

Cottingham and Middleton

...memories



Walter Campbell (1929–2020)

Walter Campbell was born at the Old Red Lion pub in Middleton on 4 January 1929. His parents were John and Catherine Campbell, but he mostly lived as a child and later worked with Walter 'Swin' Swingler (Walter's real father), on his dairy farm at 21 Main Street, Middleton. Walter and his wife Cecile (Ces) ran a doorstep milk delivery service in the villages for many years.

Walter wrote down his memories between 1997 and 2008; transcribed by his daughter Helen Gamble and with the help of Pat Aldaya

Swin

Writing started April 1987

Swin was born on 21 January 1888 in this house (21 Main Street, Middleton) and died here on 10 January 1959. He is buried in Cottingham churchyard. His father Thomas was born in 1849 and died 29 November 1932, aged 83 years. His mother was Sarah Jane, born 1847, died 25 January 1895, aged 48 years, when Swin was just seven years old. **Swin** (or **Walter Samuel Swingler**, he hated the Samuel part and called himself Walter S. Swingler) was the youngest of the family. He had two sisters. One, 'Em' (Emily?), I knew lived in Blatherwicke with one daughter and a husband who lost a leg in the First World War. He wrote a postcard home from France to say 'Alive and kicking with one leg'. A nice rural family. The other sister Nancy, Mrs Brassington, was a bit posher, lived in Stamford with two sons (one a hunch-back) and a husband who worked in an office for a brewery firm. Ran a shiny black Ford Ten. There was also one or two brothers that I never met that emigrated to Canada. Swin says he was reared by his sisters. There was also a housekeeper at sometime called Mrs Dutton.

I've got hand tools with Thomas Swingler's name on them. He was a carpenter, wheelwright and probably installed all the milling machinery in the barn. He eventually sold the business, machinery and tools to Swin who was rather aggrieved at having to pay a fixed sum for the scrap iron on the place.

Swin was educated at Middleton village school under headmaster **Mr Beacroft**. Swin, who was short tempered in his younger days, was always grateful to his teacher following a dispute they had. It appears that Swin was about to be caned for some offence that he felt he was innocent of. They had an open fireplace in the school and Swin picked up a poker to defend himself and the teacher had the good sense to drop the subject. He left school at 14 years.

Sometime during the next 11 years he spent a period in Skegness as a farrier, possibly as an apprentice working under an employer with a small group of workers. He told me they used to shoe the beach donkeys and used to put the opposing donkey's foot on a wooden block to lift them to a more comfortable working height. On frosty winter mornings there would be a queue of delivery horses waiting to have 'frost nails' fitted. These were horse shoe nails with points on the heads to cut through ice and probably only lasted a day or two.

On a special day, the boss' birthday I think, the boss hired a horse and cart and took all the staff out for the day. I understand it was a 'beery do'. Later in life, in the 1930s, I remember Swin buying farrier tools in order to shoe his own two shire mares, but shoeing used to bother his back.

He must have worked for his father most of the time between 1903 and 1914, learning the woodwork crafts of carpentry, joinery, making and repairing wooden wheels for farm carts, repairing farm carts, making ladders, repairing house doors and windows and so on. I remember Swin grinding corn, generally barley, grown on allotments to feed cottage pigs, generally on a Saturday morning and he would do some woodwork at the bench as he watched the 'stone' mill that was fitted in my daughter Jackie's, barn. Probably his father had done the same. Jackie now lives in the converted barn alongside our house, which is number 21 Main Street, and hers is 21A.

This woodcraft skill was utilised by the Royal Flying Corps in the 1914–18 War at Farnborough. Those old planes were made of a wooden frame with a canvas covering, even the propellers were wooden.

I only remember a few service stories. Swin, as a 25 year old, didn't take kindly to army life.

On parade one day, the order was bawled out "Fall out the carpenters". They fell out, and were ordered to pick up all the matchsticks on the parade ground.

"You've split that wood" says the Sergeant.

"No I haven't Sergeant"

"Don't argue, I say you have"

Swin said that NCO didn't know what a dry split was.

NCO: "So your name's Swindler"

"No Sergeant, neither by name nor nature." He never won promotion.

During the RFC days he made a paperknife, that is on my desk now, that contains all the ingredients of a flying machine. There is steel, brass, aluminium and two sorts of wood. Upstairs here there is a wooden trinket box with a plaque on the lid marked 'D', the initial of the woman he eventually married. I would guess he married soon after the War. I know that they lived for a time in one of two cottages next to the village pound on that steep lane which is now called School Hill. They later must have moved to this house when his father retired and sold him the business lock, stock and scrap iron.

Mother's early life

Born **Catherine Elizabeth Jeffery** around 1891. Father was coachman to a family that lived in East Carlton Hall. Mother's family lived over the stables a little distance from the Hall. Four children as I remember, most, if not all went into service, that is working for rich landed families as house servants, which was a higher social position than most of the villagers.

Uncle George became a gentleman's gentleman, married a schoolteacher and had one son, Malcolm. When I knew him he had the **Neville Arms at Medbourne**, was away a lot doing his servant job leaving wife to run the pub and look after quite a lot of hens on the attached small holding. Malcolm, about two years my senior had lots of splendid toys that came from Uncle George's employers. Later, Uncle left the pub and built a new house at Nutbush on a hill above Medbourne, but he still used to do freelance butlering for special functions. He was a village character, had an impoverished aristocratic view on the world, dressed in old tweeds unless he was 'working' and would only have locals in his pub that he approved of.

I realised later in life that George's brother Bill was a homosexual. Probably George knew this – there seemed to be quite a gap between them later in life.

I have my doubts if my mother knew this. She considered Bill to be a wonderful, loving brother who wrote postcards home, which are still kept, around 1905 from places he visited with his employing family. He used to send Lilies of the Valley packed in wet moss in biscuit tins from Chippenham, Wiltshire. He was my 'rich uncle' as he always sent me money for birthdays and special occasions. He helped me dress up for my wedding. The old Army man that he worked for bought him a nice house to share with Beatie, who was the cook/housekeeper, to retire to at the end of the old man's life.

