

Chapter 2 *Farming and Animals*

*The crowded farmyard featured once, and now,
The rampant bull midst massive tons of cow.
Alas, big business now is often that
Of the inseminator in a bowler hat.*

Until the Second World War agriculture was the main occupation in the Village, though between the Wars the numbers working on the land in the Parish fell by 50%. The smallholdings have all but disappeared but there are still seven active farms in the Village. They are mostly worked by their owners. However, the only working farmers resident in the Parish are David Stanbridge (see Chapter 6 **361**) at Duck End Farm, Brian and Damian Pell [**53**], who together work Mill Farm, and Peter Brown at Tythe Farm. Frank Wooding (see Chapter 7 **466**) was the last manager at Hart Farm. The Day family farms at Picts Hill.

Between the wars the whole family as well as the farm labourers would be involved in stacking wheat sheaves [**45**] and haymaking [**46**]. On the other hand there were times of the year when even for a farmer it was possible to relax and put your feet up [**41 and 42**].

Two ploughs illustrate the transition from horse to mechanization. **Plate 43** is a horse drawn plough of about 1880. **Plate 44** is a tractor-drawn plough of the 1920s. **Plate 47** is an early photograph showing the power of steam thrashing. **Plate 48** shows Ken Prentice with his combine, a Minneapolis Moline, reputed to be the first in the Village, just after the Second World War. Finally, a spectacle to wonder at: mechanisation in action and the camera's brilliance in capturing what a tractor driver has to endure when drilling dry earth [**49 and 50**]. And nowadays there is harvesting at night, something not possible before mechanisation [**51 and 52**]. On the other hand, an early picture of farm animals [**54**] presents much the same scene as today [**55**].

However, fifty or sixty years ago it was the custom to take the odd cow or heifer to fulfil an appointment with the nearest bull [**57-60**]. This inevitably meant a journey through the Village. As the bewildered animal was not led by a halter (first catch your cow) fun was guaranteed. The smallest boy

was sent ahead to close the garden gates, which were promptly opened again by the goodwife outraged by such a liberty. The cow would trot happily along, but unable to resist an open gate, would investigate. This would result in the goodwife emerging from the back door brandishing a besom whereupon the startled cow would embark on a high speed tour of the garden collecting some washing on the way. The delighted drover's cup was overflowing when the cow emerged onto the road with a pair of voluminous unmentionables attached to its horn. In modern times we have the artificial inseminator, otherwise known as "the bull in the bowler hat", which is the most these cows can hope for [**56**].

The days of farm horses are also over, as we are reminded by the pictures of a farm worker pausing to pay tribute on the day of King George V's funeral [**62**]. This fine shire dwarfs a young Stan Walker [**64**]. An earlier photograph depicts Horace Prentice of Meeting Farm showing off his fine horse which no doubt also pulled his trap [**63**]. An old picture taken outside the Almshouses [**61**] has George Seamarks on the left, identified by his "stiff" knee. He overcame his disability remarkably well and was able to do most jobs on the farm as well as the next man. His injury was caused by falling out of an upstairs window.

The days of the horse were not always as golden as we like to imagine and horses caused many injuries and deaths. Nowadays the horse is for recreation [**65 and 66**]. Nor must we forget the donkey, Melissa, so popular with generations of schoolchildren who fed her as they passed the field adjacent to the Church Rooms on their way to and from school [**83**]. He is ridden here by Matthew Seager.

It is said that "cats look down on us; dogs look up to us; but pigs is equal". The huge boar, Halesfarm Field Marshall 110, captured in **Plate 67** surely looks down on us. After all, he travelled by rail all

the way from Bedford to Oakley in 1957 as the sole passenger en route to Duck End Farm. The photograph of Brian Pell's breeding stock [68] reminds us that there are pigs in Stevington no more.

An early picture [69] shows one of the Turney brothers feeding his sheep, probably at Moat Farm which they owned with Duck End Farm. You can just make out the ridge and furrow and the horse and cart on the right. Nowadays the only sheep in Stevington are owned outside the Village and graze on leased pasture [70-74].

There may still be some turkeys in the Village but not kept on the free-range scale of Dorothy Robinson of Hart Farm in the 1930s, shown in **Plate 76** with old Shipley. The goose-stepping geese in **Plate 77** are definitely free-range though the Canada geese look more sedate [91]. In contrast, the hen in the armchair in **Plate 75** has a more liberal idea of the concept of free range. The friendship of a cat and dog in **Plate 84** one hundred years ago is little different from that of their successors today.

Then there are the wolves [85, 87 and 88]. They must have been absent from the Village for over a thousand years. In those days they were rather more menacing than their friendly and well-fed descendants kept in a secure compound at Moat Farm. Other wolves take liberties [100]. Incidentally, no-one asked the deer [81 and 82] what they thought about the introduction of the enemy. In **Plate 78** Barry Compton shows off another predator as does Ken Ward in **Plate 79**. In contrast the doves in **Plate 80** send a different message. Sadly, their owner has gone but the doves remain in mourning.

The non-domestic animals of the Parish lend their own touch of beauty. There have been swans on the Ouse here as long as anyone can remember [94] and the goldfinch [93] was undoubtedly here before us, but other animals are rather more recent additions to this locality [89 and 90]. Some birds make themselves at home in or on our homes [97 and 98], while others eat the newly sown seed. The scarecrow [99] cannot compete effectively with the gas gun and it's time to go when the food has run out and the nights get chilly [95 and 96]. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous rabbit does its best to reduce the farmers' profits [86] as does the hungry



pheasant [92], while the butterbur finds a novel visitor [101].





41 Eddy and Amos Turney Shifting the Deck with a Friend from Chicheley before



42 The End of the Day for Amos Turney



43 Horse-Drawn Plough c. 1880



44 Tractor-Drawn Plough c. 1920



45 Stacking Wheat Sheaves in a Round Stack



46 The Hay Wain: Brenda Stanbridge and Alf Sw



47 Steam Threshing
c. 1910

48 Ken Prentice with
Combine c. 1948





49 Drilling with Dust



50 Seeding with More Dust

54 At Rest in Home Field,
Duck End Farm. A
Nondescript Herd of
Short-Horns c. 1910



55 A Similar Scene Today
at Hart Farm



56 Subjects for big Business?



57 Enter Big Business



58 Getting Amongst Them



59 Enter Bigger Business



60 Bigger Business Sizes Up a Mate



61 Horse and Foals outside the Almshouses: George Seamarks on the Left

62 Old Shipley Remembers: The Funeral of King George V



63 Horace Prentice with his Fine Horse



64 A Young Stan Walker Riding High



65 Not Quite Banbury



66 Horses under the Rainbow