

6 Home Run (1949-52)



The floods were gone, the banks mended, and major flood protection schemes, aimed at preventing such a disaster ever happening again, were in hand. All this, plus the lingering aftermath of the war, from which the country was still recovering, brought changes and challenges.

In 1949, road transport was nationalised and, by the end of that year, Slaters were operating as part of British Road Services with 25 lorries under their control. The lorries were kept at their depot and at Mason's Yard, Peterborough Road, and Bert was the manager. John had just returned from two years National Service in Mombasa, East Africa.

Here he is (above) beside an ERF lorry loaded with potatoes. The lorry had a 4-wheel draw-bar trailer, and on this occasion there were 10 tons of potatoes on the lorry and 6 tons on the trailer. "Squib" Copland, who we met earlier, drove this lorry to Scotland, taking rams for breaking rocks and caravans for workmen at the construction of a hydroelectric dam at Invermoriston, near Inverness.

However, nationalisation did not last very long, and in 1955 much of BRS, including the former Slater depôt was sold back to private enterprise. As well as the business upheavals, the intervening years brought some personal changes to the Slater family, one of the most important being John's marriage.

John Slater and Betty Bailey were married at Crowland Abbey on 2 August 1952, bringing together two prominent Crowland families, the Baileys, as we saw in Chapter 2, being well-known blacksmiths in the town for several generations.



Following de-nationalisation, the Slaters were back in their own business again, with six lorries. However, these proved unreliable and in 1956 new lorries were bought, including the "Sentinel" in the next two pictures. By now, too, John had a small son, another Charles, born in November 1954.

Here he is with his grandma, by the side of a 1956 Sentinel lorry, loaded with 16 tons



of potatoes and smart in Slaters new apple green livery. During the five years of nationalisation the lorries had been red.



The 1956 Sentinel again, with Bert Slater holding Charles junior, Betty's brother Roger Bailey, and Bert's son Michael.



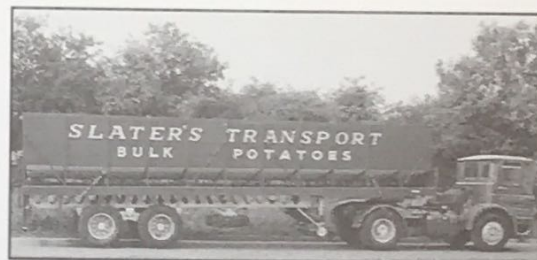
1959 now, and John and Betty have another son, Nicholas, born in July 1958.

The lorry is a 1959 8-wheel Foden fitted with a Gardner 6 cylinder 6LXB engine and loaded with 16 tons of potatoes in 1cwt (50 kilos) hessian sacks ready for market. Sacks were loaded by hand, no pallets or fork-lift trucks in those days. Loads were carried as far afield as London, Birmingham, Bristol, Swansea and Cardiff.



Still about 1959, Charles and grandma with some American cars from Alconbury being taken to another base.

The scene below in 1960 shows the Slater fleet of eleven lorries, renewed after de-nationalisation, loaded with potatoes and