The youngest of the siblings was Tom, generally called 'Jinks' as that was what he called drinks as a small boy. He was a well liked lad who had a miserable end. Jinks was conscripted into the army as a young teenager, saw the terrible trench fighting in France, came home on leave and on the way back to the war chose to jump off a moving train and so died. Poor Jinks.

Father's early life

John Bernard Campbell. I know little about it which is strange. I think he was born in the Northampton area. I knew his sister Aunt Louie (Louise, I expect), who was married to Charlie Amos, a shoe factory worker in Kingsthorpe, Northampton with no children. There was also an aunt of my father called Aunt Harriet, lived at 30 or 31 William Street, Kettering. She was a little old matriarch, dressed in long black clothes with a sort of poke bonnet and was a favourite of my mother's. Aunt Harriet's husband was a quiet little man, worked in a local shoe factory and Aunt worked in a shed at the bottom of the garden doing 'out-work', again from a local shoe factory. That's all of his family that I knew and I really didn't know him at all well until, on leaving school at 17, I chose to work with him in the bakery for about six months and we got on well.

Two stories I remember

He used to deliver bread with a horse and trap and poor people bought cheap horses and cheap horses meant trouble. He had mother with him one day in the trap, highly pregnant at the time, (mother that is), when the horse refused to climb Bringhurst Hill, so he lost his rag and reversed it all the way up with mother clinging on in a panic.

He eventually decided to buy a motor van, a Model T Ford I think. That night he was in tears in bed because he had no idea how to drive it. However he had one driving lesson from one of the **Adams** brothers who ran the local garage on The Hill next to The Red Lion, and he was away.

When I brought my first real horse home to show him in the bakery yard, I was amazed to see him climb aboard and ride around the yard. I didn't know he could ride, but he had spent a lot of the 1914–1918 War riding horses in the army in France. At that time, army privates got one shilling a day but horses cost four shillings and so were better looked after.

At that time Burgess' Farm at East Carlton was a 'Remount Station' with Farmer John Burgess and a few cronies being well paid to purchase horses to supply the army.

My brother **John** was born on 14 January 1915, when Father was away in the army. My Sister **Rose Catherine** was born six years later on 18 January 1921. She died in 1996.

Some time after the First World War, both parents were running the **Red Lion Pub** at Middleton. This was the earlier pub before this modern one, on the same site but set further back. This is where I was born on 4 January 1929. Father, who had learned his trade with the Co-operative Bakery at Kibworth, was also renting a **bakery in Main Street**. Later, they rented the house next to the bakery and lived there until father died of lung cancer at the age of 61 years. That would be in that very severe winter of 1947 when we had snow on the ground for weeks.

Brother John (known as Jack), who was always an adult as far as my life was concerned, he being 14 years my senior, on leaving school worked for Burton's wallpaper and paint firm in Kettering. He later worked for father, doing the delivery and developing the grocery side of the business. I used to get dragooned into helping with the deliveries but I wasn't very fond of it, as Rose and I used to spend a lot of boring time waiting in the van for brother John who used to gossip to the customers a lot. I suspect now it was more than gossip.

He was conscripted into the Air Force in 1940, was stationed in Weston-Super-Mare, as a cook I believe, came home once on leave, went back to barracks and was killed one dark winter's night by a bus as he and a mate were walking to a dance.

This was austerity Britain in wartime 1941. Mother received a telegram saying Jack was injured. She shot off by train to Weston-Super-Mare, the police found her a boarding house for the night and she discovered Jack had died on the spot. She brought his body home by train.

At that time, petrol was only allowed to be used for specific purpose and not at all for private use, so this

made travel difficult and time consuming.

Mother was heartbroken at the loss of her favourite offspring. He was born during one War and died during the next. She had a full nervous breakdown weeks or months later and finished up in hospital for some time. The grief lasted a long time. I was 12 years old at the time of Jack's death and it was the first time I had experienced a family bereavement.

Back to Swin's Life

In 1920 he bought two heifers in Kettering Market. This was the very start of his dairying enterprise. He walked them home to Middleton, sitting, he said, for a rest on the heaps of stones that were kept on the roadside verges. This was the start of his farming in addition to his carpentry work. In 1928 he was renting **Peasdale Hill**, which is near Gaulborough Wood between East Carlton Park and Ashley Road, from Mr Reynolds at £35-12s-6d (£35.62p) a year and had just bought **Oak Tree Meadow** for £30 an acre, having previously been just the tenant. The Oak Tree Meadow was at the Ashley side of Lambert's Meadow and was soon afterwards owned by my mother. She gave it to me on my 21st birthday.

Sometime in the middle of the 1930s, Swin took the tenancy of **Blackfold**. This was a block of land of about 120 acres set between Rockingham Road and Corby Road, east of Cottingham roundabout, including a 16 acre field called **Mantle**, just short of the school on the road into Corby. This was poorish land at the time, having been neglected during the 1930s depression years. I think the first year's rent was free and afterwards about 18 shillings (90p) an acre a year.

This land became profitable during the War years when it was ploughed up to grow corn but, about 1949, the New Town of Corby bought up all that area for houses under a compulsory purchase order and we as tenants were pushed off with two years' rent as compensation, plus the value of the residual manures. This was a great blow to our fortunes. There is a **Mantlefield Road** on the Beanfield estate to the west of Corby, the name no doubt being taken from the field called Mantle.

The old bakery at Main Street, Middleton

I want to describe the old building where my father made his living. It was a two storey building in a yard that you can't see from the street behind number 11, **Willow Cottage**. The bakehouse was on the ground floor with a flour store above where flitches of bacon and hams were also dried after being salt-cured. These were the end products of cottage pig sties.

