

VIEWPOINT SUPPLEMENT

May 2000 Issue 16

50 YEARS



A H Worth & Co

The Early years...

Chronicle of Peter Shepherd

A H Worth 50 Years Ago
Chronicle of Peter Shepherd during
his 18 months as a farm student

Introduction - 1950:

Having left school at the end of the Christmas term, aged nearly 18, I was now living with my parents in Holbeach, and had aspirations of becoming a farmer. My father, a local bank manager, had been able to persuade the estate manager of one of his farming customers (AHW) to take me on as a farm student.

On Monday 9th April 1950, I duly reported for work on the White House Lodge & Top farm at 7.00am to foreman Dick Rayner at his home called White House Lodge, situated in the paddock which is now the Company football pitch. In those days foremen tended to live in large houses which were probably the original homesteads of the owning farmers. One of the foreman's perks was for his wife to take in several lodgers, usually single men working on the farm. Rayner's instructions from estate manager Bew Todd were to put me 'through the mill' and to ensure that I had a go at *every* job there was on the farm at that time, during my 18 months as a student, a tall order.

At this time, the estate was divided into three virtually separate farms of approximately 600 acres. Each farm had its own foreman and workforce consisting of about 30 men, (there were still a small number of Land Army girls remaining from the war years) its own tackle which included a few petrol/paraffin tractors and a stable of working horses. A farm office (one room in Hovenden House), a workshop, blacksmiths, carpenter's shop, a full-time gang of women, a narrow-gauge railway that connected most fields with the main-line railway station at Fleet village, and about 10 miles of cinder roads (no tarmac) helped to service these three farms.

There were just over 30 houses and cottages on the estate, housing workers and their families. Apart from Hovenden and the manager's house (Old White House) there was no electricity or telephones on the farms, although the workshop did have its own generator. Arthur Hovenden Worth along with his wife Lizzie were still alive and well, having retired to Rutland and handed over the Fleet Estate to their eldest son George Arthur (Dick) who with his wife Janet were now living in Hovenden. (Tony at this time was just 10 years of age!) George Arthur Worth had been a Squadron

Leader with RAF Bomber Command during World War 11, as was his older brother Tom in Fighter Command who was sadly shot down and killed in the war. The family also owned other estates at Wainfleet near Skegness and Soham near Ely.

April 1950:

My first week's job was hand hoeing winter beans, and I was dispatched in the care of Andy Clarridge, one of the farm labourers who was very helpful and informative. My next job, to last for a couple of weeks, was one-horse harrowing potato ridges. I was instructed to report to the stable yard at 6.30am to get my cart-horse (a Suffolk Punch who was called Rattler) fed, brushed, harnessed and ready for work. Once out on the field I was shown by one of the regular horsemen how to attach Rattler to the harrows and how to drive him from walking behind (Rattler and I would have to walk the best part of 15 miles on loose soil for our full day's work). In South Lincolnshire, working horses were driven by using only one rein (not two) and to make the horse turn to the left you had to give a steady pull, calling it to "come-here" and to the right, a series of tugs calling it to "eat-up" In order to make the horse understand, the calling had to be carried out in a broad South Lincolnshire dialect. Having set off down the field with Rattler pulling four harrows on top of four potato rows for the purpose of weeding, my next challenge was to turn him round at the end. Unfortunately I turned him too tightly, the harrow poll stuck in the ground, the harrows up-ended and landed on Rattler's back, and he bolted! Nothing like learning the hard way!

May:

This was the month for planting celery. Ruben Wells (still alive today in his 90's) would draw through the field with his team of two horses pulling a three-row ridger and a "pram" for marking where the plants were to be placed. Ruben would measure the length of the field into retches, with two men planting and two women dropping to each retch. I was to be a "woman", and had to place a seedling celery plant on each mark in the bottom of the ridge, for my planter Ted Epton to "dib in" This was a "piece-work" operation and I had to ensure that I always kept ahead of Ted. Sometimes a gust of wind would blow these tiny seedlings out of the ridge before Ted could plant them, which meant that I would have to start all over again. Each planter had to plant 10,000 plants in the day. It was

back-breaking work for me, as I had never done any back-bending work before. My back was so stiff and ached so much that I was unable to sit properly on the seat of my auto-cycle (forerunner of the moped) for my journey home to Holbeach at the end of the day. Celery planting took about two weeks to complete, and for the last two days, I was promoted from dropper to planter!

