

Recently I saw a poster for a ploughing match at Mollett's farm which reminded me of several other "highlights" of rural Suffolk. I can't remember that one in particular but can remember several others. A delightful sight to see two Suffolk punches in front of the plough followed by a flock of seagulls sadly all gone, replaced by the new "in vogue" tractor. There was also Framlingham gala and Aldeburgh carnival both always popular for villages from all around, Stocks fair, races of all sorts, a parade and a donkey derby. Going back to the 1950's Aldeburgh carnival was very different, the procession was much, much smaller and the lantern parade of about fifty or even less unlike today when there are hundreds, maybe thousands. I have vivid memories of an evening military tattoo at the age of about five, held in the grounds of Hurts Hall, very loud big guns, searchlights, tanks, army lorries and other vehicles plus legions of the military and a bagpipe band. I must admit I was a bit frightened. (Hurts Hall regularly the venue for the "Hunt Ball" is worth a bit of a study since this country "pile" was allegedly financed from the profits of slavery.) Perhaps the biggest event put on by the two parishes that I clearly remember was for the Queen's coronation when everybody got involved, no doubt there are still several photo's around the parishes. Most village events concluded when the old boys finished "bowling for the pig", Christmas dinner for some lucky family.

It's strange how things cross your mind when thinking about days bygone, memories from childhood. Farnham has several listed buildings, Elm Tree Farm, Elm Tree Cottage, Rose Hill House, The Post Office Stores (our shop), Farnham Hall, Turret House, St Mary Church and Hill Farm, quite a few for such a small village. (There may well be others and there are also 5 in Stratford). Elm Tree Farm is a bit of a misnomer since there are no elm trees in sight, a result of the last regular farmer Mr Reade, selling all them all before he sold up. Originally the road out of Farnham was lined on both sides with well-established large elm trees. Causing a bit of an uproar at the time when they were cut down. With exception of Rose Hill House (on the Aldeburgh Road just before the railway bridge) and the old part of Farnham Hall, I know them all very well from childhood as a regular visitor.

Behind the shop was the poorhouse which was a wreck up until quite recently. It has now been completely refurbished. Next to that was the blacksmiths and the carpenters' shop. Many happy hours spent watching "Cuddy" make mangers, feed troughs and all sorts of timber products for the local farmers as well as repairing waggons and tumbrils. Was absolutely fascinated watching him make/repair waggon wheels from scratch. The blacksmith next door made the metal hoop for the wheel, which was heated red hot, placed, and hammered down over the laid flat timber wheel and quenched to shrink fit and tightened the new wheel. As far as I know the furnace, shrink plate and bending machine are still there. The blacksmith had incredible talents in all things metal related and could make just about anything asked of him. I can remember when the fire hearth was blown by an enormous suspended bellows operated by a pull rope but eventually changed to an electric fan blower. Behind these two shops were two other workshops repairing all manner of farm tools from tractors to ploughs. Most of the men employed were in their forties and fifties, most of them having seen active service in the first world war plus one or

two caught up in world war two when a lot of the Suffolk Regiment were captured in Singapore by the Japanese. All had a tale or two to tell, some fact and some fiction but nothing of their war.

Most of the village and the engineering works were owned by Herbert Heffer (farmer, threshing contractor, agricultural engineer, wheelwright, blacksmith and dealer in scrap iron). I shall refer to him as Herbert from now on. (Herbert also owned a fair bit of Stratford as well.) Behind the terraced houses in the street were a couple of acres or so called the orchard. There were very few fruit trees since it was largely used by Herbert as a scrap yard for all the old redundant farm implements, he collected from all the local sales and farms. The village bonfire night was held there for many years which was always well attended by all age groups.

The whole area now occupied by the caravan sales was also covered in collected "Herbert's" scrap, mainly old binders, single furrow ploughs and other redundant horse drawn implements. Herbert did well out of scrap selling most of it to Garrett's Engineers in Leiston. As a general farm contractor Herbert was one of the first to invest in a tractor towed Claas combine harvester. It is a shame really but it spelled the death nell of his beloved Garrett Major traction engine plus Ransome thresher and elevator. Spent many an hour watching rickyards stacks being "throsed" by Herbert's set and the rats running out in all direction to be despatched by "Weary's" pair of Jack Russel dogs. The engineering works finished in the mid-sixties and became derelict for quite a while.

Fairly frequent visitors to the village were two families of real old-style gypsy caravans to have their horses reshod. My very first love at the age of seven or eight, was a raven-haired blue-eyed lass who with her parents, were happy for me to occasionally join them far a bite to eat. (Not sure what it was on the menu, but it was always delicious.) They always camped on the bit of grass opposite the churchyard for a couple of days or so and sold/bartered the old-fashioned split hazel pegs door to door.