A full mixing of flour for bread making was one sack of 1401bs (60kg) weight. Heavy enough for one man to handle. This was tipped down a chute in the loft straight down into a dough making machine. This was a drum that rotated under electrical power, quite an innovation at that time. About 4 gallons (20 litres) of water at the right temperature and a warm yeast mixture were added, the lid was put on and sealed down with rubber seals and the whole lot was rotated for about 20 minutes. The resulting gooey dough was tipped into a trough on castors and taken to the fixed dough trough where it was left covered overnight. About 6am, the trough lid was raised, the ballooning dough was punched to expel the surplus gas and armsful of difficult-to-handle dough landed on the work bench to be cut up into the correct weight for loaves. The finished hot loaf had to legally weigh 2lbs, so that lump of dough had to be about 2lb 2ozs (1kg). These pieces were kneaded by hand to give the right texture and were then placed in open-topped tins for further 'proving'. During the War years, the size of the loaves was reduced to 1¾ lbs and a flour halfway between white and brown had to be used. This meant changing the old established methods of baking.

The skill of the old baker was in producing a loaf of the right weight, the right texture and a good flavour while coping with an old coal fired oven with no instrumentation and a mind of its own. Government inspectors used to arrive to check weigh loaves, and they were feared by bakers as a prosecution could ruin a little business.

As soon as he had baked a batch, he would weigh a sample and, if it was too light, he would keep it out of the way of Inspectors, but there was also the need to avoid overweight loaves. There would be about 70–90 loaves at one baking.

What I really want to tell about is the oven, a coal fired thing. It wasn't an oven you go out and buy, it was part

of the building. One end of the building contained the oven, it was about 12 feet deep, 10 feet wide, 2 feet high (3.6m x 3m x 0.6m) with a small door, 3 feet wide, 18" high (0.9m x 0.45m) standing about chest high from the bakery floor.

The floor of the oven was tiled, that is fire resistant bricks like big floor tiles. You couldn't have a concrete floor because that would crack with the heat. The oven floor started off smooth but became uneven with wear and this caused trouble. The door was steel, rather like a furnace door, and through this fairly small hole all the raw loaves in tins were fed in, in pairs on a peel, a flat wooden shovel with a very long shaft. The baker would fill the oven as quickly as he could, sometimes with a helper to put two tins at a time onto the peel, the peel slid into the oven, a little jerk to get them off in row after row in the oven. It took about 30 minutes to bake small loaves, and 40 to 45 minutes for full loaves, and they were all ready at the same time.

The peel was slid under the nearest two tins, the baker reverses away until the peel is clear of the oven and slides them onto the floor of the bakery and then in again for another bite. If all went well the oven would be emptied in minutes, but the odd tin would fall over on a worn tile and refuse to be retrieved for several seconds – and the language could be heated as well. Take too long and some of the bread would have black tops instead of shiny brown. I kept well back. I never even attempted to learn that trick.

Another highly skilled job was managing the heating of the oven. On the right hand side was a coal furnace, a long simple grating burning 'bakers nuts', coal the size of beach pebbles that burned fast and evenly. It wasn't anthracite or anything posh, it smoked, full of sulphurous fumes. The furnace was lit early in the morning and 'pulled', that is the draught was arranged so that the smoke and flames and heat from the fire was directed across the oven and up a flue on the left hand side. A peephole in the oven door gave a view of the flames sweeping halfway across the oven ceiling. Like Dante's furnace.

There were no temperature gauges, the baker's experience told him when to kill the fire. There was no fire during the actual baking process. There would be fire ash on the oven floor that had to be removed by washing with a wet flour sack on the end of a long pole and the oven was ready to use.

There was generally just one oven full of bread per day, but you could cook cakes later in the day or Irish Stew for the family with the heat still left. One interesting thing was that the baker was stuck with his oven like a cowman with his milking shed. You couldn't go away for a day or two. Every day you had to light it to keep it in going order.

This meant that we cooked Sunday dinners for locals who had no ovens in their homes – maybe only five or six in my time there.

They would bring their baking tins with a joint of meat sitting on a trivet in the middle and a jug of batter about 10am. At the appropriate time, the baker slid the tin into the oven, basting it if it was poultry and would pour the batter into the frizzling fat just before lunchtime. The result was our version of Yorkshire pudding, fluffy around the outside of the tin and thick solid yellow and full of fat in the middle. Gorgeous!

The owners would arrive at 12.50pm, pick up two wads of newspaper for heat resistant gloves and walk off down the street with the family dinner. We charged 2d (less than 1p) a time for that.

I used to make batches of cakes entirely on my own, one was a plain lemon flavoured round cake, sold for one shilling and a fruit version for 1/6d (7p), and that was quite profitable. Big Christmas and birthday cakes used to quietly bake for hours into the evening I remember, with the residual heat of the oven. I seem to remember at Christmas time lots of folks wanting Christmas poultry cooking, which was a bit of a bind, but it used to get fitted in somehow. But I always remember the swearing when the loaves fell over in the oven. That was bedlam.

I remember the rent. **Henry Burgess** owned the home and bakery and the rent was £40 per annum or 80p a week. That doesn't sound much, but you could rent a terraced cottage for 11 shillings (55p) per week. That puts it into context. It was quite a high rent, and of course Henry Burgess did no repairs. If the roof leaked or the windows wouldn't shut, you either fixed them or put up with it. An old fashioned landlord. Owned a lot of village property and was a law unto himself.

Swin and his wife

Swin, who had been living in this house with his wife, separated from her and divorced her several years later. He left her to become a lodger at the bakehouse before autumn 1930. I know because at that time he took me with others in an old Clyno car to see the famous R101 airship that had stopped at Rugby (I think) on its maiden voyage to the Far East. It crashed in flames on a hillside in France the next day with a great loss of lives. I don't remember it as I was only 18 months old. My memories start around 3 years old. That was the first year I went haymaking with him in a field called 'The Pan' down the Occupation Lane. That was famous in the family legends as I messed my handknitted shorts, was cleaned up with hay and brought home. Swin used a motor cycle with a side car around that time. Later he bought a new three-wheeler truck called a Stevens that eventually was used to teach me to drive.

