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Rolling along (1918-1939)



The photograph on the left was taken during the time the brothers were working for Messrs G. F. and C. Birch. It shows them operating a straw bale carrier. John William ("Big Bill") Slater - Uncle Desborough's son - is feeding the straw stack, father Charles needling the straw in the press, Uncle George with a sack over his head to stop the straw going down his neck, Uncle Matthew driving the engine, and two assistants.

Below, peace celebrations, 1918, in North Street, Crowland. Fred Slater (b. 1910) is the small boy 3rd from left on the cart and his sister Cis (b. 1912) is 3rd from the right. Their mother, Aunt Florence, is standing at the extreme right next to the soldier.

The fateful years 1914-18 brought changes everywhere. Although, at a glance, the above scene may not appear to be drastically different from before, there is no doubt that in many ways the men came home to a different world.

John Slater's father, Charles, served as a Sergeant in the Army Service Corps (Transport) as a Sergeant on the Somme. He was in the battle of Cambrai and after the war spent an extra year in Germany with the Occupation Forces. His brother, Matthew, served in the Tank Corps. On their return to civilian life the Slater brothers went to work for G. F. and C. Birch and Son, corn merchants of Spalding, working north of Spalding with the threshing set. They stayed out all the week, cycling home at weekends. Being classed as farm workers their wages were only 16s 0d (80p) a week and they had to work flat out from dawn to dusk.





We are now in the 1920's, and folk were gradually picking up the pieces after the war and getting back to normal. Here, for a change, is a photograph that shows people taking the chance of enjoying a break from work. All the Slater family were keen skaters, and here we see twelve members of the family seated on a boat at the side of Crowland Lake during the winter of 1929.

Back Row: Desborough, John (known as "Jack" was Uncle George's son and author John's cousin), Charles, Jack Cary (who later became Lincolnshire and Fen skating champion).

Front Row: Lilian (Cary), Fred, Bert, Nellie Jane, Winifred, Bill, Rose, and Florrie.

Lilian appeared in our first picture, at almost the same spot. She was the little girl seated on the donkey pulling the water-carrier's cart. Jack Cary (her son) served in the RAF during the 1940's. Jack Slater kept the *Crown* public house at Crowland and in 1936 moved to the *Swan* (sometimes called the *White Swan*) first known in 1557 in Midgate, Peterborough, where he stayed until 1940. The *Swan* was demolished in the 1960's. Fred Slater founded athletics clubs at Crowland and Peterborough in the 1940's. Nellie Jane (John's sister), then aged 11, had just won the Lincolnshire Ladies Skating Championship, which title she held until 1947. In this picture she is holding the cup.



Here she is aged 11 with her mother on Crowland Wash.



John's pictures now take us into the 1930's. Although mechanisation on the land was advancing fast, much work was still being done in the traditional way.

Above shows a gang of Crowland potato-pickers at work in the fields, some time in the early thirties. The potatoes might have been dug by hand, too, but were usually ploughed out by a horse pulling a single furrow plough, and left on top ready for the pickers with their baskets. (This gang has a dog to keep a sharp eye on them and make sure the job is being done properly.)

1935 now and pictured here on the right is Desborough Slater (second from left at back) with a gang, this time trimming sugar beet. The picture is taken on what is now St Guthlac's School playing field, Postland Road. The lady on the right in the front row is Julia Nichols, who lived in a cottage which stood where the school is now. The man on the far left, whose name was Clifford Taylor, had walked from the North of England in search of work. To the right of Desborough Slater is his son Fred and daughter Cis (later Stanley).

The elderly gentleman next to Cis is George William Palmer ("Granddad"), Desborough's father-in-law. He had been farm foreman at Toynton's Farm, Holbeach

Marsh, and was in his 80s when this picture was taken. The other lady in the picture (front left) is Mrs Asplin.

The two horses with the cart at the back were Percherons, named 'Daisy' and 'Metal'. 'Metal' was the white one and 'Daisy' the black. She was an ex-Army horse and had been used in France during the war, to pull gun-carriages. The other horse, being held by "Granddad" Palmer, was a black Shire named 'Captain'. Uncle Desborough had bought him in a sale for 90 guineas (£94.50).

Sugar beet is now such a familiar crop in East Anglia that one tends to forget that it was only introduced at the turn of the century. Although the seed could be drilled mechanically, until about 1950 everything else to do with the crop had to be done by hand. The first job after germination is "singling", to thin out the plants to about 8 or 9 inches apart, and this was done either by hand or by hand hoeing.





One wonders if these nine Crowland ladies above, photographed some time in the 1930's, were perhaps taking a welcome break from singling sugar beet? The third lady from the right is Dora Bailey (née Dora Pepper) who was to become John Slater's mother-in-law. We saw her earlier, as a little girl, in the Postland School photograph.



