

LIFE IN CARBROOKE 1930 – 1942:

By Mrs. Doreen Gotts (nee Harvey).

Tin baths by the fire on Friday nights, two obligatory Sunday services, crispy baked rice pudding scraped out of a tin.....and the old-fashioned health remedies? Most of them I recall with horror – you were so busy recovering from the dose, you actually forgot how ill you felt! Revisiting my childhood memories of Carbrooke from eighty or so years ago, has stirred many recollections of the village and its inhabitants. There will be the odd error, I have no doubt, but it was a long time ago and as my memory is not infallible, please accept my apologies now. I have tried to be arbitrary as I am not recalling a factual history of the village, but simply making a picture of how I saw Carbrooke and its residents live, through the eyes of a young girl, as I was in the 1930s.

My parents Charles and Gladys Harvey moved from Shropham to Carbrooke in 1930 when my father took the job of cowman on Mr Saunders' farm in the village. Our home was Willow Corner where I was born, sister to my oldest brother Roy (1928 – 1998) and sister Peggy (1926 – 2016). In those days Willow Corner was a small semi-detached cottage with a living room and kitchen on the ground floor and a narrow stairway leading to two small bedrooms on the first floor. My father's wages were eighteen shillings (ninety pence) per week, and as we lived in a 'tied' cottage (one which went with the job), we had no rent to pay.

By the time my younger sister Hazel was born in 1933 (d.2002), we had moved to Chapel Bungalow. We eventually moved to the council houses in Mill Road, where in 1935 my brother John was born (d. 2016), followed by twins Dennis and Ivy in 1937. This house had one bedroom at the front for my parents, and two smaller ones at the back. The boys shared one room: Roy, being the oldest, had a single bed of his own whilst John and Dennis had a small double bed between them. We four girls shared a double bed, two slept at the top, and the other two at the bottom. Each bedroom had a candle and a chamber pot, and they were our sleeping arrangements for more years than I care to remember!

There was no electricity of course, candles and paraffin lamps provided the only source of lighting. The water supply came from a well at the front of the house. Whenever we needed to fetch water from it, my mother always made us take an old walking stick with us, which we used to hook round the chain attached to the wheel, to prevent us from leaning over too far and falling in. We would hook the bucket on to the chain, then unwind the wheel, and as soon as we heard the bucket hit the water and fill, we'd have to crank it back up again. Of course the closer the bucket got to the surface the harder it seemed to pull. As soon as it reached the top again we'd hook the walking stick round the chain to pull the bucket within reach, unhook it and take the full bucket indoors. We would do this 4 or 5 times a day, and on wash day many times more. Most of the time the well was full of soft clear water, but in very heavy rain the surface water leaked in, making the water resemble brown soup: on those occasions we then had to fetch buckets of water from elsewhere in the village.

My mother did all the cooking in a small black leaded stove built into the bottom of the chimney with a small oven attached (which could turn out some tasty meals, especially if the wind came from the right direction!) My favourite was rice pudding baked until its top was brown and crispy, which mother would dish up for tea from its big square tin – I can almost

taste it now! The doors of the house had not been fitted very well and our feet were prone to getting very cold in the draught – I remember many times warming our feet near the oven! Our toilet was at the end of the back garden and had concrete walls (those concrete walls proved to be a life-saver for my sister Peggy some years afterwards, as I shall explain later), and our toilet paper was squares of newspaper tied together with string, attached to a nail within easy reach. I remember my father saying it was surprising what news you missed the first time round!

Teeth were cleaned with salt, which had been bought in a block, hacked into slices and finally crushed with a rolling pin. Bath night was the tin bath by the oven, which we all had to take turns to use. This took place on a Friday night so as to be clean for the weekend and Sunday services. Monday was always wash day and Tuesday had to be ironing day; mother always used a flat iron heated on the fire and a rubbing cloth to keep it clean.

