

# Life on a farm near Penrith through the eyes of a child aged 0-5 years old 1940-1945

## Margaret's Story



I was born on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1940 at Brunswick Square Nursing Home in Penrith. Someone gave me a little Santa Claus when I was born and I still have it to this day. (He's now 79 years old and still comes out every Christmas. I also still have my teddy I



was given when I was little although he is a little the worse for wear.

We lived on a farm in a village on the east fellsides. I believe my Grandad (Mother's father) died shortly after I was born in February 1941. My Grandma had already died so I never knew my grandparents from my mother's side at all.



## Inside

I don't remember much of this very early time but things I can remember are the wooden settles either side of the fireplace and the 'badger sett' in the garden that I could see through the front windows. I used to watch them going for a walk round the garden. The windows in the side looked over someone else's garden and when I was old enough (but not very old) I used to climb and go and play with the little girl next door. We played amongst the wallflower plants and they seemed enormous but of course we were only tiny.

We then moved to another remote farm in the Eden Valley when I was 3 where I lived with my Mam, Dad and my Mam's brother. The house was very bare with four bedrooms, a sitting room, parlour, kitchen, big pantry/dairy with a round stone shelves in the middle

and a huge wood panelled staircase. We had no bathroom or electricity and carried a candle up to bed. Really hard work for my Mam with no help.

Monday was washing day but we had no washing machine. A fire was lit under a boiler in the wash house and of course it had to heat before she could wash and it took a long time. Dirty marks on clothes were rubbed with hard green or red soap (carbolic soap I think) then put in the boiled water and swished round with a posse stick. They were lifted out dripping wet and put through a big mangle, I used to help turn the handle. We carried them to the orchard which had a very long clothes line and pegged out – washing must have taken all day. Because we had no electricity, Mam used a flat iron which was heated on a black lead range. There were no ironing boards, at least we didn't have one if they existed, so blankets and a top sheet were laid on a table.

Every Tuesday we went into Penrith on the 'Ribble Bus' for market day. The men went to the auction which was behind the Agricultural Hotel where Morrisons is now and Mam and I went to the market which was in 'Great Dockray.' The shops I remember clearly in Penrith were James and John Grahams, Arnisons, McVitties shoe shop and of course Woolworths. A treat was to stop for a drink at The Brown Jug Cafe before going back home.

I'm sure Wednesday would be a special day but I can't remember why. Mam used to look after the hens and I loved to collect the eggs. Mam gave me a special job to look for the hens stray nests in the stackyard (where the hay and corn was put up in stacks). Mam told me when I found the eggs that I had to shake them. If they wobbled the eggs were rotten and I just had to throw them at a wall and break them (I still remember the smell which was awful!). The good eggs didn't wobble so they were put into a basket and taken home.



At different times of the year I would pick wild gooseberries and (eat a lot) take them home for Mam to cook. Bramble time was great and I would be out all day, picking brambles and chasing the rabbits that came out of the bushes below. I always had my dog (a little terrier called Terry) with me. Mam always made bramble jelly and crab apple jelly plus other things from what we had on the farm or found in the hedgerows.

Thursday was always bedroom day when everything was cleaned. In the Summer when it was really good weather, the windows were opened wide and the feather mattresses and pillows were thrown out, hung on fences and well beaten. I remember that if Mam plucked a hen (for us to eat), the feathers were saved for making pillows etc.

Friday was baking day. With no electricity or gas cooker Mam used to cook on a black lead range (heated by a fire). This was used for all cooking and to heat water for baths. I remember the kettle hanging on a black bar. Mam used to make jam tarts, sponge buns etc. Even though food was rationed during the war we always had milk from the cows (Mam made butter as well), eggs and meat if one of the animals was butchered (we had cows, sheep and pigs). We did have some food delivered but it wasn't much. A traveller came early in the week to see what we wanted and it was delivered by James and John Graham.

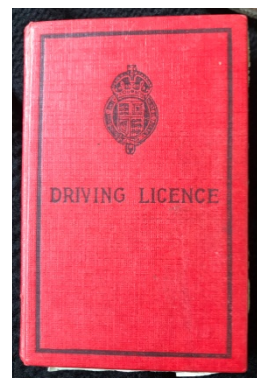
Saturday was bath day which was a tin bath in front of the fire. Water was heated up and put in. When I got in I always kept my knickers on because people were coming in and out of the house. On Sunday people came to visit, usually Mam's aunts and cousins, and they always stayed for tea.