Alas, after celery planting, my poor back was to get no respite, for I was next sent sugar-beet hoeing and singling with a short hand hoe. Once again, this job was done by piece-work, and what I earned depended on how much ground I covered. In those days there were no precision drills to sow the natural seed and no selective chemicals to kill the weeds, which resulted in tangled thick bunches of seedlings mixed up with all sorts of weeds that had to be separated and singled. This was heart-breaking work, which was to last for about three weeks, but I knew that somehow or other I had to stick it. I spent most of the time crawling on my knees to try and relieve chronic back-ache!

June:

I was to spend most of this month learning about pigs, and was put under the charge of head pigman Wilf Crawford, at the extensive piggeries on the Grange farm. (Worth's were big in pigs in those days) I quite enjoyed this period in spite of having to turn up on Sundays for feeding, and I certainly learnt a lot about pigs from Wilf who took quite a shine to me and tutored me well. My dear mother was not quite so thrilled at having to wash all my smelly clothes! (washing machines were virtually unheard of in 1950, and she was too ashamed to send my filthy clothes to the laundry)

The end of the month was spent learning about how to control blight in the potato crop. A H Worth was one of the early pioneers of intensive potato growing in South Lincolnshire, and one of the challenges that he had to overcome was the control of blight. He introduced a Bordeaux mixture of fine powder (mainly copper) and invented a machine to apply this mixture to the potato crop. The machine was horse-drawn and had a small hopper which contained the powder. A chain in the bottom of the hopper fed the powder into a fan chamber which blew the mixture into metal tubes with spouts that were centered over each of nine potato rows. The chain and fan were driven by the land wheels of the "sprayer", which was called a Gratton after the local agricultural machinery merchant who manufactured it to A H Worth's patent (hundreds of these machines were produced for

potato growers over the years, with the later machines having a small donkey engine to drive the fan).

The Bordeaux mixture would be applied to the crop as a fungicide, starting at first light in the morning (4.00am) when the foliage was at its wettest from the dew, so that the powder would stick well. By mid morning the operation was over until the next day, having covered 20 acres or so with a single machine.

July:

This was the month for haymaking, and a very important one too as cattle enterprises featured strongly on all three farms (silage making was still a few years away) Back to horses again; my next task was turning newly mown clover with a horse and tedder but this time I was able to sit on a seat instead of walking behind. When the crop was nearly fit, it was gathered up by hand with a team of men using pitchforks, and placed on "fourpoles" (small cocks) for its final conditioning before being "led" for stacking (balers were still several years off). This was hard manual work which I found very tiring, and as I suffered from hay-fever this was not one of my favorite pastimes. These were long days and foreman Rayner had arranged for me to have my "tea" with the Limbert family who lived next to the paddy hut at Home Farm. Mrs Limbert was a very fine housewife who had five virtually grown up children at home along with her husband Joe who was a stockman on the farm. At busy times of the year when the men were working overtime, Mrs L as she was called, would provide "tea", the main meal of the day, for up to half a dozen labourers like myself. At harvest and main-crop potato picking time, she would be looking after a dozen or so "paddies" in the hut next door who had come over from Ireland for the work, as well as her regulars. Tea would consist of a huge slice of hot suet pudding and gravy served on its own (this was to fill you up before the main course so that you didn't need so much meat!); the next course would consist of home cured fat-bacon cooked in milk, with potatoes and veg, followed by steamed pudding and custard, with huge mugs of steaming tea. We certainly did not go hungry!