Every Sunday without fail, we had to attend two services: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. This was either at the Church or Chapel, depending upon the religious belief of my father's employer. Mr Saunders of Broadmoor Farm was a Chapel man – therefore all we children attended chapel services every Sunday. Then when my father took a job for Mr Crawford who lived at the end of Mill Road, we had to attend Church services instead, as Mr Crawford was a Church man and not a chapel one. This practice was extended to christenings too, as I was baptised in a chapel when my father worked for Mr Saunders, whilst my younger siblings had to be christened in church during his employment with Mr Crawford.

I can remember only four people in the village owning cars: Mr Saunders, Mr Crawford, Mr Bond and Rev. Chambers. Everybody else walked. A few people cycled, if they were fortunate enough to be able to afford a bike. There were no buses through the village – the nearest one went along the main road in the distance between Watton and Norwich. On the rare occasion we used it, was when we visited an aunt who lived the far side of Watton and mother deemed it too far for us all to walk.

The village hall in those days was just a long wooden hut, and the forge used by the blacksmith Mr Coleman, was situated opposite the church. The forge was a fascinating place: we often watched the blacksmith at work in a long leather apron shoeing the horses. He always seemed to have plenty of farm implements to repair and the local people would bring him their tools and pails to mend, most of which would be stacked up outside the forge. In addition to that, he would sometimes make iron bowling hoops for the children to play with.

Life in the 1930s was slow and proceeded at a rather sedate pace. Every tradesman was addressed accordingly: "Mr Milkman" who delivered the milk out of churns from the back of his pony and cart, and "Mr Paperman" who delivered the Eastern Daily newspaper on his bike (in those days I think it only cost one penny). Anything else we needed was purchased from either of the two village shops. The corner shop was the smaller of the two and sold things such as paraffin, combs, shoelaces, etc. whilst Mr Bond's shop was bigger and from where we bought all our groceries. Every Saturday afternoon we would take a pram and, having bought all our weekly provisions, would load them into the pram and push them home.

Mrs Haylock lived next door to the small corner shop, (which Mr & Mrs Spooner, her daughter and son-in-law kept), and when we children returned from church service on a Sunday morning, she would always be waiting outside her garden gate for us as we came

down the road, where she would hand us a small bowl of dripping, left over from her beef dinner the day before. She would say to me, "*Here you are my little woman, take this and give your mother. It'll be lovely for you children to put on your toast for breakfast tomorrow.*" She was right – it was.

Mr and Mrs Luther Taylor lived next door to us at number 10 at the end of Mill Road, and we lived at number 9. Next door lived Mr and Mrs Syer (who had two daughters, Beattie the elder of the two who was married, and a younger daughter Phyllis who was friendly with my older sister Peggy as they were a similar age). Then there was Mrs Carman, Mr and Mrs Ruffles and their two sons, then my brother Roy's best friend Colin 'Diddy' Orford and his family, then Rosemary Fincham, and finally Mrs Precious who was affectionately known in the village as "Gandy".

Next to Gandy's house was a high hedge which had a caravan behind where a man called Billy Banham lived. Billy's only mode of transport was his very big cart horse. I remember the horse having huge feet and Billy would plod steadfastly along the lane on it, to and from work every day, in just its bridle - no saddle - where they worked on the farm.

Gandy was a lady of considerable proportions, and every Monday she would do her washing and always had the habit of hanging out her sizeable bloomers – which to us children seemed to resemble a small marquee - over a big bush directly outside her front door to dry. One particular bright and blustery morning as we were walking to school and with her bloomers sprawled out over the bush, the wind picked up unexpectedly - just as Billy rode through the gateway on his horse. As the horse ambled along in its usual docile manner, the sudden gust of wind launched Gandy's bloomers into the air and straight into the back of the horse, wrapping around its backside like a giant nappy. The horse leapt forward in fright, and took off like a greyhound coming out of a trap. Poor old Billy fell off backwards and landed in the hedge (much to his fury) whilst the horse galloped off down the lane and soon disappeared from view. Billy then emerged from the brambles – absolutely livid – using a few choice words about Gandy, her bloomers and his horse, which we gleefully related word for word to our teacher upon arrival at school shortly afterwards (much to her astonishment!)

It had been hilarious to see, but I don't think Billy or Gandy saw the funny side of it - my mother told me some years later that neither of them were on speaking terms for quite some time after that!