I remember being down this yard with Swin and a worker when this woman appeared and there was a shouting match, and a little frightened boy was taken back to the bakehouse by the worker. Whether or not it was because I was there, I don't know, but after that I kept away from his house and walked past on the footpath on the other side of the road. I recall being put to bed at the bakehouse by Swin because he used to call in at his little bedroom and get two squares of Cadbury's milk chocolate, one for my mouth and one for later. He divorced her later on the grounds of adultery with a man at Great Easton (called Sharman I think). I met her briefly many years later when she was visiting her relatives at Great Easton and I was delivering groceries or bread, and she knew who I was.

After their divorce he moved back home to live alone, although mother did his cleaning and laundry and cooked food to send down.

Old stone mills for grinding corn

I saw one of these mills in Oakham Museum and that had been made in Caldecott. It was the same design as the one in Jackie's barn, so I presume that was also Caldecott made. It seems that these mills (the one I knew could be contained in a six foot cube) could be used in watermills, windmills and barns, powered by water or wind or steam or paraffin engines.

Local windmills were in **Mill Field, Cottingham**. That lost its revolving top in a high wind well before my time. Also, a windmill stood on the Top Road, on land that later became a limestone quarry and was proposed to be a village park. Another stood where **Gaulborough Wood** now stands, according to old maps I have. There were watermills on the River Welland. The Cottingham one was down on the Bringhurst Road. I remember that first as a roofless gutted ruin with just vertical walls and a mill race made of bricks. Mills had a tendency to catch fire due to the accumulation of fine flour dust and hot bearings.

Selling live eels for food was a perk of the **Cottingham water mill**. In thundery weather, eels tended to be on the move in the river, and if the sluice gates in the mill were opened in a particular way, eels would be washed up a grating and trapped. I was told that a horsecart load at a time would be sent away by train. I used to imagine an open cart full of slithering eels, but on reflection I suppose they were secured in hessian bags. Kept damp, they would live for days.

The Cottingham water mill was operated by one of the local farming families. 'Tis said that this character had such a strong body odour that his own wife sat one seat removed from him in Church. He may have been a bit unfeeling too, because when asked about the health of his pregnant wife he replied "She's carrying things about so I think she intends to make a nest."

Today I haven't re-read these earlier writings, but I have done a lot of thinking about things that never occurred to me before.

My mother was a very loving mother, old-fashioned of course, but she was 41 years older than me. She always had a private bank account, even in the pre-war poverty struck times. During the National Savings Weeks that were held during the War, she would go to the local Post Office late in the week to invest an undisclosed sum to boost the village's total. She was going to buy John Smith's house when it was sold after the death of Mrs Farrell for me to live in with Ces, but it made too much. She did buy the bungalow, which is opposite **Rodney Spriggs** at number 23, for my sister Rose and her husband Reg, probably for cash as she wasn't the sort to get involved in loans and mortgages. I doubt if she could have got a mortgage anyway, as she was not a wage earner. Later, this bungalow was sold and Rose's family moved into a new house in Hood Court in Corby, but I know nothing about the financing of that. Around 1928, Swin bought Oak Tree (2 to 3 acres) for £30 an acre. Afterwards, mother was the owner of it and gave it to me as a 21st birthday present. In the early years of my marriage, mother had spare cash to help out the **Rev Crowther Greene** of East Carlton, who was short of cash, and then there was a big falling out when he couldn't pay it back.

I remember that when Swin and I were farming in partnership and we had given up dairy cows because I was fed up with milking twice every day, we used to buy store cattle in the spring to fatten on grass and we often had a cash flow crisis. Mother would lend us money to buy cattle and reclaim it later.

It didn't seem weird at the time. So, through my young life, mother fed and clothed me, I lived down here with Swin, weekends only at first, then full time. Certainly from 11 years old I remember doing my secondary school homework here. Swin bought most of my toys, my first bike, my first pony Peggy, my first horse Fancy Nancy, took me to the cinema every week, regular visits to Wicksteed Park for the swings and the little boating pool. I don't remember John Bernard buying me any toys.

Conclusion. My birth registration was false to preserve the family reputation. There was never any whisper of it that I ever heard but, without doubt, Swin was my father. I only knew him as my life's best friend and he still watches over me.

All the above must be why my mother tried to keep me away from all girls. But I became as secretive about my girlfriends as she did about her money, and I eventually married the best of them and lived happily ever after. Knowing that my 'parents' often had rows, I said to Swin when I was young, "Why do people get married?" He said something like, "Because they want to be together." It didn't make sense. Later it did make sense.

Short Stories

Written January 1998

Swin was a milk producer/retailer. At first, the cows were milked by hand and the milk was delivered twice a day around Middleton in competition with other small farmers. Later when I came back from Moulton Agricultural Institute (1948), we installed milking machines, not the milking parlour type. The cows were milked in their usual places tied up in the sheds around the top yard. At this time we were delivering once a day around Cottingham and Middleton. We milked about 21 cows during the summer and up to 28 in the winter when each cow's yield was less. We had to produce enough milk every day for the round, so would sometimes have to buy in a freshly calved cow to keep up the supply. Milk that was surplus to retailing requirements was sold wholesale in churns to the local depot of the Milk Marketing Board (MMB).

During the War and afterwards, basic food was rationed, including milk. The legal milk ration was half a pint per person per day and the country producer/retailer was supposed to send the surplus to the MMB to feed the urban population. In actual fact there was no milk rationing here. Everyone had as much as they could pay for, although we were not allowed to sell cream.

Captain Lucas, who lived at the **Bury House**, had his own legal arrangement. He had Swin buy a cow for him, keep it here 'at livery' and we delivered as much milk as they required to Bury House twice a day. A bill for the cow's keep would then be sent instead of a milk bill. All legal and correct.

I must have been aged between 13 and 15. John Bernard (J.B.) was off work, in bed with pleurisy, I think.