Following closely on from haymaking, the dried pea crop was next on the harvesting agenda that I was involved in. This crop was cut with a tractor that had very sharp fixed blades which ran just under the soil surface cutting the crop off at root level. The tractor also had large "torpedoes" on the front to part the crop so that the wheels would not cause damage. Like hay, it had to be turned, but this time by hand so as not to shell any of the peas, before being dry enough to place on fourpoles (this operation was

called tri-podding) and eventual stacking. The whole operation being very labour intensive and very dusty (pea vining was three years away).

August:

Most of this month was very enjoyable for me as I had been sent to ride the binder with head-tractor driver Claude Peacher for corn cutting. Ahead of most farms in this country at this time, AHW had recently acquired two American built Massy Harris "21" petrol driven combines, but in spite of having these new-fangled machines most of the corn crop (wheat, barley and oats) was still cut with binders. After serving my apprenticeship on the binder for several days Claude allowed me to drive the tractor, which was fantastic! This was one of the early Fordson Major tractors that had to be started by hand-cranking, firstly on petrol and then when the inlet manifold was hot enough switching over to paraffin which was much cheaper. These 30 hp tractors were pretty basic, having no cabs or other luxuries that abound today's models! On and off over the next 12 months or so I was to learn a tremendous lot about operating farm machinery from Claude Peacher who was incredibly skilled in every job he did.

This month coincided with the retirement of estate manager Bew Todd, and the appointment of the new manager John Green.

September:

This was the traditional month for harvest and once again I found myself back in the "gang". Firstly the freshly bound sheaves had to be stood up on the stubble in small groups of eight so that they could dry out, this was called stooking, pronounced "stowking". Once fit "leading" would commence - this harvesting operation consisted of two or three leading sets on each farm. Each set comprised six men and three horse or tractor men. If the set was using horse carts these would probably be driven by teenage school boys, but there were one or two tractor sets just creeping in by this time. My set consisted of Andy Clarridge "picking" and Knap Smith loading in the field, Frank Jones unloading at the stack, and Ted Epton stacking, Billy Marriott binding and myself serving on the stack. Stacking was by far the most important job which required great skill, and my job was to handle and pass every one of the heavy sheaves to Billy. When the stack was getting quite high, I was placed in the "steer hole" so that I could pass the sheaves from Frank over my head to Billy. With luck, a stack could be completed in a day and would contain about 10 acres of sheaves. At the end of harvest, it was unusual to finish off exactly with a

full stack, so what was left in the last field went into a smaller stack - now it was my turn to stack! Ted had schooled me well, and my first (and last) effort at stacking was not a total disaster, although my stack did end up with some funny bulges, and it did lean a bit to one side.

After the corn stacks had a couple of weeks to settle, they had to be thatched to keep the rain out over the winter months. The thatching team consisted of two men, usually the original stacker and binder. The stacker would do the thatching and the binder would straighten and draw the straw into bundles and carry it up a long ladder to the thatcher which was called "serving". I was allowed to thatch my stack! Once again, all these harvest jobs were carried out by piecework, and at this time in a good week, the men would earn between £10 & £15 (the weekly flat wage was £5).

October:

This was main crop potato picking time, and probably one of the most important times of the year. A typical "back-end taty" picking gang would comprise eight men picking, one man "graving", a tractor man ploughing or hoovering-out, and three horses and carts with two drivers. The tractor man would always ensure that there were eight rows through the field ready for each man to pick into his basket. This year there were two new pickers in the gang - a chap called Ginger Kitchen and me. The old hands were determined to try and leave Ginger behind because he was a bit cocky (they weren't too bothered about me) and set off picking at a very fast rate. Slowly they drew away from me with the horse-cart keeping pace with them, and the further I got behind the further I had to run to empty my full basket into the cart. Eventually, Sid Ringwood (known as Churchill) who had very large hands and therefore had a natural advantage and who was picking the next row to mine, took pity on me and started picking some of my row as well as his own. This enabled me to catch up, but to the gang's dismay, they could not leave Ginger behind!