Christmas were vastly different in those first few post war years. Decorations and everything else were homemade, paper chains, a couple of small beech branches decorated with crepe paper flowers and a selection of candles and not much else, and all put up after we children had gone to bed, what a surprise Christmas morning. If we were lucky Santa had called round and filled a sock (or maybe two) with odds and ends usually including a tangerine, an apple, maybe a few sweets, a couple of bright pennies and a handful of nuts. Christmas morning breakfast was usually cold rabbit pie followed by present opening. It must have been difficult for parents with little money and virtually nothing much to choose from. There were no fancy present wrappings, just brown paper and string. Christmas dinner was usually chicken or duck and very occasionally a goose, plus all the trimmings followed by Christmas pudding and custard. Turkeys had not as yet arrived in England! In the afternoon it was off to church and weather permitting, followed by a walk and listening to the Kings speech. No televisions in those days! The evening meal was leftovers from dinner plus pickles and a slice or two of gammon. Pretty basic, wonder what todays youngsters would make of it? Boxing day, a day of rest, very quiet, perhaps a few board games and maybe a game of cards. There was also the preparations for opening the shop the day after.

There were some real Suffolk characters, most with broad Suffolk accents. Most families in both villages were in some way related to each other, family names such as Cracknell, Plant, Cook, Ling, Borrett, Cooper, Death, Berry, Reade, Spinks, Dunster, Godfrey, Hewitt, Rogers, Bull, Woods, Reynolds, Hare, Robinson and Hawes all of whom lived in Farnham.

My generation the local "gang" of boys were Wilfred, John, Billy, Arthur, Peter, Tich, Kenny and me and for the girls, Yvonne, Vera, Greta, Janice and Audrey. As one of the lads I was a bit of an outsider firstly for being the only lad from Farnham to attend Leiston Grammar School and secondly for having a large unruly crop of very curly bright red hair. The latter was always an embarrassment, being readily identified by all and sundry.

A few notes about the river before delving into my memories of the local pub. My Dad introduced me to fishing in the river which was well stocked with roach, rudd, dace and eels and not much else, starting a lifelong hobby. In the late 1950's a few unsociable people (not from the two villages) spoilt it for the natives by trout stocking and making it private water for the fortunate few. Before the weir built just downstream from the bridge, was an access into and out of the river and provided with a concrete submerged river crossing where several local farmers took their horse drawn water bowsers to fill for their livestock. It was a handy paddling pool in summer. Us lads continued to fish the river mainly for eels with a bonus of catching the odd trout. Fairly frequently we were in minor trouble with the river bailiff as a result. On the same side just beyond the caravan sales is a small piece of ground adjacent to the ramp into the river which currently looks like a mini forest. It was for many years the village playing field with swings, a big slide and a roundabout. Many hours spent there by all the village lads and lassies getting into all sorts of mischief! On the roadside next to the playing field there was a tubular steel handrail which provided a lot of entertainment as to who of us could "tight rope" walk along the whole length. An even more adventurous endeavour was to ride a bike across the bridge parapet. Failure would either result in a ducking in the river below or a crash onto the road. Several attempts were made but nobody completed the half-crown (25p) challenge to my knowledge! On the opposite side of the road to the playing field, were the quoits beds and a tumble down shed, yet another place for further misdeeds by us lads.

For the record, the army provided a single-track bailey bridge controlled by traffic lights for the duration of both demolition of the old bridge and construction of the new bridge. Cannot imagine the traffic problems if it was today instead of yesterday.

The river marshes whilst dangerous, provided hours of entertainment for us lads but we were always observed by some good soul, nothing was ever secret! Nearly all of us learnt to swim in the river just upstream from Langham bridge, a few miles away downstream, how it got that name I don't know! For years now the river has not been maintained. Up until the early 1970's the river was tidal for about a mile or so upstream of Langham bridge and the road and surrounding marshes flooded regularly. The whole river used to be cleaned regularly but it all stopped when Suffolk and Norfolk River Board constructed a dam just upstream from Snape bridge which heralded the end of any further maintenance. From then on, the river was ruined, badly silting, full of rushes and reeds which wrecked both the fishing and swimming.

