, if one started to worry too much about it they would put their head in a sack and jump into the nearest pond.

It is indeed a strange world that is for ever changing, as I wrote earlier I was brought up with the horse, I followed my father in the same farm and yet I have never owned a horse. I did buy a pony for the children and yet only one daughter out of our five children showed any interest in it but even then the interest did not last.

Our youngest son is also carrying on in the farming business and he is not interested in horses. There probably were instances in the past where horses were ill treated, the chief part of the care of the horses is to give it the right food, they love grass, good hay and crushed oats, and a careful watch needs to be kept on their feet, in some instances a good blacksmith is required to fit a good set of shoes. Then for whatever work they are expected to do a good fitting collar and the correct set of well maintained harness are essential. Care should be taken in selecting the loads they are expected to pull, for this reason they should be treated as mere mortals and given the respect that they deserve and they should not be asked to do more than they can comfortably manage.

The one sobering thought about the farm tractor or the iron horse is that if they are neglected the one who suffers is the user. Life is strange, how as a young man at home when we had made a rick of hay on Caldicot Moor which could have contained twenty tons of hay, my father and I would set off with two shire horses and a four wheel wagon, the wagon would be drawn up alongside the rick and with the only tool for the job, a hay knife which needed to be sharp and you needed to know how to use it, we would cut the hay out in slabs which would be loaded onto the wagon. It was hard work and when the load was low I would pitch the slabs onto the wagon and then load them correctly as the load got higher I would have to climb up a ladder with the slabs to put them on the load, although when fully loaded the hay was roped onto the wagon it was vital to load it correctly to get the full load on and to be sure that it would not move and slip off as we travelled home. The job just would not have been possible without a pair of good horses.

If the same job had to be done today, the hay would not be put into a rick it would be baled in the field in the summer, it would be loaded onto a trailer with a mechanical grab and then mechanically placed a barn at the farm for storage and there would not be any hard work at all, in the harvesting, hauling, stacking and feeding. At the present time

in 2008 they have big bales that are put whole into feeders, usually round feeders and there is usually quite a lot of waste. If we wasted hay like that when I was at home my father would have gone berserk, waste was not tolerated. It is probably a case of economics, by dumping a big bale of hay into a round feeder, the amount of time it takes providing you can steer the tractor and use a few levers the actual manual labour is nil, so the waste is tolerated. We now live in a different farming world and there is a generation of people who have never known the maxim that if “you looked after the pence the ponds would look after themselves”.

One mistake that it is easy to make is to compare the way of life as it used to be with what we have today. We have to live as things are now, there was a certain amount of unfairness when I was a lad in certain instances, when working people were exploited, they would live in a simple country cottage, they would have to draw their water from a well, there would be an earth “privy”, down the garden one simple fire as the only source of heat for the whole house and this was what they had to go home to after a hard days work often in adverse weather conditions, cold and wet or very hot and all this for very low wages. Some factory workers were treated as human machines, and the coal miners after a shift of hard labour in dangerous and unpleasant conditions under ground would return home to their simple house black from the coal dust and then to bath in a tin bath tub in the living room. There is no doubt that in this dear old country of ours life for many has improved.

Throughout the ages there have always been in human nature the parasites who are quite content to live on the efforts of others. During my lifetime I have met and dealt with a lot of people in the business of farming, that is inevitable and the most important item in human nature is without any doubt, honesty. I as all we humans have failings, but I have always been proud of the fact that I have always been honest. Now to some that is old fashioned, I remember a few lines from a poem, “I can look the whole world in the face, for I owe nothing to any man”.

One of my failings is in evidence here as it has been on many occasions, is that I have strayed away from the main subject, but as I write as things come to my mind with

no planning this will always happen, it is a wish to share my thoughts with my fellow men.