In those days, the main crop potatoes were "graved" (stored) on the headlands of the field they were grown in. These were small continuous clamps about two metres wide at the bottom, initially covered with straw. Later, the graves would be covered with a "1st coat" and then "top-capped" and finally a "winter coat" of soil, all done by hand, to keep the rain and frost out. The chances were that most of these potatoes would remain intact until well after Christmas when "riddling" would take place, but that's another story.

November:

Sugar beet, a relatively new crop, was grown, and this was the traditional time to start hand lifting. Like potatoes it had to be ploughed out, pulled, knocked together to get rid of the soil and have its tops cut off and thrown into small heaps for carting. This time, I was helping with the carting by forking the heaps of sugar beet into carts and taking it to the headland for loading into lorries; once again all by hand. However, "new-boy" manager Green was to introduce the first mechanical lifter for carrying out this task, and although I didn't realise it at the time, this was the start of a new mechanical revolution on these farms.

This was also an important month for celery lifting, and a bit like sugar beet, it had to be ploughed out, trimmed by hand and packed into small wooden crates.

After a short spell with the celery gang, it was time for me to get involved with corn threshing. The cattle by this time had come in from summer grazing, and were now occupying all the various cattle (crew) yards on the estate, and the stockmen were needing straw to bed the yards. The corn stacks at harvest time had been carefully sited close-by to the cattle yards, so that when they were threshed, there would be an abundant supply of straw for bedding and feeding the cattle.

Threshing was to commence at Top Farm yard (where Tony now lives) and the Contractor was engaged to bring all the necessary tackle which comprised a steam traction engine, a thresher called a drum and an elevator for the straw. The thresher would be sited between two corn stacks with the elevator attached to receive the straw and a space to build the straw stack. The traction engine, with a good head of steam would drive the thresher with a huge belt, and in turn the elevator as well. It was always a mystery to me that there never seemed to be straw set on fire from the sparks that were continually being belched out of the engines funnel. The engine had to be supplied with coal and water and this was the driver's job. Two men forking sheaves from the corn stack onto the thresher, one man cutting bands and feeding the drum, two men carrying corn, one man carrying chaff and two men on the straw stack comprised the piecework threshing gang. The most dangerous job by far was feeding. Here the feeder stood in a small slot on top of the thresher immediately in front of the open beaters; he would cut the bands (string) with a sharp knife and feed the shoaf into the drum. Occasionally he would drop a whole shoaf into the drum by mistake which would make the steam engine

give an almighty cough, throw out a huge cloud of black smoke and the big driving belt would jump off the pulley (self feeders were soon to take away this dangerous practice). As I was beginning to get a bit cocky by this time, foreman Rayner thought he would bring me down to earth by sending me corn carrying which was one of the toughest jobs. This entailed having to take off fully filled 18 stone (115kg) "railway" sacks of wheat from the drum, weigh and tie them up with the string saved by the band cutter/feeder man, put the sack on a hand winding barrow, wind it up to shoulder height, put it on your back and carry it up steps onto a trailer or lorry. Fortunately I soon got the knack for carrying corn, because it's not just strength that is required, but I did go home that first day with raw shoulders where the coarse heavy sacks had chafed my back, and certainly not so cocky! (a good yield was 10 quarters per acre=2.25tonnes)

Footnote: When I was riding the binder at harvest time with Claude, I lost my Ronson cigarette lighter. When we were threshing in the Top Farm yard, one of the men on the corn stack caught sight of something shining in the sunlight sticking out from one of the sheaves of corn - believe it or not, it was my Ronson lighter which must have slipped out of my shirt pocket when we had a bung-up on the binder.

December:

I was to spend much of this month back with Claude riding the wheat drill. It was quite impossible for Claude to carry out any tractor operation other than absolutely dead straight. After much patience and many "dog's hind leg" bouts, he eventually instilled this skill into me which I became quite proud of, because its a bit like riding a bicycle - once you get the knack, you never forget it, but sadly not all tractor driver's get the knack!