Agricultural produce has of necessity to be taken to market, and in the early 1920's Charles Alfred Slater had acquired one of the first T-type Ford vehicles and had gone into

the long-distance transport business. Work was mainly transporting potatoes to markets in London and Birmingham; 25cwts (about 1250 kilos) in 1cwt (50 kilos) hessian sacks to a load. Locally, peas were taken on the vine to Farrows at Peterborough, and it was not uncommon for children to run alongside the lorry to try and snatch handfuls of peas. Carrying sugar beet from local farms to the Spalding and Peterborough factories, both of which opened in 1926, was another regular job. The beet was ploughed out in rows with a horse-drawn single furrow plough, and after trimming with a sickle, placed in heaps.



Lorries were loaded by hand from these heaps, the stronger men using seven-tined forks. None of today's mechanisation was in evidence then.

In the picture (below left) John Slater - then aged about 2 - is standing with his cousin Eileen in front of a 1931 Ford lorry, whilst his father Charles fills up from a one-gallon petrol pump winder at the left.

Above is the same lorry (FL9980) a few years later. Charles Slater has just finished unloading straw with a hay-fork.



John and his elder brother Bert (left) on the bonnet of a Ford (EG301) about 1931. Bert drove the first Ford Carrimore to be used in Crowland, and in 1931 regularly did six trips to Bournemouth for a weekly wage of 25 shillings (£1.25).

As well as the weekday loads of potatoes and sugar beet, Slater's lorries also collected the newspapers from Peterborough North Station at 4.45am on Sundays. Bundles were then delivered to Wansford, Stamford and the public house at Tallington Station crossing, while the other went to Whittlesey, March and Manea. Meanwhile Uncle Ernest, working with his own lorry, made the deliveries at Northborough and the Deepings. Payment was £1.00 per lorry. In bad weather there were hazards; fog and floods and sometimes it was possible to get stuck in the snow. The empty lorry then had to be loaded with snow to weight it down and thus enable it to get out.

The photograph (below) was taken about 1931 and shows Uncle Ernest Slater, on left, with his own lorry (EG315) and John's elder brother Bert with father Charles Slater's lorry (EG301). The lorries are loaded with 1cwt (50 kilos) bags of potatoes; their destination and the location of the photograph are unknown.



Charles Slater's lorries were often used in parades and celebrations. The picture right was taken during the celebrations for the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary on 6 May 1935. A carnival parade was held in Crowland, and one of the lorries carried the band. On this occasion it was an amalgamated band comprising the bands of Crowland Salvation Army (with six bandsmen from Peterborough) and Crowland Brass Band.



Crowland certainly celebrated the 1935 Silver Jubilee in style, as the picture left shows. Here is Slater's Commer lorry decorated for the parade, with Bert driving, father Charles standing at the side, and John, aged 6, in the cab. It was taken in Uncle Desborough's paddock, North Bank. The passengers were each dressed to represent a different outdoor sport or holiday activity. Left to right were: Mary Childs (sunbather), E. Cary (footballer), Bernard Slater (angler), Eve Truman (greyhound racer - note her two dogs), John Turner (cyclist), Janet Turner (?), Mary Turner (hiker), Fred Turner (gentleman of the Turf), Olive Stapleton (hockey), D. Brooks (tennis), Nellie Jane Slater (skater), P. Butler (flyer), Esme Wortley (?), and S. Adams (cricket).

The thatched cottage in the background was owned by Mr Bates, and was demolished to make way for Bill Snell's bungalow.



Some other entrants to the parade were not amongst those fortunate enough to be riding on the lorry, and had to go on foot. However, they did have four feet, although one wonders whether, in their circumstances, this would have made walking any easier. (But we do know who provided some of the legs.)

William White, left, constructed the donkey and the elephant. Vernon Dunmore was the back legs of the donkey but the front legs remain a mystery. If anyone recognises them, please let us know. The 'mahout' holding the elephant is Frank White; Ted Wortley was this animal's front legs and Tommy Pepper the back. Ted carried a bucket of water and a pump inside and the elephant obligingly gave the Fire Brigade a shot of their own medicine as they went past. The elephant re-appeared on many future occasions in the town.

William White was a plumber by trade and was a well-known character in Crowland. He is seen here outside his house and shop in Reform Street. He carried his tools around in the boot of the Vauxhall car seen at the right of the picture.

The large building in the background is *Pear Tree House*, and Ray Elliott of Reform Street is looking on.

Scarcely were the decorations taken down and the costumes put away than it was time to get them out again for the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in May 1937. Here (top right) is another Slater's lorry ready for the procession.

This time it is a Ford V8 decorated to represent the British Isles. Passengers were, left to right: Bernard Wortley and Betty Sharman (Ascot), G. Burton (John Bull), P. Bristow

(Scottish lady), Nellie Jane Slater (Peace), the brothers George and Harold Hadnam (Irishman and coal-miner), Esme Wortley (Britannia), Phyllis Butler (Welsh lady), and Elizabeth Whiting (Irish lady).

The procession on the move (below, bottom). Bert Slater, dressed as Father Time, is standing on the bonnet of the Ford V8 as it passes Annible's Family Bakery in East Street. Mr W. Annible (senior) is standing in the doorway. Following behind the lorry is the *Queen Mary*, made of hessian and escorted by Fred Holmes in sailor dress.