I remember with great fondness the vicar of Carbrooke, Rev. Chambers and his lovely wife who were held in great esteem by the village folk. They were instrumental in all activities and genuinely held the well-being of their parishioners at heart, as they would help anybody in times of difficulty, and in those days there were many. When my mother fell ill unexpectedly, I and my younger sister Hazel, stayed with Rev and Mrs Chambers at The Vicarage for more than two months. They were so kind, and treated us as if we were their own.

Every summer Rev. Chambers would arrange for the schoolchildren to have a holiday at Eccles near Great Yarmouth which was paid for by church collections or donations from the local gentry. This annual treat was often the only outing the village children could look forward to, and would involve us being taken in either Rev. Chambers' car or the charabanc he hired for the occasion, to stay for a week by the sea. Well, to us children, a trip to Eccles seemed like a trip to the far side of the world, especially as none of us had ever been to the seaside before!

We all stayed in big wooden huts with a roll-up mattress to sleep in at night. In the morning we'd have to go into the neighbouring hut where Mrs Chambers and another lady served us with porridge or cornflakes for breakfast, before being taken for nature walks and spending the rest of each day playing games on the beach. Our toys were simple – if it was windy we made kites from newspaper and ran with them up and down the beach doing our utmost to get them to fly. We weren't always successful, but that didn't seem to dampen our ardour. We were always inventive and made endless versions of games.

At the end of our holiday, Rev. Chambers would present each of us with a stick of Great Yarmouth rock which, we later learned, had cost him 2d.each (almost half of one penny in modern currency), so we all had something to take back home with us. It was a wonderful week for all of us: we had so much fun. Computers and expensive toys will never give modern children the magic we knew then in simple things.

At Sunday morning church service in Carbrooke, the girls would have to walk down the aisle behind the vicar and no girl would be allowed inside the church door unless their heads were covered with veils (my sister Peggy always wore a lovely green one). These veils were provided by the church and kept in a special wooden box. Of course, every woman attending church had to wear a hat, and if any children failed to attend church for any reason, the parson would be knocking on the door the very next day asking why!

Every Saturday night without fail, my father would mend and clean all our shoes ready for church service the following morning. He would lay a large jute sack on the floor in the kitchen, then he'd get out all the polish, brushes and cloths, paying particular attention to the heels. He used to say "*Make sure you keep your shoes clean, especially the heels!*" He could sole, heel and stitch up seams, on any of our boots and shoes, finishing them off as good as any cobbler. I think this was because of his experiences in the First World War as a soldier, where every part of his uniform had to be kept in immaculate condition.

There was a great community spirit in the village, everyone had to just 'muck-in' and help whenever it was needed. There were no Social Services in those days, only good neighbours and kindly villagers who could – and would – turn their hand to anything asked of them by anyone in need and, despite having a large family of her own, my mother was frequently called upon at such times. Whether it was helping at a birth, death, accident, illness, or crisis, the call "*Go and fetch Gladys, she'll know what to do*" was made on many occasions, night or day.

Schoolteachers, the village policeman and the vicar were people who were always held in high regard and were respected wherever met – anytime we saw a teacher outside of school we girls would have to curtsy and the boys touch their caps. Woe betide anyone who didn't do this.

I remember one occasion however our respect for the village policeman dwindled when my brother Roy, his friend Colin 'Diddy' Orford and I decided to pick some windfall apples from a nearby orchard. As I was the smallest I was the one chosen to wriggle through the fence and pick the apples off the ground and pass to Roy and Diddy who waited the other side. When we had collected a good lot, I then crawled back through the fence. We were delighted at the sight of all these juicy apples filling my apron and the boys' pockets, ready to take home to our families to enjoy over the days that followed. Our joy was short-lived however when

the village policeman, a tall and rather portly man, appeared from seemingly nowhere on his bicycle.

“What are you three up to?” he boomed, his towering figure looking down on us from a great height. Despite our protestations of innocence in that we had only gathered the windfall apples from the ground, his formidable manner almost frightened us to death.