Rose and **Doreen Langley**'s regular jobs were serving in the shop and delivering bread and groceries door-to-door in several villages. While J.B. was out of action, they were fetching bread each day from a bakery in Market Harborough. There was deep snow one day, so I wasn't at school. I should explain that no salt was used on the roads at that time, so any snowfall made travel difficult. I was sent off in the Bedford 10HP van with Doreen to collect bread for Harborough. She drove gingerly up the street, gently round the Woolpack Corner and we came to a spinning halt near the Red Lion. There was no other traffic about, so I backed up along the Main Street, took a run at the corner and booted it up the hill. I kept driving, no vehicles about, saw a roadman on the other side of Wilbarston who thought we couldn't get through to Harborough but I drove all the way there and Doreen drove back on the roads that were then clearing. It seems incredible now that traffic could be so light on a main road.

It was a winter's morning in 1962, Ces and **Mary Ward** were on the milk round. **Ray Ward** was helping me in his spare time from his Steelworks job. We had loaded two fat Friesian-cross bullocks into a single axle box trailer behind the big standard Vanguard pick-up truck to take them to Kettering livestock market. Roads had a covering of snow, so Ray said he would go with me to the top of Middleton Hill in case I got stuck. We had an empty truck and a heavy trailer. We had a struggle to get up the hill, even accepted a tow from Damp's* Ford van. Ray decided to come with me. Along the top road approaching the bend at Short's barn, a tipper lorry came round the bend towards us, slid wide into his nearside grass verge. We tucked in close to our kerb, he carried on down his grass verge and just as he was level with us went over one of the drainage grips in the verge. I saw him thrown upwards in his seat but he kept his lorry straight and missed us.

Ray and I carried on along the original main road to Kettering. This was before the new straightened road was built from the water towers onward. We passed Oakley Hay pub, up the hill and on the next right hand turn, the left wheel of the trailer came off and the trailer ran on its brake drain for about 20 or 30 yards, leaving a score in the tarmac that lasted for years.

We unhitched the trailer and I drove towards Kettering to get help, leaving Ray to guard one leaning trailer. I met and stopped a cattle truck which cleverly backed up to my trailer and we transferred the two cattle without losing them. The cattle got to market in time to be sold. Middleton garage went out, replaced the broken wheel studs and wheel and brought the trailer home.

Swin told me that, when he was a little lad, he and his mates found a stray donkey that they brought back here. Nobody claimed it and so they kept it. They must have acquired a cart and harness for it because Swin's brother was home for a short stay and needed to be taken to Rockingham railway station the next morning. The donkey was kept in a pig sty overnight with some straw for food.

Swin and his brother set off in the donkey cart for the station, but the donkey was hungry and insisted on grazing the grass verges, so his brother had to pick up his bags and walk. Later the boys heard that the Rockingham parson wanted a donkey to pull a small wickerwork cart, so they took it over. But it was too big. So they brought it home again, looked at its thick winter coat and decided to clip it with scissors. After they had done just one leg they reconsidered and got a local groom with a clipping machine to do the job for them. They then took the second smaller donkey back to the parson and he saw that it was good and just the right size and, lo and behold, he bought it.

During the War, soldiers were living in these two villages on two occasions. The first group were British Royal Engineers that I don't remember much about. The later group were all Czechs and had tanks and Bren gun carriers (small armoured tracked vehicles).

They took over three empty rooms in this house (21 Main Street, Middleton) for sleeping accommodation, but we didn't have their vehicles. Those were kept in the big yards that used to go with **Cannam House** and in the grounds of **Bury House**.

They were lonely young men, far way from their families and their homeland over-run by the German army. The local young girls and war widows found their broken English irresistible. I can think now of at least three offspring that were born as a result. There were probably more, and probably lots of time nothing happened.

Pig problems

I always remember a vet lecturing at Moulton. "Temperatures are taken with a lubricated thermometer per rectum. That means you spit on it". At that time all thermometers were made of glass and every pig keeper had one because sows often have infections, and therefore high temperatures, at farrowing time.

Not many people will know that a sow's rectum tends to blow out and suck in, particularly when it is straining to give birth. It was necessary to hold the thermometer firmly. **Margaret Jackson**, a fellow pig keeper, hurried into the yard to see me one day to say she had been taking a pig's temperature and the thermometer had disappeared inside. "What shall I do?" Answer, "Go and buy another one."

Syringes used to be a problem. Now they are made of plastic, are used once and thrown away. When I started, they were shiny metal with a glass barrel. To sterilise them after use, we used to boil them for about 10 minutes in a small saucepan on the stove. Trouble was, if they boiled dry the solder at the end melted and ran out. The problem was so common that you could send them away for repair. Later, plastic syringes came in that could be sterilised in the same way, but if you let them boil dry you got a room full of white smoke that was very choking and poisonous. One evening, we managed to fill the whole house with this smoke and we had to rush upstairs to get the two girls who were asleep and carry them outside until we got the house ventilated.

Farming

I left school at 17 years of age and worked with John Bernard at the bakery for about six months. Then I realised that at 18 I would be conscripted compulsorily into the armed forces for two years, which I didn't fancy. Agriculture and coal mining were exempt, so I said I ought to take a job with Swin. Mother didn't want me to be just a farm worker, so it was arranged that I should do a year's practical farm work which then qualified me to join a year's course at Moulton Agricultural Institute, and that then I should go into partnership with Swin. J.B. seemed a bit upset that I was leaving him, as we had got along well, but I had no real choice, so he didn't complain. So at 19 years old, I was a formal partner with equal shares in the profit, drawing a cash sum each week to live on. I had invested all my available cash (a few hundred) in the business and I owned three small fields that we used.

Ces and I got married at East Carlton Church on 27 June 1950 on Ces' birthday when I was 21 years old. She was slim, fit and could walk on her hands. I was skinny and could get dizzy just bending over. We had a four day honeymoon in Stratford-upon-Avon. I remember the first job on returning to work was delivering plump, newly weaned piglets to some cottage pig sties at Cottingham. People were still rearing and fattening pigs in their garden sties for home-cured ham and bacon.

There was a housing shortage at the time and it wasn't unusual for newly married couples to lodge with their in-laws. Rose and her husband Reg had lived at the old bakery for quite a long time. With hindsight, I don't advise it.