It seems that as always with these writings of mine that I have come to the end of the story as it were. A very good friend of mine, Peter Bartlett, he comes from a local family whom I have known a long time in the poultry business, he has now retired from the business he was in and he to still lives locally and he takes these writings of mine and prints them in book form, he must be very able to make sense of my writings, but then I am an elderly human being, some days the pen does not express my thoughts as well as it should.

This year is rather special in that it is sixty years since I first got to know my wife, we were selected to represent Chepstow Young farmers in the County Public Speaking Competition, Winifred seconded of the vote of thanks with myself as speaker. The subject I was given to speak on was; “Should blood sports be abolished”. We were as a team quite successful and we won the county cup. Not wanting to appear boastful in any way but I have found Winifred to be a remarkable woman. There is no doubt that we menfolk can not have the same relationship with our children as their mothers have.

It is wrong to compare humans with animals but in the profession of farming, especially stock farming a person has to grow up to the realities of life, and I do not think I would like to be in the present day business of poultry farming where these living mortals are merely units of production where it is just a means of making a profit. In all aspects of farming it is unfortunate but profit does have to come into some aspects more than others, with sheep for instance, they all look the same and if you are in the business of producing fat lambs they are not on the farm for long, but the time the ewes are with you does vary, some ewes that have produced quite a lot of lambs last longer on some farms, the condition of their teeth is the most telling factor, some all wear down together, that is the single row in front, on other ewes the gums seem to shrink the teeth get longer and they are inclined to get loose. These ewes whose teeth are not in good condition are referred to as being “broken mouthed”, this means they will not be able to graze properly and so they would lose condition if they were retained on the farm.

On some farms especially our land at Green Meadow and Runston is what we would call on the limestone if a ewe can keep her teeth for six years she has done well. I always thought in all aspects of stock farming you needed to be prepared for anything, animals can and do die from many causes and not always from disease and sheep are probably the most prone to die for no apparent reason. I have looked at a bunch of sheep at evening time and they would all look well and next morning one could have died quite unexpectedly, for example if gets in a position of lying on it's back especially if it is in full fleece and perhaps it is in a hollow it is not able to get up and in the struggle it just dies from the effort.

In the business of rearing cattle for beef production there are several aspects of the job that vary depending on the system that is used. Some farmers keep cows as sucklers where the cow rears her own calf, they are usually born in the spring and the calves run with their mothers on the spring grass which enables the cow to have an abundant supply of milk to nourish her calf, this is the most natural way. The calves are weaned in the autumn, the ideal is for the calf to be eating suitable food before it is weaned so as to avoid any setback when it no longer has the milk from its mother, these calves should then be ready to be killed for beef at about eighteen months of age.

There are other methods to produce beef, some keep cows to suckle one or more calves for so many weeks and then the calves are weaned, and new young calves are then put with the cow for her to suckle, this is repeated until it is time for the cow to be dried off before she calves again and the cycle is then repeated. The calves when weaned may be sold to another farmer to rear on until they are ready to be killed for beef or they may be kept on the same farm and reared on. Then other farmers buy beef cross calves from dairy farmers and hand rear them on milk substitute until they can be fed a full ration of solid food and they are reared either to be sold as store cattle or they are sold as fat beef cattle for slaughter.

It is the dairy cows that like the horse were treated as individuals, this was very much the case in the days when they had horns and names and they were tied up in their own stall everyday and you sat under them on a stool with a bucket to collect the milk as they were hand milked. In those days the average size of a herd would have been about

twenty five cows. In this day and age it is a job to say what is an average sized herd, there can be five hundred or more cows in one herd, for myself I have never worked with such a large herd so I can not make any comments about them, but I would think that it is getting to the stage when a cow is just regarded as a production unit and not as an individual, this to me is a bit sad as when milking by hand you always felt that you had a personal relationship with each cow.

This writing of mine is supposed to be about the horse, but as has happened many times before I drift off into other aspects of life on the farm. The horse, the sheepdog and the farmyard cat can all be very different. Even in the days when we bred horses for work and for riding the horses would be sold at six years of age to be replaced by up and coming younger horses, the exception was the mares that we kept for breeding. Although six years is not a great time when these horses were sold it was like saying goodbye to an old friend, they were all different, individuals in their own way.