Harvest time saw many of us lads on bikes complete with large stick, to find which farm was "cuttin today". We were there to catch wild rabbits as the binders cut the cereal crop in ever decreasing circuits round the field from the outside to the centre. The last few circuits

to the middle was when most of the rabbits made their bid for freedom. (A good number of them made it!) Nevertheless quite a few of us had a rabbit or two to take home for the stew pot! (Combine harvesters put paid to that frequently lucrative venture.) A lucrative venture as well as a few opportunities to earn a couple of bob picking, blackberries, blackcurrants, strawberries and French beans

In the winter most of the lads played football for Benhall and for a few years the field on the right-hand side of the drive up to Mollett's Farm was a pitch. Prior to these years it was grass field home for a few cows and a couple of Suffolk punches. Halfway across this field was an old tree, home for years for a family of owls. Many a time I had been told not to look at the owls' nest being warned "if they see ya lookin they go fer yer eyes", and I believed it! The hardest winter was in 1947 when the whole village was snowed in with several foot-high snow drifts. Nothing much moved for two or three weeks but everybody looked out for everybody else and nobody went cold or hungry.

And now for memories of the George and Dragon. My earliest memory was of warm summer evenings when all the windows were open, listening to the dulcet tones of some of the regular "artists" perform after several pints of mild beer. (Closing time was 10.30 officially every day not that too many regular patrons took any notice.) At the time I could only have been about the age of about five or even younger.

I really first got introduced to the pub on beautiful summer evenings about the age of fifteen when several of us lads sat on the long bench next to loos (where the new houses are) in the forlorn hope that some kind soul would have pity and buy a round of fizzy drinks or shandy. It nearly always worked! And now a brief description of the way it was in 1930's 1950's. Behind the long bench was the landlord's vegetable garden. West of the long bench were two barns, one of which was the pub landlord's garage and the other the stable home to Herbert's farm Suffolk Punch. On the car park outside these two barns was a telephone box and a hand operated "petrol pump" to fuel the farm tractors and of course Herbert's lorry. Next to that was a double access gate to Herbert's farm and another couple of sheds for his pigs and chickens. Along from that was the farm pond and finally two more sheds, one to house Hebert's lorry and the other for his combine harvester. Next to that was a drift access to the rest of the farm buildings and fields. At that time the pub car park could accommodate at least twenty plus cars. At the extreme west end of the car park was a large timber post topped with a wrought iron George and Dragon sign erected next to the road. (I wonder where it presently resides?) Having driven through the village very recently there are now no obvious places to park which is a pity, good job my memory still functions.

The George and Dragon was home to the quoits team and the local darts team as well as serving all the regulars and most of the village entertainment. Come to think of it, it was the only place for entertainment other than the Mens' Hut in Stratford now demolished, which sported a regularly used snooker table and a nightly cribbage game, I got quite useful at both. It was also the home for the WI and Mothers Union with Jerusalem being hammered out on a well out of tune piano. Winter heating was provided by a very smoky Tortoise stove and there was no loo!

Entering the pub from the front door there was a small bar on the left with just about enough room for the nightly cribbage school which for a long time included Herbert and his wife plus the landlord and his wife. To the right was the public bar with coal fire and high

backed “pews” to accommodate maybe thirty at a push. The serving bar was between the two bars and beer was served through serving hatches. Most of the entertainment was general conversation related to events of the day plus several dubious but highly enjoyable yarns, however at weekends it was a very lively place to be, especially on Saturday night. We regularly enjoyed country folk songs performed with or without accordions or concertinas, no juke box or background music. As the beer took its toll dancing would break out. (Guitars and/or mandolins also appeared from time to time.) My favourite time was listening to the yarns of the old boys’ high quality Suffolk humour. Typical, two old carpenters, Charlie says “I don’t care what yer say yer can’t use nobodies tools like yer own” Bills reply “depend how long you borrowed ‘em for”. Priceless! Darts, poky die and cribbage were the usual events with darts matches played most Fridays. It always amazed me that those old players who could hardly read nor write could score quicker than the electronic scoreboards of today.

The local bobby frequently arrived about ten minutes before closing time complete with helmet, torch and bike clips and hurried out the less regular visitors. Taking of his helmet, torch and bike clips usually commented “I don’t care who pays but mines a pint”. It could be any time up to about two in the morning before he and the rest of us left, usually somewhat the worse for wear. During the “lock in” the landlady frequently offered us trays of baked potatoes or chips. Which has just reminded me that on Friday night somebody would always volunteer to bike to Vic Lasts fish and chip shop in Snape, four miles away. Needless to say, these were not very hot by the time they arrived back at the pub. Unbelievable!

During the summer it was not unusual for a coachload of day trippers to enjoy the hospitality of the pub. I remember one particular night when a coachload of Jews arrived after a day at Yarmouth races their organiser asked the landlord if they could bring in their beer in from their coach. The landlord replied “cause yer can as long as yer stay till closin toime” which they did, what a sensational evening. It particularly sticks in my mind since the following day complete with hangover I sat A Level maths at 9.30 in the morning. Not sure what it proves but was the only time I ever got 100% for anything?

