

BRADMORE OF THE NINETIES

by John P Smeeton, from the Nottingham Guardian 1939

No.1 The Home Close Pond

What a joy to be a farmer's son, to roam the rooms of a large barn and stackyard, to wander over meadow and cornfield in unrestricted freedom! My earliest impressions of life at the old Bradmore farmstead were of a monstrous mansion, gigantic rooms, colossal passages, and a garden of enormous proportions.

These ideas sobered down with the passing years to a picture of a solidly-built farmhouse, 200 years old in parts, and much older still in the northern wing. Like a huge letter L it stood beside the turnpike road, its 3 storeys reared aloft to some considerable height, while in the garden, of medium size after all, stood a real veteran of bygone centuries - an enormous yew tree!

What pictures I wove around that solid, gnarled monster! I saw it standing there in stately solitude beside the rutty track when Norman knights rode by to take up their abode in Nottingham Castle. I visualised it in vigorous growth then Cardinal Wolsey cantered past with colourful retinue on his pilgrimage to Southwell Minster. I heard its spreading branches creak as the cannons roared on Wilford Hills, and proud Cavaliers and close-cropped Roundheads galloped by to fight or flee. Yet best of all I loved to conjure up visions of buried treasure around that yew tree's mighty roots.

What a landmark the tree must have been for centuries! What more likely thing than for some long-dead squire or village miser to have delved deep at dead of night beside its age-old roots, and buried there rich treasure, when the tempests of civil strife, the storm of riot in the neighbouring town, the terrors of fire and pestilence, or the whirlwinds of highway robbery and murder swept through the fair countryside!

Alas, the giant branches of that ancient yew have now been lopped. No longer is it possible to climb to the precarious summit and peer over the ridge tiles of the house along the highway to the north. Nor is it possible to fall from an outflung bough into the potato patch far beneath, as I once did.

The Gay Nineties

It must have been about this time that my grandfather, Thomas Bowes Smeeton, estate bailiff to the Bunny Park Estate where Miss Hawksley reigned in dignified state, walked up from his pretty rose and vine-embowered cottage beside the park gates to our farmhouse at Bradmore. Playfully he poked fun at my girlish skirts when I was "such a big boy" - it was the custom for boys to be clothed as girls until they reached school age, in the dim days of the

frivolous nineties! Evidently my grandfather's badinage struck deep, for some short time afterwards I might have been observed toddling across the highway - not in those slow-moving days a procedure fraught with any grave risk to life and limb - and climbing through the bars of the home-close gate, with a bundle of clothing - skirt, petticoat and whatnot - en route for the muddy cow-pond in the distant corner of the field.

Fortunately I was spotted ere I reached the pool, and was led back to the house in sore distress, whereupon I explained that I was a baby no longer and intended "drowning" my girlish raiment in the muddy waters of the cow-pond.

The Dame's School

At this period in my youthful career there resided beside the turnpike road a Miss Atkinson, keeper of an old dame school. Her tiny house - one room down, two very tiny ones up - still stands in its old-world garden, and here the tiny tots of Bradmore village went day by day to learn their tables and their alphabet before being transferred to Bunny School.

Miss Atkinson was not possessed of a lovable nature. She was not one of those sweet, young, modern schoolmarms to whom the little child of today prattles in complete confidence. Rather was she to many a Bradmore child something of an ogre. She had a wooden leg, her stump giving her an endless amount of trouble and causing her considerable pain at times. This, and her advancing years combined to make her rather cross-tempered, and lacking in patience with her young charges.

I was the baby of the family, and for some reason or other was excused attendance at Miss Atkinson's little school. Not that I skipped having my lessons. My mother, still flourishing mightily as she stops steadfastly and placidly along the richly-remembered road that leads on to nonagenarian distinction, had previously been headmistress of Bunny School, and she saw to it that my life was not without its periods of study at her knee. Possibly I learned considerably more than those who daily attended the village old dame school.

No.2 Schoolboy memories

At 6 years of age my name was entered on the registers of Bunny School by that respected head master and strict disciplinarian, Mr H S Watson, who afterwards became head of Cotgrave School. Here there was much work to be done - work of the good old-fashioned style. Paragraphs from history and geography text books had to be memorised, lists of dates learned and tables - yes, up to 20 times - droned parrot fashion until it was well-nigh impossible to forget them. No games period, no handicrafts, no broadcast lessons, no

school cinematograph, no New Art, no drama - nought but real sound work that was never forgotten.

Reading books were few, and long before we had been in any particular class for a year, we had memorised by repeated reading round and round the class every chapter, and could recite every word from memory, when our turn came round, without once referring to the text.

Physical training was taken on the roadway in fine weather, on that triangular piece of ground lying between the park wall, the old school and almshouses, built by Sir Thomas Parkyns, and Towle's farmhouse. In bad weather dumb-bell exercises were taken in school to the strains of the wheezy old harmonium.

The Concert

At dinner-time, those of us who did not return home played marbles in the roadway, caught tadpoles and minnows in Fairham Brook, or climbed Bunny Hill and sent our iron hoops careering down the slope towards the brickyard. Once the older boys of the school were taken in a cart drawn by a slow-trotting nag all the way to Cotgrave, via Keyworth and Plumtree, to play a cricket match. Our newly appointed head master the late Mr John Arthur Townsend accompanied us.