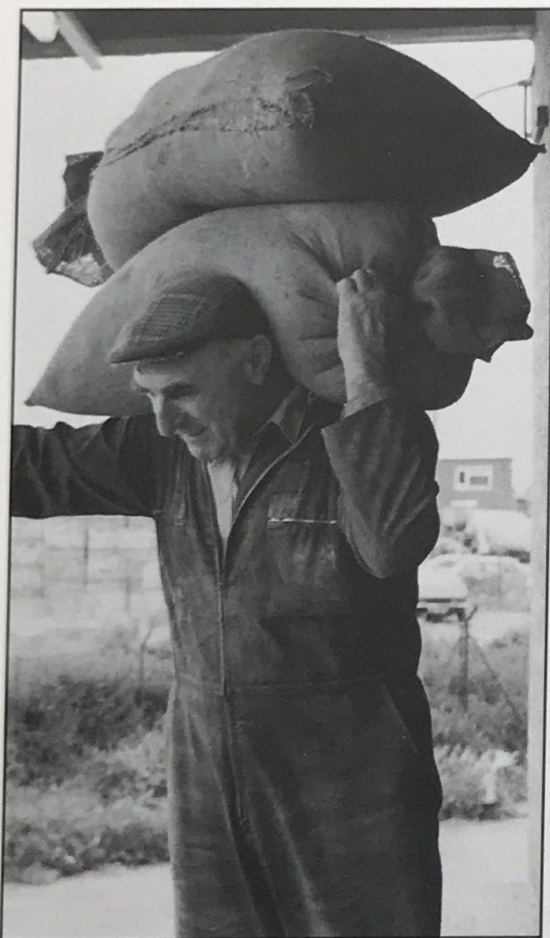


ready for an early start the following morning. At this time the fleet was composed entirely of Dodges, except for one lone Foden at the extreme left.

The Dodges had P6 Perkins engines and were often used to transport loads of sugar beet from local farms to the processing factories in Peterborough and Spalding. Both factories were opened in 1926 and Slater's lorries carted sugar beet to them from the beginning - their first loads were in October 1926. The Peterborough factory closed on 30 January 1991; the one at Spalding had already gone, on 9 February 1989.

By the mid-sixties, bulk-handling came to the fore. Slaters had one of the first bulk potato carriers to be built by Calibars of Ely. The publicity photograph (above), taken in





1968, shows one of the later versions.

Potatoes were unloaded by means of a conveyor belt running underneath the length of the body and powered by an electric motor just visible at the rear. The tractor unit was a Leyland Beaver.

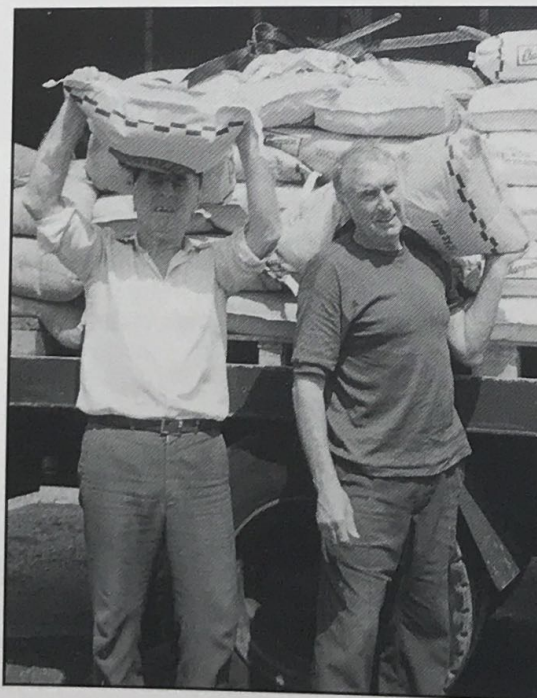
Not all Slaters haulage was agricultural products. Bricks made by the London Brick Company were taken to different parts of the country. They were loaded at the company's many yards in the Peterborough area, including Dogsthorpe, Eye, Kings Dyke and Whittlesey.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were busy years at Slaters. At their peak they were running 13 cabs and 34 trailers and employing 17 local people at their Peterborough Road depôt. John's cousins, William Ernest ("Bill") and Tony Slater also had their own smaller road haulage business, and they were busy too.

Left is a picture of "Bill" Slater loading corn at the Dogsthorpe silo, with two 8 stone sacks of wheat on his back (approximately 100 kilos).

Dogsthorpe Brickyard can be glimpsed in the background.

Here he is again (on left) with his brother Tony helping to unload flour for



chappatis from Tony's lorry. The flour was from Cadge and Colman's mill and the load was destined for the Midlands.

Bill served in the REME during the war,



attached to the American 5th Army in Italy. He retired in 1987 and lives in Crowland. Tony is still in business (1994).

So the years slid by for the Slater family. A sad landmark came at Christmas 1976 when Nellie Jane died on Christmas Eve. Her husband had become Police Superintendent at Skegness and they had gone to live there.

Bert and John's business continued to expand and the big green lorries were a familiar and normal part of the local scene. As well as the business, Bert was active and prominent in Crowland's public and social life. As a very young man he had been elected to the Parish Council, and in due course he became its longest serving member. He was also for 10 years one of Crowland's representatives on Spalding Rural District Council and served one term on South Holland District Council after it was formed in 1976. Amongst all this he found time to be a Governor of St Guthlac's School.