Our toilet was down the garden, old wooden slats with a hole below and we kept a chamber pot under the bed in case we needed to go during the night – it must have been awful cleaning them out. There was no soft toilet rolls like now so newspaper was cut into squares, put on baler twine then hung up.

When we went to bed we had to go by candle light which made huge shadows on the ceiling. Downstairs we used hand held paraffin lights and Mam was always buying mantles to put round the flame – how dangerous it must have been. The farmhouse was joined to one of the barns and when I was in bed I could hear the rats running between the floorboards and in the attic, they didn't bother me and I remember having names for them although I forget what they were.

## **The Great Outdoors and Farming Year**

In January, February and March the sheep were brought down off the fells and looked after in the fields. We used to get in the car, a Morris 8, and travel a few miles to see and check them. An old hessian sack or two and a shovel were put in the car before we left. If the snow came down we were stuck so out came the sacks and shovel. The sacks were pushed under the wheels and the snow round about was dug out and then we had to push (even me) and off we went again.



At Easter we made pache eggs. Onion peelings were put in the pan with eggs and boiled until the eggs turned a lovely brown colour. On Easter Day we went to a hilly field and rolled the eggs down. When they broke we were meant to eat them but I didn't like eggs (I still don't) due to breaking the rotten ones on the walls.

I loved lambing time when all the little lambs were born. Any orphan lambs had to be fed and that was my job with a glass bottle with a teat filled with milk. When they were feeding their little tails moved all the time.

The next wonderful job was clipping and dipping day for the sheep. The sheep were all gathered in and brought to a field next to the house. Lots of people came to help, mostly relatives but by then we had German and Italian prisoners of war to help on the farm. The sheep were all clipped with hand shears and then put through the dipping pen which was water in a big tub with strong disinfectant in. After being dipped they were marked so that if they wandered people knew who they belonged to. Our mark was rudd on its back, initials on the side and letters burnt into the horns. I think the initials were those of the first residents on the farm.

When dipping was finished the sheep dip was emptied and the tub was covered over. The local policeman used to come on his bike to make sure everything had been done before the sheep went back to the fells. When the lambs had grown they were taken back up the fellside. This was a great day out running and skipping with the dogs to keep them all moving in the right direction.

Next came hay time, cutting the grass with a binder, leaving it to dry then piling it up in the field as haystacks. The men would work late so my Mam would make a picnic and bring it out for supper. Everyone would sit down beside the hay to eat – it was a wonderful, happy, magical time. When the hay stacks had to go to the stackyard for storage, the tractor and bogie were brought out. The bogie was backed up beside the haystack and a winch from the bogie put round it and pulled to load up. Before being piled up, a big ring of stones was put round the bottom and they were piled on top. I think the stones let a little draught through to help keep the hay dry.

Following hay time was harvest time when the corn was cut with a different binder. When they were cutting nearer the middle of the field, rabbits started running everywhere. Sorry but with three dogs it was great fun catching them. Mam took them to make rabbit pies. Stooks came out of the binder tied with bailer twine and were left for a few days before being picked up two at a time and stood up. Six were grouped together to dry and, when they were dry the horse and cart was used to take them to the stackyard for storage. Again at harvest time, Mam made picnics which were eaten in the field. I remember everyone chatting and it being a happy time.

Threshing was when the thresher came to separate the corn from the stalks. This was another day when loads of people came to help and we must have gone to help them too. The tractor was in front of the thresher with a large belt joining the two to run the thresher. Some of the men got on top of the corn stacks and threw them into the thresher one at a time. The corn was separated from the straw stalks and the corn went into hessian sacks and taken to be stored in the barn. The straw was made into stooks and taken to the stackyard for storage. Threshing days meant more picnic suppers but at dinner time (always 12pm) Mam made huge shepherd's pies for everyone to eat.

When the thresher was going, there were loads of rats came out so the dogs had a great time catching them. When all the straw had been used from the stackyard, I used to get my terrier and the other dogs, and any cats I could find, to look under all the stones from the bottom of the stacks for rats. I got blood poisoning and the Doctor had to come and

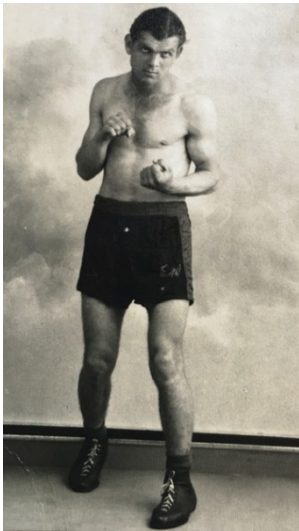
deal with it. At the time a pig was also being butchered and the blood was being drained so that Mam could make black pudding. When I saw the Doctors knife and heard him shouting for me I ran away and Mam had to catch me so that the Doctor could cut my arm and drain the poison. I think I thought I was going to end up like the pig.