It is strange this business of farming, how it has changed, we used to put a hen to sit on a dozen eggs and then in three weeks we would have those little yellow chicks going about the farmyard with the hen, yet in a few months the cockerels would be hanging by their legs on the lower branches of a tree having been killed and waiting to be plucked before being dressed and either sold at market or cooked in the farmhouse for the family to eat.

With pigs the sow would give birth to about a dozen piglets and in a few weeks they would be running around the farmyard with little curly tails and by the time they had reached sixteen weeks they would be ready to be killed for pork, yet mother pig would be part of the farm for about seven years.

So that was life on the family farm, the farmer did not retire he was part of the farm. In some mundane occupations I can understand that if you have the necessary pension or means of support, retirement is something to look forward to. For my part I spent more time milking cows than I did on any other work in farming. I started milking when I was eight and finished milking cows at the age of seventy nine, I started with hand milking sitting on a stool under the cow who was tied up in her stall and the milk

was collected in a bucket to be carried to the dairy and milking progressed through various stages to milking in a parlour with electronic controls. Press a button for the correct amount of dairy cake to be fed to each cow, warm water between each stall in the parlour to wash the udders, paper towels to wipe the udders dry and automatic cluster removal to remove the clusters when milk flow finished. Each cow would be fitted with a collar that held a transponder and this would be computer controlled to allow each cow to obtain more concentrated feed from a feed station, the quantity each was allowed depended on the quantity of milk that they were producing. In winter time the cows would be housed in a cubicle house, each cubicle was fitted out with special insulated matting which was much better than cows lying on concrete.

When I changed from housing the cows in a cowshed where each cow was tied up in its own stall I went to loose housing in an Atcost covered yard where the cows were bedded down on straw and this was very good for the comfort of the cows, but it needed a lot of straw to keep the cows cleanly bedded down and another drawback was that when a cow came into season, bulling, the other cows would ride her and this would churn up the bedding and mean that even more straw was needed. The next move was into cubicle housing with a slurry pit, this was a combination of the cowshed with individual stalls and loose housing because the cows could lie in their own cubicle but they were not chained and could move about when they wanted to. One annoying thing with this system was that after going to a lot of expense fitting out each cubicle with an “Enkemat”, for the comfort of the cows some cows would choose to lie in the gutter and they would get really filthy, this was not too much of a problem when milking providing the hot water for washing was readily available in the parlour and providing that I could start milking on time, that was six in the morning and five o’clock in the evening. The most vital requirement in the parlour was an uninterrupted supply of electricity as without this nothing would work, it was extremely annoying if the power when off in the middle of milking, the vacuum fails and the cluster units drop off and all this in the dark as the lights would have gone off, now that was no joke I can tell you.

Then there was the sheepdog, many dogs can work with sheep but there is no doubt that a dog that can be controlled and will work sheep well is a priceless asset.

Even on a working farm such as ours where the main business was producing milk the sheepdog was a big help, we did keep a flock of up to about seventy ewes that we lambed down in March and we sold the lambs off the ewe as fat lambs, so we always had a dog that would work sheep and to a degree that dog could also be used to herd the cattle. For a dog to be useful with cattle that dog has to be able to nip their heels if the need arises. The dog kept loose in the farmyard at night can be a security aid although this did not apply so much when I was farming. In the days when the horse was the main source of power there was not the high value of equipment on the farm that there is today, in those days most of the work was done manually. If an unwelcome visitor pays the farmyard a visit at night a good dog can be an effective deterrent. That also is probably a part of history, when we milked by hand, a feature of the farmyard was the cat and when you got up from milking the first cow a drop of warm milk poured out for the waiting cat or cats, was their reward for keeping the farm free of mice and rats, nowadays much reliance is placed on keeping these pests down by using baits of rat and mice poison.