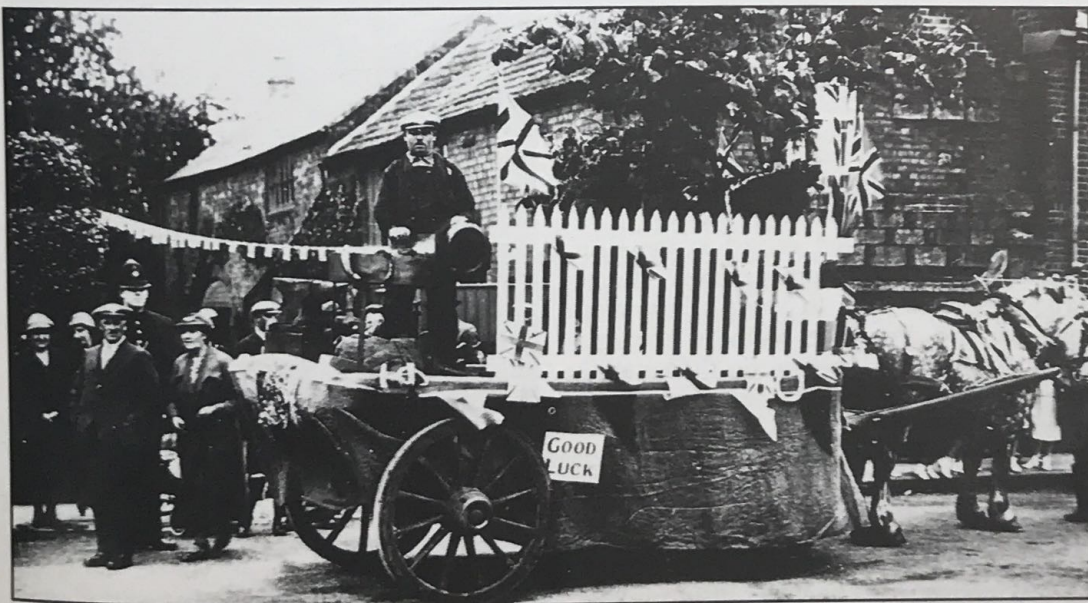
Annible's shop stood on the site of the former *White Horse* public house, which was kept by Frederick John Cary, Jack Cary's grandfather. He moved there from the *Three Tuns* at Market Deeping in 1894, and by 1908 had moved again to the *Three Tuns* in South Street, Crowland, upon the demolition of the *White Horse*. He remained at the South Street *Three Tuns* until his death in 1912.



Two final pictures of the Crowland 1937 Coronation Carnival now, before we go back to work.

First (right), a gypsy caravan, photographed at the bottom (back end) of North Street, near Vatcherys, with a colourful Romany family and a lurcher dog to run behind. *Romanies*, left to right: Vernon Dunmore, Ted Mackey, Millie Mackey, Rose Bristow, Margaret Dunmore, Alice Coley, Doris Bailey (Betty Slater's sister), and Annie Holmes.

"Vatcherys" is four acres of original grass, the last remaining grassland on Crowland Wash that has never been ploughed. It is believed to have been the Abbey dairy field, and the name alone is proof enough of that. The last Abbey was a Norman foundation, where French would be spoken, and "vacherie" is the old French word for a dairy farm, byre or cowshed. The deeds go back to 1611, and the present owner is Mr David Palmer Slater, who bought it from Dr Husband-Clutton in 1953.



Our last look at the 1937 Coronation Carnival. Mr Bill Drury, of Caulton Farm, Postland, photographed (left) with his Percheron horse and waggon decorated on the theme of lucky horseshoes, outside Miss Halford's private school in North Street. Mr Drury and yearling standing on the waggon with forge and anvil. Onlookers, left to right: Nancy Childs, Mrs Albert Brown, Mr & Mrs Arthur Green, and Harry Blanchard's head can just be seen behind Mr Drury's leg. The police constable is John Glaslyn Thomas, Nellie Jane Slater's future husband, who became Superintendent at Skegness. They were married in 1939.

According to John Slater, Miss Halford's school was next door to the doctor's (Dr Boardman in 1937) and was burnt down.



Leaving the jollifications behind for the time being, we must move on. It is April 1938 and Charles Slater now has a fleet of four Bedford lorries, three 5-tonners and the 'Carrimore' that Bert used to drive.

Above we see them all lined up, with from left to right Matthew Slater, Ted Wortley, Charles Slater, young John Slater and big brother Bert, and Ernest ('Skatt') Henson. Ernest, in front of the then latest Bedford model, was the strong man from Eye. He performed many feats of strength to help raise funds for the Red Cross.

Ropes undone ready for unloading of bulbs at Peterborough (Matt. Verdegaaal's

bulb factory, Walton). This photograph (right) was taken before the war, and shows Bedford lorry EG4455, with two local drivers. Ted Wortley, standing, has his arm round Jack Fovargue's shoulders. Jack is seated on the running step of the lorry. Ted Wortley worked for Slaters from the early 30's until after the war. Jack Fovargue (who came of Huguenot ancestry) was called up in September 1939 and served in the RAF. Together with his brother Frank he returned after the war to work a few more years for the firm. The brothers Fovargue then left Slaters to start up on their own in farming and the haulage business.