When we butchered a pig, Mam gave me the job of putting the intestines on the top and rinsing them out so that they could be used to make sausage. Mam minced some of the meat then put it into the intestine skins. The rest of the pig was for us to eat.

At Christmas we had a few decorations but not many. The Christmas tree was cut down in the wood and brought in. I remember putting on metal candle holders and lighting the candles on the tree, how dangerous was that. I hung my stocking up and was very excited that Santa had been and left me an orange in the toe and some nuts. I remember getting a home made wooden dolls crib with little covers and a soft doll with a painted pot face. I didn't like dolls and wouldn't have it in the crib which I made into a bed for Terry my little dog. I didn't get much but was still very happy.

## War Memories

We had Prisoners of War who came to work on the farm. The prisoners used to come every day in a big army lorry from Merrythought, a Prisoner of War camp on the A6 beside Thieveside, now the VLA. They were dropped off for the day and picked up at night to go back to the camp.



I remember that we weren't allowed to give them knives and forks to eat their food and that the German prisoners were much more pleasant and chatty than the ones from Italy.

The German prisoner of war who came to the farm was called Ernest (Ernie) Hoffman. Before the war he had been a boxer and I used to watch him practice every day. He had also been a jeweller and made me a ring out of an old sixpence. He also made Mam one out of a two shilling piece and Dad's was made from half-a-crown. I remember he was a nice kind man and after the war he kept in touch with us until he died.



ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

\*I removed on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)  
to the following address :- \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest Railway Station :- \_\_\_\_\_

\*I have changed my name to \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
\*Complete as necessary

FOR USE OF SERVICE AUTHORITY ONLY  
This man has joined H.M. Forces as a  
volunteer. \_\_\_\_\_ Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Rank \_\_\_\_\_

OFFICIAL PAID

The Manager,  
Local Office of the  
Ministry of Labour  
and National Service,  
SCOTCH STREET,  
CARLISLE  
CUMBERLAND

My Dad got his registration papers but luckily for us the war ended before he was called up. Because we were on a farm and producing food and crop he didn't have to go, nor did my uncle.



Sid, a friend of my Dad was called up and was a dispatch rider with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. He often sent letters back and I still have this one which gives an insight into what he was doing shortly after being called up although I'm not sure what happened to the last page.

Being young the war passed me by and I started school in January 1946 shortly after it finished



Dear John, I don't think you will be too surprised to have a letter from me and I think you will like to know how I am faring in the Army. Well I am not doing too bad now but it was very rough after home life at first and brought me in mind of the days when I stayed on the fell and had to dig in with the other chaps, however I have now got into the ways of the Army now and I am as happy as can be expected under the circumstances. I was called up three weeks after I left Barlisle and went to my first station on Dec 19<sup>th</sup> which was a bit thick being only 6 days from Xmas so I spent the holiday in the Forces and I can say it was a tame affair most of the chaps that were near home sneaked off when they had the chance, I was too far from home, being then at Sutton in Asfield which is 12 miles from Chesterfield (south of) and 15 miles North of Nottingham and approximately 45 miles from my wifes home, incidentally I have not seen her since I was called up, however I have applied



for a day pass for Sunday and will look forward to that day if I am so fortunate as to get it, leave of absence is very bad to get on this job and we get 7 days if we go abroad which is very probable I do not expect to be in this country much longer unless they start an invasion.

I am now stationed at Mansfield which is quite a large town and only 5 miles from the first place I was at where I had a months drilling and small arms training, here we are trained as drivers I have been here a fortnight and passed my tests at driving the first week and am fit for night driving and convoy work I would have been put in as a driving instructor had I not been a butcher but as I was interviewed by the Major on Friday on the subject I am eligible for a post of company Butcher should a vacancy occur which I hope will happen. Well I think that is plenty about myself for the present I will look forward to the day when we get settled down into civil life again one thing I have noticed since I came into the Army is, you never talk about the war like the civilian possibly its because we are in it up to the neck its our job and we like to talk about home and the civilian life as we knew it, I get on fairly well with the chaps, if you keep in with the right sort it is quite easy and I have not taken up drinking if you read the daily orders and obey them