We lived here at the farm with Swin. We had the big sitting room as a kitchen and living room, a small bedroom and use of the bathroom. The downstairs room was fitted with a white sink and draining board in the corner, an electric geyser for hot water and a cold water tap. There was a free-standing kitchen cabinet that rattled when you did any chopping on it. Uncle **Harry Morgan** gave us a useful electric cooker as a wedding present that he had spare when he moved from Dunstable. Unfortunately, his old electricity board men came round and took it away as Harry had it on hire. So we had to hire a new one from our electricity board.

We didn't live here for many months. Harmony in the house was absent. Swin didn't cause any bother but mother and Rose were not always sweet and helpful. After a big row we were asked to find alternative accommodation, so that day we went to Peterborough and bought a 16 foot (5m) caravan. I put it in the corner of the Caravan Field, fenced it, put in concrete paths and a handgate in the hedge, built a shed for a wash house, fitted that with a sink and a drain, a gas boiler and a tortoise stove burning coke for heat. The caravan had bottled gas lighting, a gas cooker, a radiator powered by paraffin, a bath under one of the seats and a pull down double bed. We bought a cocker spaniel puppy called Jane and the whole place was called 'Quiet Comer'.

The next two years were a very happy time for me. I bought a .22 sporting rifle with telescopic sights for £7 and we used it from the caravan windows. I was woken one morning by a pheasant calling, shot it out of the window, let Jane out of the door and she retrieved it without me having to get my toes wet. The longest shot was a rabbit killed by a bullet through the head at 137 yards and that bullet had dropped and ricocheted up again off the hard ground. Ces used to shoot at rats near the duck house until she nearly hit **Archie White** with ricochets.

When Ces was pregnant, we applied to the local borough council for one of the new council houses being built down **Berryfield Road**. We got the tenancy of number 39 before Jackie was born at Market Harborough cottage hospital in Coventry Road on November 9th, 1953.

Jackie was about 3 years old when Swin suddenly had his first stroke when he was feeding pigs with Ces at **Jarvis' Yard**, Cottingham where we kept the pregnant sows. At this time we had given up milking cows and retailed milk round Middleton and Cottingham. We had just bought our first pig house to accommodate the growing numbers on what is now Jackie's lawn. We had a few cattle to fatten and a flock of breeding ewes.

Swin was quite ill after this stroke and was confined to bed with mother looking after him. Then he had a sudden complete urinary blockage caused by an enlarged prostate and had to go to hospital for an emergency operation. His heart wasn't good enough to stand the anaesthetic and major surgery, so a catheter was fitted to his bladder under a local one. He came home after a few days, back to bed. About this time, mother was tired out with the work and moved across the road to Rose and Reg's bungalow, and Jackie, Ces and I moved in to look after him. Ces said later that she could feed him, wash him, change his catheter more efficiently than **Nurse Crowson** but she couldn't handle his dentures.

We kept the tenancy of the council house although we were not living there, as we didn't intend to be made homeless twice. Swin realised this and called in his solicitor to make a new will. Under an earlier will, the house was bequeathed to mother. So under a trust, mother would now get a rent for the house and, at her death, the house would become mine. We were then able to give up the council house.

Mother was living in the bungalow with Rose, Reg, John and Sally. I worked the farm on my own. Ces and I did the milk round. **Grandma Hill**, Reg's mum, helped out with the house and looking after Swin, paid for out of Swin's state pension.

The farm was very short of cash and still had a big overdraft. We still had bits of the old Blackfold land on short term rental for making hay. The old Morris 10 Shooting Brake built on an ex-army chassis collapsed and died around this time and I replaced it with a new Standard Vanguard Pick-up that did milk delivery and could pull a bigger livestock trailer. Swin recovered enough to be able to walk round the yard and be driven in this new truck around the fields. He had other strokes later that left him unable to get up and down stairs, so we fitted a coal burning stove in his room as there was no central heating then.

It was a hard and worrying time. I was on the barn roof one day painting on a Tarry waterproofing compound when the **Brassington family** arrived, bringing the young grandchildren that we hadn't seen before. It was such a blatant death bed visit, so that they might be remembered in the will, that I stayed well out of the way. They hadn't been worried over his two years of serious illness.

Swin asked me to find his parents' grave at Cottingham and to check that there was space for him alongside their grave. He died one night in January 1959. He called to us to say he didn't feel well and, as we talked to him and held his hand, he had another stroke and stopped breathing.

I arranged for **Horace Buswell**, who had worked for Swin for years, to make his coffin and he was buried in the plot that he had asked for. It was a sad time. Swin's sister Nance and her husband came to the funeral. I think they were the only relatives on that side. As we were loading the cars for the church, Mr Brassington said he wouldn't be coming to the church which was a surprise to me. Much later, I wondered if he wanted to look over the deserted house. Of course, all of us knew the contents of the will and nothing was mentioned of it that day. The next day Nance rang me to ask why the will hadn't been read out after the funeral, so I said the solicitor would send her a copy. I felt very upset by it all and I haven't heard from any of those two families since.

Swin's will had left small cash legacies to a few people but there was no cash, only an overdrawn bank

account, so I settled them out of my own pocket. I had no spare cash for a headstone and anyway I didn't know the relatives' wishes, so I did nothing. I didn't visit his grave at all because his presence was so strong here that there was no need. I was surrounded by his workmanship, his hand tools and 27 years of wonderful companionship. Now that I have realised that he was my biological father as well as a great friend, I am arranging a suitable memorial to be erected.

Starting out in business on my own account, I had to first apply for a bank overdraft in my own name for £2,000 and had to take out an assurance policy that would pay out the same amount at my premature death. We had also to pay a small rent for just the house.

Helen was born on 23 February 1959, the month after he died. Pity he couldn't have seen her. He certainly enjoyed Jackie's company.

Rose, Reg and mother moved to a new house in Hood Court, Corby and we were left to get stuck in and learn how to make money.

We realised that we had to have an intensive operation of some sort to generate more money and we hadn't many acres and that was all grass, so we increased pig numbers as fast as funds allowed. At that time, we had no buildings beyond the bottom edge of Jackie's lawn. That area was just derelict gardens. Ces and I laid a big concrete slab at the far end of the garden and I had Neaversons of Peakirk make me a seven pen wooden pig building with a feed store. This would hold seven sows and litters for up to 84 fattening pigs.