It makes me wonder with this writing of mine how in forty years time my son who will be about the age I am now, will view life. I can not imagine what life will be like then, but it would be very interesting to know. The measure of time is very strange, for instance I do not do very much at the old farm these days, at one time I used to go down there every morning and evening and on one occasion Winifred and I went down to help with testing the animals for T.B. the vet was due at a certain time, but as a profession the veterinary surgeons do find it difficult to keep to time as things may turn out to be much more complicated than expected at a previous call and they have great difficulty in making up this time. So we were waiting for the vet to arrive and we could not really do much else as he might arrive at anytime, and half an hour waiting seems like a lifetime. When I wrote earlier about forty years hence, which is a long time and there could be a lot of changes by then, and yet it will be twenty years this April since we came up here to live at Shirenewton, a lot has happened and much here has been changed, time never stops still and a day is always twenty four hours. It is we humans who change.

Today it is the eighty fifth birthday of an old school friend of mine, unfortunately he is quite ill in hospital, we were at Mathern School, he was an only child and he lived at Pwllmeyric, he used to go home for dinner, whereas I always took sandwiches, I rode a small bicycle and sometimes I used to ride up to his home after eating my few sandwiches, and on my bicycle there was a stepper on the back wheel and he used to ride back to school with me with his feet on this stepper.

There is a bit of a story about that bicycle, at the bottom of Hayes Gate Lane there was a family with two boys and two girls about my age and my pony Meg had a foal and we did not really want it so we exchanged it for this bicycle. The pony ended up delivering bread from a little cart that it used to pull locally.

### **Hayes Gate.**

Maybe I have exhausted my ability to write any more on horses, and I realise only too well that time is at a premium, so I thought I would write a short history of the Hayes Gate Lane. There was quite a change in the early 1920's when the Hayes Gate and the Broadwell Farms were bought by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) along with other farms, when the St. Pierre Estate was sold on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1919. The tenant at Broadwell Farm before the sale was Mr. Prewett who moved to another farm at Trelleck, I was in the young Farmers Club (YFC) with his son Jim. The first tenant of MCC at Broadwell Farm, the acreage of which had been reduced was Mr. John James with his wife and son Ted. Unfortunately Mrs. James died; I think she had blood poisoning caused by an infection which she got from a wound inflicted by two cockerels that she was trying to stop fighting. The son Ted had a religious bent and Mr. James did not succeed in farming and I think that it was in 1933 that he sold up.

Mr. James was followed by Mr. Will Arthur from Redwick. Will's father had a farm at Redwick and they introduced a different style of farming at Broadwell, they also had a stock haulage business with lorries, I wrote about this earlier in this effort of mine, I think he and his wife had two children whilst they were at Broadwell, for all of this I

have to rely on memory. I liked Mr. Arthur, he was a good neighbour, of course I was only a boy when they were at Broadwell and they did not stay there very long. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur and their children moved to Redwick I think it was in 1937, but they left their groom and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Foster at Broadwell, they had a house cow but Mr. Foster could not or would not milk the cow so I went to Broadwell twice daily to milk this cow for them for a short while.

The next tenant was Mr. Ashley Reece who moved in with his wife. Ashley was the son of Mr. Leonard Reece of Penylan Farm, St. Brides near Penhow, they were traditional farmers and they kept quite a lot of chickens but they did not produce milk. They had not been at Broadwell Farm for long when the war broke out, with the ploughing up orders that followed, and they were good ploughmen and arable farmers. I liked Mr. Reece he taught me how to plough with a standard Fordson tractor and a three furrow plough. Mr. Reece did a certain amount of contract tractor work and he also took some extra land at Mounton, they kept stock, beef cattle, sheep and pigs. Mr. and Mrs. Reece had five children three girls and two boys, and they all married and lived locally. Mr. and Mrs. Reece both died at Broadwell and one daughter, Mary died just a year ago. The two sons, John and Ernest (Bunny) married and had children but unfortunately their marriages did not last. John the eldest of the sons took on the tenancy of Broadwell Farm and he is still living there, he does a lot of contract work with his tractor and equipment and he is very good at this work especially at hedge trimming.