“I’ll take them, so you can put all of ‘em in my basket,” he bellowed, and watched us sheepishly transfer all the apples into the basket fixed on the back of his bike.

“I’ve a good mind to tell your father of you when I see him!” he threatened, and then gave all three of us a sharp clout round the ear, before climbing back aboard his bike and pedalling off into the distance.

The threat of him telling father frightened us even more, as we knew we would get into trouble again if he did, but much to our relief nothing was ever said. Mother had always told us children that if you took anything which didn’t belong to you, your fingers would shrivel up and fall off, and for days afterwards we kept looking at our fingers to see if they were starting to shrivel away!

In the weeks that followed we often wondered what that policeman did with all those lovely apples – and hoped that if he had personally benefitted from the fruits of our hard-earned labours, he would be justly rewarded with a severe bout of diarrhoea.

I remember Daniel Bullen who lived in the village too. My memories of him were of a rather elderly gentleman who, despite his years, still cut the verges with a scythe or layer the hedges, barely disturbing any nesting birds or wildlife. He didn’t seem to be a particularly tall man, but perhaps that might have been because whenever I saw him he was bending over cutting the verges, so I would not have noticed his true height.

My father was always up by 5 o’clock every morning (a habit he maintained until the day he died aged 84). His job as the farm cowman meant early mornings and long hours. Farmworkers had a very hard time in the 1930s depression and everyone was poor. My father worked incredibly hard all day every day: everything on the farm had to be done by hand – and he never took a day off. He had to milk all the dairy cows twice a day by hand: after milking them in the morning he would shepherd them through part of the village to their grazing pastures, and then repeat the whole procedure in reverse later on in the day, and between times he had to work on the farm.

Like all family men in the 1930s, had he not worked through illness the family would have had no money as there was no such thing as ‘Sick Pay’ then. The only thing that he ever worried about was making sure we had a roof over our head and food on the table. If any man who was the wage-earner in the family fell ill, the first thing the neighbours did, was to ensure his family had enough to eat until he was back on his feet again. Everyone pulled together, as nobody knew who might need help the next time.

My mother had to be up at the crack of dawn too – each of her days began with getting up by candle or lamplight, stoking up the fire to boil the kettle and getting us children up and ready for school.

Even though I was just a young girl at the time, I remember the day in December 1936 when it was announced on the wireless (or radio, as it's now called), that Edward VIII had abdicated. When the news broke there was a great deal of sadness amongst the villagers – I recall seeing some of the women in tears. It was as if they were mourning a family member.

I enjoyed going to the village school, even though the facilities were basic to the extreme. The teacher I had in the 'little' class was lovely – I remember her saying that she lived in Pudding Norton – but I think the teacher in the 'big' class who taught my brother Roy, was quite different! In later years Roy told me that at times she could be extremely strict, adding "*She could train a tiger with that ruler of hers!*"

In those days the school had no kitchen so everyone had to go home for lunch (including the children who lived a considerable distance away), unless they had been sent to school with something to eat. Every day small bottles of milk would be delivered to the school for each child: the bottle would have a thick cardboard top and we'd have to press it very hard to insert the drinking straw.

At the back of the school building, there was a little door and just inside that door was an old copper. One of the older schoolboys called Freddie Laws was the 'inkwell monitor'. He had the job of filling the copper half full with water, then he'd put in some powdered black ink. After stirring it up for a few minutes, he'd get a scoopful at a time, pour it into a jug and fill everyone's inkwell on their desk. That would usually last two to three days, then he'd have to go round and fill them all up again. When pupils attained the age of eleven, they had to move up to Watton 'big' school.

Sadly, my schooldays at Carbrooke were ended abruptly when I became ill. There was no National Health Service in those days of course, so every time the doctor was called it cost my parents one shilling (five pence). I had more thermometers put in my mouth than sweets! After a gradual deterioration in my health, it was eventually discovered that I had Tuberculosis. As my father worked as a cowman on the farm, we children would often go into the cowsheds with him to watch him do the milking, and at times we would drink some of the fresh milk direct from the pail. Unfortunately, and unbeknown to anybody, the milk I drank came from a cow which was infected with TB, the result being that I then contracted this awful disease myself. I was seven years old. Little did I know then, that after less than three years of education, I would never again attend school.