Mary Ward came to help on the milk round and **Ray Ward** helped me on the farm in between his shift work.

Previous to this time, the **Claypole brothers (Ron and Reg)** had done my hay baling, but I was able to buy an old baler from **Nancy Shrive's** father that had caught fire and burnt half a field of standing wheat. It had been repaired but new safety regulations meant that it needed hundreds of pounds worth of safety guards to cover its belts and whirling wheels. A self-employed man was outside the new regulations, so I bought it for £35 and could legally use it. It was an old Massey Harris baler with a big, very independent, 2-cylinder diesel Coventry Climax engine mounted on the draw-bar. I towed it behind a little grey Fergie that cost £78 at a sale plus £25 for a new carburettor. Both machines lasted for many years. The baler was sold at the end for £150, just for the engine, as they were being fitted in marine and river craft.

Ray and I did the building work in the winter, fieldwork in the summer and livestock work all the time. A few years later we built another four pen piggery with another feed store and a lean-to straw shed. The last pig building was put up in 1970 and cost £1,300. That was a specialist concrete, oak and steel building for housing up to 12 in-pig sows. We had about 20 breeding sows, one or two boars and produced 365 bacon-sized pigs for sale each year. We were part of a Ministry of Agriculture costings scheme whereby each month a costings collator came here to keep very detailed figures of our pig business and could pinpoint our bad points and compare our results with the national average. Later, he costed our sheep enterprise and after either one or two years of this he proved that I would make just as much money selling baled hay as feeding it to the sheep with all the work and risk that involved. So I sold all the sheep in 1970 and started selling hay. I found that fellow farmers only wanted hay at the cost of production, so I concentrated on producing a better quality hay for horse owners and I am still selling it 27 years later.

In 1971 we built a big shed just for storing hay and another one in 1973. According to the accounts, the materials for the first one cost £140 and for the second, £240.

As we had sold the sheep and had given up cattle fattening as being not worthwhile, we had grass land to spare. I tried letting out summer grazing for one year but it only brought in £200. I was still paying interest to the bank, so I sold the meadows to **William Clarke** in 1972 for £4,533 and so cleared the bank and gave some working capital.

During the boom years of pig keeping, Ted Winsor and two others in Lincolnshire joined together to produce and market a more efficient strain of pig. They had been independently tested by a government body to show good livestock gains and efficient food conversion. They were selling breeding stock at high prices both here and abroad. I was invited to join them as a multiplier, which meant that they provided me with breeding sows at a nominal price and whenever they wanted, they could have the best gilts from me at a good price to satisfy their customers. Any that were not needed were sold for meat. It worked quite well for me.

Ray used to do most of the mucking out and keeping the feed stores topped up. We had our own mill and mixer and so we could make our own pig food. Ray and I had a lot of fun together. He would hold piglets for the iron injection that they had to have at four days old to ward off anaemia. We worked together once a week to weigh pigs that were getting towards the size the butchers wanted. We castrated all the male pigs at about 5–6 weeks old and weaned them at 8 weeks. Castration was a very quick job once the mother sow was put well out of the way. Ray would grab the hind legs in his two hands, suspend it in the air, catch its shoulders between his thighs. I would wield the Dettol swab and a scalpel and in a few seconds the job was done. I remember on one or two occasions we missed doing a litter at the proper time and found we were dealing with larger pigs whose noses were touching the floor in spite of Ray's efforts to lift them higher.

About 40 litters were born each year and I liked to watch over the sows farrowing in case any newborn piglet crawled away from its mother and the infra-red heater and died of cold in the corner. One evening, Ces and I had arranged to go out and Damp was babysitting. There was a sow due to farrow but Damp said he would keep an eye on her. It appears that he went in to check on her but he smelled of soap and tobacco instead of my authentic piggy pong and she 'wuffed' at him and chased him out of the place.

Pig prices have always been either boom or bust and in 1974 prices went low for a long time. When I had lost £1,000 on pigs that year, I decided to get out and sold all the breeding herd for meat. Ted Winsor, who of course was in a much bigger way with lots of expensive new pig buildings, stayed with pigs for much longer and lost a lot of money before he gave up.

Short sheep stories

When old sheep have lost all their incisor teeth (as they do) they can still pull grass with their gums, but if they only have one or two loose ones, feeding is difficult. We had one old girl with just one very wobbly tooth that was ready to fall out. Ces decided to remove it but found it had a bulbous root like a half rotten gatepost. Both Ces and the ewe struggled, Ces got bitten and the ewe kept her tooth.

Ces was given a young female sheep by Flo Cullum at Titchmarsh who had reared it on the bottle, made a pet of it and didn't want it to go for meat. We named her 'Flo', put her in the paddock with a small flock, but she stood at the gate and bleated for people company. She never became a real sheep, refused to be driven by dog or man but would follow you anywhere. When we were moving sheep, it was flock first, man and dog second and Flo brought up the rear. She did get pregnant each year which probably surprised her as well but she would show signs of impending birth much more extravagantly than normal. She would say she had labour pains so we would take the Mini pick-up truck to her, let down the tailboard and she would hop in to be bought home. Then after a few days we would declare 'false alarm' and turn her out again.

She would eventually produce lambs and she would rejoin the rest of the suckling flock, but she would never keep her two lambs together. One would be full and curled asleep in one spot and its sibling would be bedded down hundreds of yards away. She treated them just like a mother hare looks after her leverets. She was quite unique.

I was feeding a flock of bulging in-lamb ewes one day, walking along a line of wooden sheep troughs, trickling in food from a sack. When they knew both my feet were under the V-shaped trough, they pushed me flat from behind, scraping my shins most painfully and they stood over the top of me scoffing food. I didn't want to kick out to clear a space because they were all close to lambing and I remember beating at woolly flanks with my hands in great frustration.