The construction of the M4 changed Broadwell Farm and many of the other farms in the locality including Manor Farm at Crick, this is not a farm anymore some of the land was added to Broadwell Farm to make up for the land lost to the motorway, the seven other farms on Hayes Gate lane were also changed, but Hayes Gate farm was not affected. The Chepstow Agricultural Show has for the last few years been held on land that is part of Broadwell Farm. John was my neighbour for quite a long time and I found him to be a really good friend.

The next farm we come to is the farm where I grew up and later farmed, Green Meadow Farm, and because my mother died there in 1925 when I was only two I do not remember her and my father for some strange reason never talked much about my

mother, my only full sister was born at Broadwell on January 9<sup>th</sup>. 1921, they were there because the house at Green Meadow had not been built. There is no doubt I made a big mistake in that I did not find out more details about my mother and of those early years when there were people still alive who could have given me that information.

It was probably a difficult time for my father; the economics of farming were not very favourable and with two young children to look after it must have been hard. Well a young woman came as a home help and father later married this young woman. They had a son who was born in 1928 but unfortunately he died in 1933. They had a further four children, two boys and two girls. In 1937 my father rented a twelve acre field on Caldicot Moor from MCC then after a couple of years he also rented an adjoining thirteen acre field, later he had the grazing of the land on the rifle range and he rented an adjoining field from a Mr. Clarke. I was never sure of the acreage of the rifle range but I believe the total area he farmed at Caldicot was about eighty acres.

Then in 1946 father bought Court House Farm at Caldicot, I am sure I have written this before somewhere, but it is all part of the story. My step mother who had rather big ideas, and the rest of the family moved to Caldicot and of all things left me at Green Meadow with a workman. Of course this move meant that my father had broken his tenancy agreement, anyway there are other details but the crux being that he had to move the family back to Green Meadow and I had to go and live at Court House Farm. However my father had a notice from Mon C. C. and at that time I had married a local farmers daughter and we had applied for the tenancy of a couple of Mon C. C. farms while we were living at Court House Farm, and this notice said that I Ernest E Jones was now in 1953 the official tenant of Green Meadow Farm.

So after a very difficult start from a monetary aspect we succeeded and later we bought thirty five acres of adjoining land at Runston. We had five children, three girls and two boys and they all did very well at the local grammar school. The three girls all succeeded in their chosen occupations but none of them chose farming as a career, they are all happily married with children but they do not live locally. The eldest son went to college to study horticulture, and after a time of employment in horticulture, we had bought Merrylea at Shirenewton in April 1985 but we were not ready to move in so he

set up a horticultural enterprise at Merrylea, then in 1987 he took on a twelve acre field that I had bought, it had been part of Runston Farm. Then in 1988 I retired from farming at Green Meadow and it was fortunate that Mon C. C. gave the tenancy to our youngest son, David, and I handed the farm over to him as it was with the exception of the Runston land that I kept to farm myself to give me an interest.

Although I used to drive down to Green Meadow twice a day to help David, he was the boss. However I think it was in July 1995 that David married a local young woman who had two children; they have since had two children of their own. So that is Green Meadow up to this time although some more land has been added to the farm and I hope to write that up later.

The next farm along the Hayes Gate Lane is Lavender Well Farm and the first tenant here was Mr. Alf Moseley, he had fought in the Boer War, he was a rather eccentric bachelor, after a couple of years he was joined by his spinster sister who was a retired nurse. Mr. Moseley kept Hereford cattle, single sucklers and Brown Leghorn chickens, they were really unusual people but quite trouble free as neighbours, and as far as I can remember the only implement he ever owned was a wheelbarrow. A neighbour made the hay for Mr. Moseley, there was no cash payment but it was done on the basis of a load for Mr. Moseley and a load for the neighbour. I have written elsewhere that I found Mr. Alf Moseley dead on the side of the road at Crick, his cattle had got out in the night and the cold must have got to him as he went to get them back. I was driving as I did daily from Caldicot and that was when I found him.