Like most villages in the 1930s, Carbrooke was incredibly peaceful and serene. I remember watching the farm workers ploughing with their horses, the spring flowers along the hedgerows, cowslips and primroses in abundance. No fear of speeding traffic or unsavoury characters. All that village idyll however was shattered in September 1939 at the outbreak of World War 2. The way we lived was about to change.

WAR TIME:

When war broke out, living in such a rural village as Carbrooke didn't seem to affect us much at first, but gradually the reality sunk in: blackout curtains, gas masks (which we were meant to keep with us at all times) and food shortages. When ration books were introduced everyone got only what little was available – so different to today's world. Throwing things out, such

as clothes and food, was unheard of – you had to make use of what you could get and be thankful for it. It was quite common for housewives in the village to exchange groceries between themselves, e.g. sugar for bacon or butter for sugar.

As the war progressed, we began to hear of casualties from nearby towns and villages. These things brought grief and sadness to everyone and people grew close to one another to bring comfort. Air-raid sirens sounded as enemy aircraft approached, which seemed all too frequent with their many attempts of bombing nearby Watton Airfield. We soon learned to tell the difference between hostile planes and friendly ones as the German planes made an intermittent wavery noise – “unsynchronised” we were told.

Every morning about 10 o'clock, my father would drive the pony and cart from the farm to Watton Airfield where he would collect all their leftover food which would then be used as swill for the pigs on the farm, and would transport it back inside two 45 gallon tubs in the back of the cart. As I wasn't allowed to attend school because of my TB, I would sometimes go with him. The people working in the kitchens would frequently send bags of cooked meat and vegetables which they had made extra, especially for us to hand out to any needy families in the village. On our way back, we would stop off at different houses and distribute them. This practise continued for almost three years and I am sure many of the poorer people in the village enjoyed better and more wholesome meals during that time than they had ever had before – courtesy of the Air Ministry (now the MoD). I don't think the people at Watton Airbase ever realised what a difference they made to those families, bless them.

It was quite normal to have tramps passing through the village in the 1930s, some of these men stayed just long enough to be given a meal or some clothing whilst others remained for a few weeks to work as seasonal help on the farms. It was quite rare however to have a female tramp, but Carbrooke can boast to having its own 'lady of the land'.

She lived in the woods, just past Mr Crawford's farm, and it was quite common to see her sitting by the fire she would stoke up on a cold night. One night however, when it was particularly dark, after unsuccessfully trying to light her fire, she lit a candle so she could see what she was doing more easily. After a short while, and by which time her log-fire was merrily blazing away like a mini-bonfire, the siren sounded. Another air raid had begun. Unfortunately one of the German pilots flying overhead noticed her fire below him, which it was thought, he wrongly presumed to be a light on nearby Watton Airfield. Within seconds he had flown round again dropping bombs as he did so and as they hit the ground the immediate area was soon ablaze.

Luckily for the tramp (and for the neighbouring houses), the bombs landed slightly off target resulting instead in the complete obliteration of Mr Crawford's chicken sheds at the adjoining farm. As far as I am aware, the woman escaped unscathed by her experience, which is more than I can say for the unfortunate chickens!

Within a few days, the notorious German propagandist Lord Haw Haw, proudly boasted on the wireless that German planes had successfully bombed Watton Airfield with a considerable loss of life. What they hadn't realised was that instead of wiping out the buildings and people on nearby Watton Airfield, they had bombed all Mr Crawford's chicken huts in Carbrooke and the only loss of life was of the feathered kind!

This wasn't the only near-miss incident in Carbrooke involving enemy aircraft. One day my mother took us children to collect acorns. This was a useful way of earning a few shillings as the farmers would pay for every hundred-weight of acorns delivered to them, as it was a valuable yet comparatively cheap source of food for their pigs. On this occasion, we set off with two prams – one containing the twins Ivy and Dennis, whilst the other pram held all we needed for acorn collecting: a pair of scissors, some sacks and a ball of string.