Do you remember 'William', the Dalmatian dog that **Rachel Morgan** gave us? Whereas his collie friend, Meg, could slide through a closed field gate at the gallop, he would come to a stop and look puzzled. He appeared to close his ears when he had his nose down and was looking away and it was a job to get him to come to heel. Years later I discovered that a big proportion of that breed are deaf, so that was his trouble. Not very brainy, used to lie in front of a big coal fire and pant and turn pink when a normal dog would have moved back. Was very flatulent too and that eventually got him banned from the house.

More sheep stories

Ces and I were lambing a ewe in the Red Door barn when four year old Jackie peeped through the bars of the gate and said, "Oh, that's where they come from is it?"

Helen would be a few years older than that when she was driving the Mini Pick-up alongside the big hedge in Peasdale Hill. I was in the passenger seat when the old Suffolk ram stepped out from the depths of the hedge. Helen didn't slacken speed and so I hauled on the handbrake lever and we missed it. I related this at home and Ces mentioned that Helen had come home from school with a list of words that weren't spelt correctly. Helen had said that **Mrs Muggleton** had spelt them that way because Helen had copied them off the blackboard. The result was an eye test and a pair of glasses. She has not hit a sheep since then and the spelling has vastly improved.

Ewes, like cows, can be found in a collapsed condition called 'Milk Fever', a calcium deficiency disease. Our sheep didn't usually suffer from it but I had a bottle of the calcium solution in the medical bag we carried at lambing time in case. We found this old girl half dead and read the instructions, which I think were to give either 50 or 100ccs under the skin. We only had a 5cc syringe so set about giving many injections at different sites. Poor old lady said she felt like a pin cushion, but she stood up within a few minutes and walked off. We invested in a 'flutter valve' which gravity feeds a large quantity of fluid straight from the bottle down a pipe and through a needle.

When we were keeping sheep, the River Welland was not so well dredged out and the meadows were often flooded. When we had had a night's rain I used to view the valley when I was on the milk round from the Cottingham factory. If I saw flooding near the river I would belt off down the Ashley Road to fetch the ewes out of our meadows. It was a case of opening the field gate or if there was too much water there, to go farther along the road and dismantle a post and rail and just call the sheep out. They would follow the truck along the road to Peasdale Hill which never flooded. I would have my head out of the window shouting, "Oi Yoi Yoi, Oi Yoi Yoi".

The old baling machine

I told you we had a difficult diesel engine on the old baler. It was so worn that if it was left unused for months – it had no compression and wouldn't start. We overcame this by pouring two pints of oil in at the air intake to flood the cylinder heads with oil every autumn when we packed it away. Then the next spring it would start quite readily but would throw out masses of smoke and dirty oil spray for several minutes, so we used to swing the starting handle round till it coughed and then run for it. The starting handle was a piece of steel weighing 7–10 lbs (4–5kg) and was completely separate from the engine. You stuck this handle in a hole in the engine, heaved it round with two hands and, when the engine fired, it would be kicked out of the engine automatically. One spring day, the handle was rusty and stayed in. The engine ran up to full working revs as I ran away. I watched the blurred circles of the handle from a safe distance expecting it to go through the shed roof at any moment. When it stayed stuck, I made a big circle round and approached it from the other side like a sheep dog and shut the fuel off from there. Afterwards I made sure it was well oiled. It was a difficult machine to manage because whenever I had a minor breakdown in me field, such as a broken string or a blockage to be cleared, I had to stop the engine in order to be safe. Then to restart a hot engine with a massive compression was sometimes more than my aching arms could do. It was a great relief when the baler was replaced by a more modern one that was driven by the tractor engine.

Post pigs

After all the pigs were sold, we gradually converted the pig housing to take horses and ponies and finished up with 11 stables of assorted sizes for DIY livery.

We were in the doldrums for a few months, then had good luck to be offered **Cecil Clarke's** milk round at Great Easton for £280 in 1975. He and his brother Joe had separately produced milk and sold it round the village. Cecil was taking advantage of a government scheme to reduce the amount of milk being produced. Joe seemed a bit put out that he wasn't consulted and when he wanted to give up his half of the village he gave or sold it to Jim Woolston's Dairy at Corby.

About 1977 or 1978, Northern Dairies who supplied both me and Jim with milk reorganised their Corby rounds and, as a result, Jim gave me his share of Great Easton for nothing. Good luck again.

During the next 10 years, retailing milk dominated our lives. It was a safe secure income but it was seven days a week and difficult to get a holiday. I used to get up at 4.30am to start delivering at 5.30am and finish about 11.30am, leaving the rest of the day for farm jobs. Ces sold the milk business to Oakley Manor Dairy in April 1988 and we got out just before the supermarkets took over most of the milk trade with their heavily discounted milk prices.

Ducks

What do I know about that big flock of semi-tame Mallard ducks that used to live on the stream along Brook Lane, Great Easton? I know that **Terry Bailey** and **John Hill** came back from the Great Easton milk round on a Sunday morning and they were giggling. It seems that they had innocently stopped to eat sandwiches in the truck along Brook Lane with both doors open for fresh air and a duck's head and neck came in to pick up crumbs. Terry's fingers got tangled in its neck feathers and they had to wring its neck to get free of it!

Fox in the Yard

This morning, Monday 26 January 1998, Ces shouted from the kitchen that something was carrying off one of Sam's silkie bantams. I went tearing down the frozen yard in my soft house slippers, found white feathers all over the place, hens cackling, cockerels saying "It wasn't me". I found a fox cub biting a silkie cockerel in the sand arena, ran at it screeching at the top of my voice and it stood its ground until I was only yards away. It then dropped the bird and slipped through the hedge and stood waiting in **John Bradshaw's** paddock to see if I was serious. I shouted again and he hopped over the next wall out of sight. We rounded up the live birds and found that 10 out of the 14 had survived. At the moment, we don't know where the other three dead ones are hidden but possibly in **Mrs Apps'** garden at **Milestone House** two doors away, as there are plenty of feathers in there.

* **Damp** was the affectionate nickname for Walter's father-in-law. Jackie as a toddler mispronounced 'Grampa' as 'Damp' and it stuck!