We pressed on drilling throughout the month weather permitting, and completed the last field in the dark at 5.00pm on Christmas Eve. (tractors had no lights in those days)

January 1951:

As the agricultural Wages Board at this time only allowed one week's paid holiday a year which was usually taken in early summer, we were soon back to work after Christmas (we also worked every Saturday morning until 11.30am). Most of this month was to be spent learning about stock (cattle) and I was dispatched to help George Diss who was the stockman at the Top Farm. George was getting on a bit, but very knowledgeable, and one of his sons was 1st horseman on this farm, and they lived in the tiny cottage at the top of Bailey's Lane. The stock on this farm were divided

between a herd of single suckling Lincoln Red cows, and fattening bullocks, and once again I was back to working on Sundays for feeding. As it was the period for the cows to calve, I was present at several births over the next week or so. Some of the herd were first-time heifer's who could have some difficulty calving, and one in particular that I was present at had a very hard time. Her calf had its head turned back in the womb, and George was unable to get it back in the correct position for birth. I tried too with my arm fully inside, but was unable to turn it. We tried attaching special calving chains with handles to the calf's front legs and pulling for all we were worth, but to no avail. Eventually, as a last resort, George decided that we would have to use blocks & pulleys to get more leverage, which must have been incredibly painful for both mother and calf, but after considerable distress, we achieved a successful birth with both just surviving the ordeal. I certainly learnt a tremendous lot from George about animal welfare which was to stand me in good stead later in my career.

Progress at last! I was to be allocated a tractor of my own (part time) and was to be taught to plough. My tractor was a three-wheeled 28 hp John Deere model AN which had a hand clutch, and I was put under the charge of Reg Chenery. First job in the morning was to fill the tractors up with water (before the days of antifreeze). Reg's Fordson Major would need eight gallons but my John Deere only required four gallons of water because it only had two cylinder's and a smaller radiator. In the depths of winter the engines took a tremendous lot of turning over with the starting handle because the oil was so thick (before the days of viscostatic) but eventually they would fire on about the 4th or 5th crank (occasionally they would "kick back" which meant if you weren't careful you could get a broken thumb). All the deep ploughing was done at this time by contractors called Tear Bros. with a D4 or D6 Caterpillar (in the olden days steam ploughs would have been used). I was to be sent shallow ploughing on Field 19, which was medium-light silt, with a 3-furrow trailing plough, and Reg was to initiate me in the art of "rig & furrow" practice. I soon became proficient under his guidance, and my previous experience with Claude soon had me ploughing a straight furrow. I don't think I have ever been so cold in my life, and had to resort to wearing thick woollen vests and long-johns to try and keep warm on the tractor!

February:

Not to be one of my most endearing experiences being sent twitch forking in the depths of winter. I was duly detailed, along with Sammy Fox to

spend two weeks digging twitch with a hand-fork around the outside of field 12. Oh for the advent of "Roundup"! To this day, field 12 has never been one of my favorites.

February had not lived up to its reputation of "February fill-dyke" and by the end of the month Claude had started ridging for early potatoes and I was following up with my "John-pop" as the twin cylinder John Deere's were known, with the "guano-spreader" which spanned four rows. The fertiliser in those days came in 12st hessian sacks, and was exceedingly lumpy which meant I had to have a mate to help me fill the drill.

March:

Spring work was now in full swing and my next task was to help Harry Brittain who was the light railway engine driver, cart out seed potatoes from the glasshouse and tin sheds to the fields for planting. The single cylinder diesel engine would pull three flatbed trucks piled high with chitting trays of seed, and these would be transferred to horse carts in the field. The engine had two gears forward & reverse, and at full speed would manage nearly 10 mph. I rode in the engine with Harry under its canopy, and my job was to dribble sand through a small hole in the floor onto the rails in front of the engines wheels whenever we went round a tight bend so as to provide more traction. I also had to jump off the engine whilst it was still moving, run ahead and switch points, and then jump back on again. Somehow or other, I don't think this practice would be allowed to-day! I only had two days on the engine because Harry's regular mate Bob Richmond had returned from being ill.