The next tenant was Mr. Jack Knight who came to Lavender Well Farm with his wife and two sons. It was Jack Knight who gave the farm the name of Lavender Well, it was derived from the name of a wood that was part of Runston that I own, this wood was officially known as Lavant Wood but we locals knew it as Lavender Well. Jack started producing milk here, he was a good neighbour, he came in 1951 he stayed for a while but for some reason he moved in 1959 to another council holding, Bradbury Farm at Crick. I could never understand why he moved, his wife was not a very strong person and the farmhouse at Bradbury Farm was quite large and entailed a lot of hard work to look after it.

He was followed by Mr. Eddie Jenkins with his wife and daughter who was about ten years old, he carried on with the milk production and he also kept some sheep. Eddie was very good with sheep dogs; he was a very keen man but a good neighbour. Eddie came to Lavender Well in 1959 and he retired in 1972. The M4 had been constructed and this cut through the land on the South side of the Hayes Gate Lane, and at this time Mon C.C. sold the house and garden to Mr. Jenkins, the thirty one acres of land they added to Green Meadow Farm. Still with Lavender Well, after a couple of years, Mr. Jenkins sold Lavender Well to Mrs. Phelps; this probably gave Eddie a good profit. Mrs. Phelps came to live at Lavender Well with her son Bob who had a secretarial job in Chepstow, her daughter also came with her husband and at least one child, the Phelps family did not stay long and they in turn sold the property to Mr. and Mrs. Ray Pope who came with two school age daughters, these daughters in the fullness of time married and left home, Mr. and Mrs. Pope are now both retired but still living at Lavender Well.

We journey on and turn or bear right at what we as children knew as Andrews Corner. Then on the right hand side we come to a semi detached house with a set of buildings, the house and buildings were built in the early 1920 by Mon C.C. and there was seven acres of land with this property. The tenant was Mr. Bob Andrews who moved in with his wife, a son and a daughter, Bob worked in Chepstow Shipyard for many years, he was a keen gardener and he kept some stock on the land until when he got elderly I rented the land from him, they were a very good thrifty living family and they were good neighbours. The children grew up there, married and left home. Mrs. Andrews mother and father lived a short distance on down the lane. As children going to Mathern School and in Chepstow our nearest town we made a mental note of any changes that took place. But once I left school and we had land on Caldicot Moor in 1937 and in 1946 I went to live at Court House Farm in Caldicot.

Some of the changes that took place in Hayes Gate Lane I was not really so keen about. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews died and Mon C.C. sold the house and garden and let the land to Mr. Tom Cracknell. The house was bought and the buildings were used as a cattery and this is still their use.

The other half of this pair of semi detached houses was let to Mr. and Mrs. Clarke who had two sons and two daughters, who all grew up there and then married and moved away from Hayes Gate lane. Mr. Clarke was an ex serviceman and in later life he did not enjoy very good health and Mrs. Clarke was always very deaf, they both died there and the property was then let to the widow of a Mon C.C. tenant, Mrs. Bartram who came to live there with a friend. They passed on and it was then let to a retired farm tenant Mr. Rhys Jones and his wife Eileen, Rhys died and some time later Eileen has also died. Then in 2007 Mon. C.C. sold the house some buildings and a paddock for £200,000 it is now very much changed, it is still semidetached and perhaps it has been made out of keeping with the other properties, I do not know the owner occupier.