We headed for a large field which had some big oak trees along the boundary, providing us with a vast supply of acorns. I remember just having filled my first sack and tying the top with string, when I happened to glance upwards where I noticed lots of smoke rings in the sky. For a few minutes my mother and I both stood quite nonchalantly gazing at them, wondering what the smoke rings could be. All of a sudden our innocent curiosity was interrupted by a man who had stormed out of the nearby Flying Fish pub and shouted: *“Missus, get and bring your kids in here out of the way. That's a dog fight going on up there, you silly bugger!”*

In sheer terror, we immediately picked up the twins, plonked them in their pram which mother then pushed as fast as she could, and me in hot pursuit with the pram containing the acorns. As we hastily scrambled for refuge in the Flying Fish, I managed to reach the door first, with mother close behind. She was in such a panic that as she came through the door she tripped and fell flat on her face, much to the amusement of those inside.

It became a standing joke in the village for weeks afterwards that mother was the only person in Carbrooke ever to have fallen over going into the pub instead of on the way out!

We later learnt that a German aircraft had flown in with some British planes on a return flight, resulting in the air attack. After a few minutes the siren went off to give the all clear. Needless to say, whenever we went acorn picking again, we kept a close observation on what might be going on above us!

I mentioned earlier about our toilet's concrete walls saving Peggy from almost certain death. Every morning before school, Peggy had the habit of taking her book with her to read in the toilet at the end of the garden – often to the frustration of anyone else who happened to be in the queue at the time. One particular morning however, as Peggy was inside and I was just inside the back door waiting my turn, a German plane had flown in without having been picked up by radar. This would happen if the plane flew very low and 'hedge hopped' their way over the countryside, which is exactly what happened on this occasion.

Flying so close to the ground, the pilot obviously saw the toilet door begin to open, and from where I stood I noticed the plane start to swing round again ready to open fire. My mother, who stood beside me behind the kitchen door, screamed out to Peggy to stay where she was and not to try and run for the house. Poor Peggy was stuck inside as the pilot opened fire on our little concrete privy, knowing there was someone in there. Then, to our horror, he flew round a second time for another attempt, with Peggy still locked in.

Having probably used most of his ammunition on our toilet, he then thankfully flew away. As soon as he had disappeared into the distance, mother dashed across to the toilet from where Peggy emerged, oblivious to how close she had been to meeting her Maker. Miraculously she escaped without a scratch as the thick concrete walls took the flak. Had it been of wooden construction instead, as were most other peoples', she would have undoubtedly been killed.

Despite that incident, Peggy still had to attend school that day, so within half an hour of being the target of enemy aircraft, she was on her bike and pedalling off to Watton School! It is incredible to think what would happen if that situation arose in this day and age, but it was wartime, and everyone simply had to cope with whatever cropped up and to carry on as normal as possible.

In 1942 my father was offered a job working as Head Cowman for farmer Jock Patterson in Worstead. We were all growing up by that time, and my father thought that living close to a busy and prosperous market town as North Walsham was at that time, with its laundry, plastic and canning factories, we would all be able to find jobs easily.

Carbrooke had been our home for almost twelve years and so it was with mixed emotion that we departed for pastures new. On the day we left, we all had to be up at five a.m. to dismantle our beds and help load the lorry which Mr Patterson had sent to pick us up, along with our worldly goods, leaving Carbrooke and our many good friends and neighbours for the last time.

Although its residents were poor and had very little in the way of material goods, their wealth lay in their hearts. Everyone was a true neighbour and just as Jesus said, "Love Thy Neighbour" so did they, the people of Carbrooke. They had a life-style suited to their village: a community of farm workers, tradesmen, housewives, and one or two 'wasters' – yes, we had them in those days too!

Despite all the hardship, they were still the 'good old days'. The world today can be wicked, greedy and selfish. The world of 'yesteryear' was kind, considerate, loving and friendly. And so I write this as a thank you and tribute to those good people who lived in Carbrooke all those years ago. Most will have sadly passed on. God Bless them.

Mrs Doreen Gotts (nee Harvey) ©
June 2017

~ ~ ~ ~ ~