My next job was to join the potato planting gang. Claude had drawn out the ridges, I had previously applied the fertiliser and a horse with a "dobber" had made a small indentation in the bottom of the ridge to mark where each seed tuber should be placed. We were three men to a chitting tray, two men carrying and planting a row each, with the third man walking behind and planting the middle row. We had to plant an acre each per day, and Claude would "cover-in" behind us.

The rest of this month was to be spent with the potato riddling gang outside in the open, taking it in turns to strip the soil off the grave, fork the potatoes into the "rocker" or riddling machine, pick out the rotten, green or damaged tubers, and bag the "ware" into 8st merchants hessian bags. Foreman Rayner would visit us from time to time, emptying a bag out on the ground to see that we were dressing the potatoes correctly, as once

again, this was a piece work operation. The potatoes were destined to go by rail for delivery to wholesale merchants, mainly in London, but also to other provincial towns and cities throughout the country. The journey from the field to the nearest main-line station at Fleet village was made either via the light railway with three trucks each carrying five tons, or by motor lorry.

April:

The beginning of the month saw me helping Bert Brittain to lamb the Welsh half-bred flock of ewes. On the whole this was quite enjoyable work, and I soon learnt a lot about the anatomy of sheep. I did a couple of nights to give Bert a break which was par for the course, and we ended up with an average of 1.6 lambs per ewe, which was not bad for outside lambing. The farm was practicing rotational 2/3 year ley (grass) cropping, and I was to spend the rest of this month fencing in readiness for the cattle being turned out in the early summer. Another job I had at this time was carting water to the cattle and sheep out in the fields. I had to keep a sharp lookout for Black Charlie who was a small Aberdeen Angus bull that manager Green had just introduced to cover the "first-time" Lincoln Red heifers. Black Charlie was very fierce, and would frequently chase anyone who disturbed him. This time I had been given a smaller John Deere BN tractor which was very fast having six gears (3x2) instead of the normal three. I was pulling an ex-WD 4-wheel water bowser which only had a quarter lock, full of water, approaching the bend at Grange cottages far too fast, failed to get round the corner and ended up skidding sideways through the hedge into the 50 acre! When finally foreman Rayner caught up with me, the air was blue and his language was quite unprintable, which I thoroughly deserved.

May:

Because of my mishap with the water cart, I was taken off the tractor and sent muck carting. The set comprised of three men in the crewe yard hand forking the manure into horse carts and one man in the field emptying the carts and building the muck-heap. This was very heavy work and we were paid by the crewe yard, and I soon had blisters on my hands. For some of these heavy piece-work jobs, it was traditional to only work from 8am in the morning to 3pm in the afternoon.

After muck carting, I was sent to join Claude again, for tractor steerage hoeing sugar beet and peas. Most of this sort of work was still done using horses, but mechanisation was creeping in, and the tractor hoe had a seat and steering wheel for the operator. We had to have a fresh set of sharpened blades each day, and Claude would let me have a turn on the tractor from time to time. On wet days, I was sent to help out in the workshop, sometimes working with Stan Barnett the fitter and sometimes with Arthur Huskinson the blacksmith. I well remember the strong smell and choking smoke of Husky hot-shoeing the cart horses at the forge. By the time I finished on these wet days, I could strip and re-ensemble engines, beat out and sharpen shares and could even carry out simple braising jobs (gas welding); electric welding was just around the corner.

June:

This was early "green" potato picking time. The crop (variety Arran Pilot) would be spun out with a spinner through the length of the field, measured out into retches, with two men per retch picking into baskets. The full baskets would be tipped onto a hand riddle in order to get rid of the chats (small potatoes) and any loose soil or tops, and the full riddle tipped into an 8st hessian sack hung on a special stand. Great skill and knack was required to get the potatoes into the sack without spilling any. The full sack was then weighed, tied up with binder twine and stacked in heaps ready for loading onto motor lorries which could usually travel on the fields at this time of year. It was during this month that I was to have my weeks holiday, which I was well ready for.