We journey on towards Hayes Gate and come to another pair of semidetached cottages again on the right hand side. These cottages are of slightly different design and have a bit more land, probably about fifteen acres with each property; they each also had a range of buildings. The first tenant of the first cottage that I remember was a Mr. Powell and his wife. I found him to be a strange man, when I first knew them there was a daughter who was in her teens, Mrs. Powell was her mother but I am not sure that Mr. Powell was her father as she only came on visits from time to time. There was a younger daughter and two sons and these were Mr. Powell's children. Mr. Powell's main occupation was growing vegetables and he retailed these around Bulwark, he would take his produce in a small four wheeled horse drawn wagon, he also kept some cattle. He did not treat his wife very well, and as children we did not like him. The three children went to Mathern School. However Mr. Powell and his family moved to a farm on the Gloucester side of Chepstow and I lost track of the family.

The next tenant was Mr. Edwards and his wife, they were of a younger generation, his father had a Council holding in Portskewett. The son had a local milk round and he used to drive a three wheel van, they did not stay long and were followed by Mr. Matthews and his wife, who also did not stay long. The farm was then let to Mr. Tom Cracknell, his wife and they had a son and two daughters who all went to Mathern School with our own children. They were good neighbours and they concentrated on milk production, they retired to live locally and the tenancy was taken over by their son

John who continues to keep a dairy herd. Since John Cracknell has been the tenant many changes have taken place at Hayes Gate, Mon C.C. have sold the Hayes Gate farm house and some of the buildings, most of the land has been added to John Cracknell's holding, but one seventeen acre field has been added to Green Meadow farm. So the land of what was originally two farms, Broadwell and Hayes Gate is now being farmed by three people having at one time had eight separate tenancies. This is in part due to the changes in farming economics and to some extent due to the disruption caused by the construction of the M4 motorway.

Moving on towards Hayes Gate the other half of the last described property, the first tenants that I remember were John Price and his wife, they were there with a grown up family, three daughters and three sons, the daughters all married locally and one, Flossie lived up the lane, she was Mrs. Andrews. I was never sure what John Price did, he was supposed to have been a keeper at St. Pierre. They kept a few cattle and two working horses and it was John Price who did the haymaking for Mr. Moseley which was referred to earlier, the one son had been a wood cutter but he was a bit unusual in some ways, the other son did some horse work but he did not enjoy the best of health, they were real country people and good neighbours. Most of these people have gone now and most of the properties have been sold by Mon. C. C.

We come now to Hayes Gate Farm and I think it was one of the best farms on the St. Pierre Estate when it was sold in 1919 with over three hundred acres of land. Something I have never been able to understand about Hayes Gate Farm is that there were no cottages with it and neither was there a threshing barn as there was at Broadwell and it was a general rule that all farms had a threshing barn. At that time New Hall Farm was in the sale of the St. Pierre estate but it was let to Mrs. Harris of Mathern Mill, this land was adjacent to Hayes Gate Farm and I think it likely that the two cottages and the threshing barn at New Hall were part of Hayes Gate Farm. Hayes Gate was let at that time to Mr. R.E. Marendaz, I remember him and his wife, they had I think three sons and one daughter, Mrs. Marendaz was a very smart lady and she lived to a ripe old age. If I have space left at the end of this history of Hayes Gate I will write about her shortly after

the St. Pierre estate was sold, she and her husband parted and Mr. Dick Marendaz came down in the world as many did in those difficult times in the 1920's.

After Hayes Gate Farm was purchased by Mon C.C. the land was split up to create other holdings, some of these have already been mentioned, and between fifty and sixty acres together with the farmhouse and buildings was let to the son of the previous tenants, Mr. Greville Marendaz who married a local Mathern girl and they had one son and four daughters. In the difficult times of the 1920's and 30's Greville did some ploughing and he also produced milk and he worked very hard, milking by hand and carrying the milk the considerable distance from the cowshed to the dairy at the house. As with a lot of farmers with the coming of the M.M.B. (Milk Marketing Board) in 1933 he went in more for milk production and he built up a pedigree herd of Friesian cattle, they were very keen but good people and I liked them, however the girls married and moved away, the son stayed at home and remained a bachelor. We humans are strange people, Greville Marendaz was a very keen man and both he and his wife died at the farm and they had a bricked up grave in Mathern Churchyard, the son Vivian (Viv) took over as tenant, he is a very likeable fellow but not as keen a businessman or as hard working as his father and he has now retired and lives locally and he still owns about thirty five acres of land at Hayes Gate, I hope to write a little about this at the end. When Viv left Hayes Gate farm Mon C.C. sold the house, and the two story building which was the implement shed with a grain store over it also a block of buildings for a total of £100,000, this was not as high as might have been expected but it was sad to see such a sad end to a good farm.