Ahh “Ginger”, what a character, renowned as a great dart player as well being by far the hardest drinker in both villages. His ability with darts improved as the beer took over! Could write a whole book about him but will relate just two of his more bizarre antics. When visitors were about and after enough mild beer he would be daft enough to eat a whole wine glass in about ten minutes! Didn’t need an ambulance after the event much to everyone’s amazement. If the audience were appreciative, he would follow this by offering to eat a ladies nylons. This was achieved by setting fire to them in an ashtray and stirring them into his beer.

There were many pub characters and I could go on for a long time but will conclude with just one, Alf who I had known for several years. Alf lived in Blaxhall and to give an idea of his vintage he was a master farrier in the First World War. He parked his bike outside the pub, lit his pipe announcing he was on pub crawl celebrating his ninetieth birthday. I greeted him with “hello Alf how does a wicked old sod like you live to be so old, what’s your poison?” There is a name for it but memory fails, a gin topped off with mild beer. “ Ah well bough I had pleny of beer, pleny of baccy and pleny of birds. As yer can see I can still manage the beer and baccy but the birds do take a little longer” and after a pause “but I

don't begrudge the time". After a few more yarns he departed suggesting he was off to Little Glemham Lion.

Totally out of kilter with the rest of this text about Farnham but certainly worth a mention is the cinema in Saxmundham. The Picture house sadly closed in the early 1960's prior to which it was a regular haunt for many of us during the post war years until it closed. It was quite unique in its way being furnished with double seats down both sides of the of the cinema for couples getting up to whatever they had in mind. No doubt those seats could have told many a story from "first dates" to "first fumbles". My first solo visit was aged fifteen when tickets ranged from one and threepence (7p) to two shillings (20p) followed by a bag of chips and a fizzy drink, total cost less than two "bob". Transport was always by bike no matter what the weather in either daylight or in the dark. I still remember one very dark and foggy night returning home late from the cinema when a cow coughed, just like an old man, in a field next to the road, think it was the first and only time my old bike got in excess of fifty miles per hour !!

I cannot express my sadness in the knowledge that the shop, still full of stock from the last keepers, is not at any time likely to be put back on the market as a shop or probably for any other use by its current owners EDF. The shop bell will never ring again!! As a result, I have decided to give a brief description of the shop interior for the sake of a record. The story goes that the shop was originally three properties, hard to believe if you look at the present architecture. The shop itself had two display windows and three serving counters in a U shape. Two were under a low ceiling and the third under a very high ceiling to a second floor which was an all-round shelved gallery with walkways and banisters. Behind the main shop was a series of two warehouses on the ground floor repeated on the first floor but with a third warehouse above the coal shed. The house itself was a series of extensions to the original, a ground floor scullery, kitchen with coal fired range and a Dutch bread oven, a long hall, pantry, living room with a coal fire and an entrance lobby to the front door which accessed the main road. The first floor was four bedrooms only one of which had a coal fire. In the attic were a further three rooms one of which was converted to a bedroom. There was also a large cellar with several wine recesses in the walls and a stable to accommodate at least two horses with an overhead hay loft. Finally, an outside 'washhouse' and loo of the "bucket and chuck it" variety in the garden. Interestingly the high brick and flint wall on the East side of the garden originally continued all the way round the garden. The bit adjacent to the main road was knocked down by an army convoy in 1943 and was eventually replaced by a new low brick wall as at present which to this day gets knocked down at regular intervals. A few chickens and two or three cats completes the picture of my childhood home.

Legend for attached photos and post cards together with a brief description.

Farnham 1

- 1 102799 and 102928 The new bridge circa 1948
- 2 St Mary Church

3 Circa 1930 Looking towards the George and Dragon. Note the high wall on the LHS to the shop and the chimney stack much higher than at present, no footpaths. The lean to on the RHS was Herbert's carpenter shop new tool shed!

Farnham 2

1 137972 Looking towards Stratford. You can just make out the old bridge which does not look as "humped back" as I remember. Notice no footpaths.

2 102744 The Street. The shop on the left was the old bakery before it was demolished. Further down on the right side (out of view) was a hardware shop.

3 102743 Note the telephone pole and behind the wood store for the carpenter's shop and the high wall to the shop garden circa 1934.

4 102718 The barn in the centre foreground long demolished circa 1927

Farnham 3

1 A gathering of most of the two villages about to celebrate VE day and the smaller photo one of several taken the same day of the children's party held on the pub car park.