Here he is (above) in the mid-1950s, standing first on the left. Parish Councillors and others had gathered for the opening of the Children's Playing Field ("The Snowden Field").

Here he is again (right), at a ceremony at Crowland Parish Council on 4 June 1973 when a silver cigarette box was presented to Tom Warren in recognition of his 42 years service (1931-1973) as a Parish Councillor.

Bert was certainly a man of many parts and wide interests. As well as being a champion skater, he was interested in ballroom dancing and the Crowland Athletic Club - and of course was a business man as well.

But in 1980 a day came when Bert and John decided they had had enough of increasing fuel costs, official regulations and the general economic situation. On 10 July 1980, the last six lorry cabs and eighteen trailers in Slater's fleet were sold off. After 58 years of carrying goods around (nearly 100 if you count grandfather and the water cart) Slaters lorries had come to the end of the road.



10 July 1980 - a sad and nostalgic day for Bert and John Slater.

But that's not quite the end of the story.

Bert retired and went to live in Albion Street, Crowland, where he and his wife lived until his sudden death on 11 March 1987, when he was in his 73rd year. His widow and son Michael still live in Crowland.



John kept one lorry and worked on his own until 1988, carting sugar beet and bricks for the London Brick Company. Between 1988 and 1990 he worked for Herberts of Northam Farm, Eye, driving their 38-ton ERF lorry carrying bulk potatoes, and also for Frank Fovargue. We met the Fovargue brothers in Chapter 3, in the photo on p. 22; by now Jack had been dead for many years as the result of an accident. Since June 1990 John has worked part-time for Cambridgeshire Libraries, driving the delivery vans and sometimes mobile libraries from Peterborough, March, Ely and Cambridge. They take books to libraries, schools, old people's homes, the prisons at Whitemoor and Littlehey, and some villages without their own library



John and Betty still live in Peterborough Road, Crowland. Their sons Charles and Nicholas are both married with families of their own. Nicholas still lives in Crowland, but Charles lives in Peterborough. John and Betty have five grandchildren.

Nellie Jane's son Charles now lives in Brisbane, Queensland. Her daughter, Megan, is married and lives near Burton-on-Trent; her husband, John Mawer helped John sort the photographs for this book and wrote some of the text.

Uncle Desborough's son, David Palmer Slater, lives at North Bank Cottage. He retired at the end of March 1993 and is a well-known figure in Crowland. For many years, first as a maintenance man and then as groundsman, he was responsible for the maintenance and much of the landscaping of the Greens, the Abbey Churchyard and all the many green amenity areas owned and maintained by the Council. He is also an amateur local historian and has a great interest in the history of Crowland.

Michael Henfrey, who lives at Gull Farm, Deeping High Bank, is Aunt Mary Ann's

grandson. We met Mary Ann in the very first picture in the book, standing by the barrel on the water cart (see Page xx) He breeds Percheron horses and, amongst other activities and events, organises the annual Crowland Horse Show.

Betty's brother Roger Bailey is in America and is a well-known personality in the world of motor racing. After various car-related jobs in this country, he went to the USA in 1966 to work for the Alan Mann GT40 organisation. He then spent several years with different racing car outfits at their workshops in the USA, Europe and Great Britain, including the McLaren USAC workshop in Detroit and a spell at BMW at Bourne. In 1968, Enzo Ferrari presented him with a gold watch in recognition of his work with the Tasman series wins and their driver Chris Amon. He returned to the USA

for good in 1977 as manager of McLaren North America, moved to their Indy cars and is now (1993) President of Indy Lights and in charge of their programme. He lives at Clarkston, Michigan, USA and is married with a son and daughter.

We have attempted to follow the Slater family through three generations and almost a hundred years. It might have been an ordinary humdrum family chronicle, but it has turned out very differently. This family is not ordinary at all and it would take a much larger book than this to tell the story as it should be told. "An everyday story of country folk?" - no, not in a million years!

And that's about all, for we have reached the present day and who can tell what lies next or who will record it.