Before the M4 was built and if coming down Parkwall Hill, very aptly named as on the right was the boundary wall of the St. Pierre deer park; you came to a level road as far as Pwllmeyric, and this road passed very near to the St. Pierre Lodge house, which was demolished when the M4 was built. Mr. Frank Harris lived in this lodge with his wife who incidentally was our Sunday School Teacher, and they had two sons who came to Mathern School. Hayes Gate as I knew it as a lad was a little hamlet where everyone knew each other. The Curre hounds were known to meet at Hayes Gate, there is no hope of that now with the motorway. The lodge was always kept very well, there was not

much garden but there were a lot of trees around the lodge. In the summer there was a border of flowers and these were always a colourful sight.

Now just a little about the original Mrs. Marendaz as referred to earlier, she was very smart and upright, not at all an ordinary sort of a woman. When the original Mr. R.E. Marendaz left the farm Mrs. Marendaz went to live in a cottage at the top of Parkwall Hill, this was on the site where the Indian restaurant now stands, there was only a cottage there in those days and she had parted from her husband. Whilst there Mrs. Marendaz purchased two fields on the right hand side of the main Chepstow road just past the St. Pierre Lower Lodge this land of thirty four acres adjoined St. Pierre Park and was some very good level land. Mrs. Marendaz had a bungalow built on this land at the junction with the lane to Mathern Mill; it is known as the "Buftons". Just along this lane to Mathern before you get to Mathern Mill there is a cottage on the right hand side and this is where her son Stuart lived with his wife and family, and one of his family still lives there. One son lives locally at Mounton and he keeps bees and produces honey which I often eat as part of my breakfast. The eldest daughter of Stuart Marendaz lives at the Buftons and is a very keen supporter of Mathern church. Some years ago these two fields were put up for sale by Mrs. Marendaz, there was a well constructed "For Sale", notice erected by a firm of auctioneers, however I do not think they were sold and I believe they were left to her grandson Vivian who now owns them.

As children returning home from Sunday school we would meet Mrs. Marendaz who would be on her way to the three o'clock service at St. Pierre church, this service was always taken by the vicar of Portskewett. I feel I have written this somewhere before, that is the problem when the memory gets a little unreliable. As I went to school I passed very near to the Hayes Gate farmhouse and I can remember seeing the original Mr. Marendaz lying in bed in the downstairs end room and this is where he died. I feel it can be quite sad when a man comes down in the world as Mr. Marendaz did. The name Marendaz is quite unusual for these parts, he was supposed to have come from abroad, I do not know how long he had been a farmer at Hayes Gate, I have an idea that I had written on this subject before. This confounded memory can be and is very annoying, rather like repeating oneself in conversation so I had better not write anymore for now.

I realise that at my age I am very lucky to be able to do the things that I do, indeed I am fortunate to still be here and over the years I have written quite a lot. As I have written before the life of a farmer suited me very well in that one can always find something to do, sometimes there is rather too much one would want to do. Although ever grateful to be as I am, this memory is a bit of a problem. I realise that I had started to write about Hayes gate in January 2006 but these writings are rather different in that they deal more fully with the people of Hayes Gate that I have known from the time when I was a young boy up to 2008. If anything dramatic happens in the Hayes Gate area either to the property or the people maybe I will be able to add it to these notes.

**Ernest E. Jones February 22<sup>nd</sup>. 2008.**