At the end of the month, I was sent tripod lifting with the big John Deere which had a hydraulic lift. This operation consisted of picking up the tripods of hay, taking them to the corner of the field where they were hand forked into an elevator for stacking.

July:

After a short period of taking the bottom out ("sloughing") of a dyke to form a new water course with Jack Matson, it was time to discover whether I was "man or mouse"; I was to be sent seed cutting which was one of the toughest jobs in the farming year. Worth's had been growing brown mustard for many years; in fact, they were one of the first growers on Colemans of Norwich books. Brown mustard when it is fit shells very

easily, therefore it has to be cut by hand and not with a binder. Each man is issued with a short handled sickle and has an acre of mustard measured out for him to cut and tie into sheaves in a day. Usually the weather is hot which adds to the "pain", and the men drink copious amounts of cold tea throughout the day (I didn't like cold tea so I had to drink lemonade). I had quite an embarrassing moment when the boss (Tony's father) came into the field to inspect the work and discovered that I was not consistently tying my sheaves with reef knots, and he pulled open several that had been tied with a granny, which I had to go back and redo. I didn't manage to cut my acre for the first two or three days, but to everyone surprise, including myself, I did manage my acre per day eventually.

When the mustard sheaves had dried out for several days, they became ready for leading (stacking). The horse carts had to be lined with "thin cloths" so as to catch any seed that shelled out, and the stack had to have a thin cloth on the steadle (straw bottom) and more clothes spread out under where the cart would unload, for the same purpose.

August:

The beginning of the month saw me trying my hand both at hedge trimming with a hand slasher and dyke mowing with a scythe, with which I promptly cut off the toe of my wellington boot, but thank goodness, nothing else! With both the slasher and the scythe, skill was required to keep them very sharp by the use of a "rub-stone". Then back with the binder again, and this time it was not so easy as last year because there had been a very heavy thunderstorm just before cutting was due to start, and much of the crop was "laid" and this caused the binder much more trouble with bunting up. I remember that we got a lot of stick from the men who were stooking because many of the sheaves were ragtag and therefore took more handling.

Towards the end of the month, I was to have the opportunity of working with the two combines which were just starting the slow progress of eventually taking over from the binders, but this was still to take another two or three years. One combine was a tanker model, the other a bagging model. My job was to unload 10st "combine" sacks of wheat from the bagger model onto a trailer and take them to the glasshouse for "drying". If the wheat was not too wet, it was allowed to remain in the combine bags with their necks open for conditioning. If the wheat was too wet, the bags had to be shot out and spread thinly on the floor of the glasshouse so that it

could be turned from time to time to effect the drying process (proper grain driers were still several years away).

September:

This month saw me back again with the harvest leading sets, but this time I was carting with my smaller John Pop, which was very much easier for me but meant that I would not qualify for the good harvest-time piecework money that the labourer's would be earning, but you can't have everything in this life! At least I did not have to lose any time during wet weather, which traditionally the piecework gangs did, and because of the heavy showers throughout the month, "harvest-home" was not achieved until the beginning of October.

October:

Only two more weeks left at AHW for me before I was to go off to agricultural college. On the whole, I had thoroughly enjoyed my 18 months, and my nose had been put to the grindstone on several occasions which had been very good for me, and I had been given the opportunity of having a go at most jobs on the farm at that time, which was a wonderful and unique experience. I had learnt a tremendous lot from the men (and women) on the farm who had accepted me with good grace, and above all from foreman Rayner who most of the time treated me like a son (he had no children of his own). The boss (Tony's father) had also taken a great interest in me because for one thing, I had been the first ever farm student at AHW and he gave me a personal written reference (which I still have to this day) and £50 which was a lot of money in those days, to buy text books for college.

Footnote:

On leaving Worth's for college, little did I know then that owing to foreman Rayner's death while I was away, I was to be offered his job as foreman on the White House Lodge & Top Farm by manager John Green, on the successful completion of my studies at college, aged just 20 years.

Peter Shepherd