At an earlier date while I was still a very small boy, the scholars of Bunny School gave a concert. The great lady from the hall - who rode about in a coach and pair, with footmen in attendance, and to whom we boys very humbly doffed our caps, while the girls curtsied, as was the fashion of the countryside - was seated there on a specially cushioned seat in the front row. Farmers and their wives, farm labourers and other simple country folk flocked in to hear us sing, recite and drill. There was no stage scenery in those days, and no fancy costumes - just homely songs, recitations of the "Lucy Grey", "We are Seven" and "Grays Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" type of simple dialogues, and dumb-bell exercises to the strains of the asthmatical harmonium. I remember that I had been chosen to recite, and very nervous, very short-tongued was I as I lisped:

"When I drow up to be a man,
I'll be kind to my movver if I tan,
and I tan!"

After 40 years I still remember those words, even though the purport may have been dimmed at times.

Floods

What fun we had when the rains of winter came and Fairham Brook overflowed its banks. The water swept down to the Rancliffe Arms where, for many years, Mrs Hind held sway behind the tap-board, and where brake parties pulled in to

stretch their legs and quaff the home-made brew. It turned up the village street and crept around the ancient church.

Then at times there would be another flood at Towle's stile, effectively cutting off Bradmore children from the school. Of course we could have taken off our boots (no shoes in those days for either girls or boys) and stockings and paddled through the flood-water, but a day's holiday was greatly to be preferred; so we usually played by the edge of the flood, watched the farm carts go through, refused quickly and decisively any offers of a lift and eventually returned home, saturated to the skin.

And in the village of Bunny when the floods swept down from the overloaded brook, pigs and fowls were hurriedly carried upstairs for safety. With grunting piglets beneath the bed and chickens perched on the bedrail, has many a cottager slept the hours of night away.

When the flood has risen unexpectedly during the night, housewives and husbands have come downstairs on a dark winter's morning to step knee-deep in the muddy waters of a flooded kitchen and to find their boots swimming round the table, and chairs floating into the fireplace.

Postman and Tailor

In my boyhood days the village postman was old John Mills. His legs were almost useless and he rode astride his patient donkey to his plot of land along Moor Lane. He delivered letters both at Bunny and Bradmore, jogging along in his postman's cart drawn by a knowing horse that pulled up as near to every doorway as it could manage. Then old John blew a shrill blast on his whistle, and the letters were handed out from the cart.

If by chance a householder had not risen when the whistle shrilled, old John could sometimes be persuaded to tie the letters to his whiplash, flick the cord through an open bedroom window, and wait until the missives were released by the night-shirted recipient.

At this time too, a well-known Bradmore character was Mr Yates, the village tailor. He lived at the top of Far Street, near the old mill, carried needle and thread about with him, and sat cross-legged on a table-top to ply his trade. What a marvellous man we boys thought him. With awe and admiration I have stood, my head barely reaching the table-top, as Mr Yates has sat like some Eastern Buddha on the well-scrubbed board, and have watched him as, mouth full of pins, he has worked at some alteration or adjustment to a suit or coat for my father. Mr Yates fashioned his suits with no long-rolled lapels, shapely waists or stylishly hanging trousers. But he used good cloth, excellent linings, and strong thread, and he made suits that stood up to the hard wear of the countryside.

When old age crept on and trade declined, this worthy village tailor retired to the quietude of Bunny almshouses, where so many men and women of simple worth have passed the eventide of their lives.

No.3 Village Games

Many a happy hour we spent in the old mill at the top of the village. Hutchinson's mill we called it, but nought remains today except a grassy mound and a few half-buried timbers to tell of lazily-turning sails, of groaning millstones, and of the busy trade of the village miller. Even the Bradmore family of Hutchinson is now dispersed to the four corners of the land, and far beyond. Duckstone and lurky in First Street, almost beneath the shade of the old church-less steeple, were favourite games of 40 years ago, while in the summertime certain youths gathered in our home-close and plied the bat and ball with great vigour and very little classic skill.

The pitch was bumpy; the stumps were stackyard thatchpegs; the old leather ball was well worn and oft stitched by the local saddler; and the bat was often a home-made one carved roughly from a chunk of willow. It had no spring handle, and jarred tremendously, but the hours of sheer enjoyment spent on that rustic cricket pitch are now almost sacred memories.

Playmates

Fox and hounds down Bradmore moors was a grand game for moonlit evenings. Off went the fox, and after the lapse of an agreed period of time the eager hounds followed. Over hedge and ditch, along meadow footpath, across the muddy lane went the chase, ever and anon the elusive fox giving a loud cry to guide the seeking hounds. If the fox failed to call at regular intervals the leader of the hounds would cup hand to mouth and call loudly into the moonlit night:

"If you don't holler

Our dogs won't foller!"

Well do I recall the names of those who hunted the moorlands in those far-distant days before picture houses and the radio called the rustics to the nearby town or to the entertainments of their own firesides. Billy and Tom Collins; Charlie, Tom and Harry Hornbuckle; Fred and Len Hutchinson, cousins, not brothers; Ira Lewis, and Fred Johnson - just a handful of those now long since absent from the village, and in one case at any rate lying beneath a foreign sky, where the roar of battle once raged and the wings of Death hovered low overhead.

By way of a change, my brothers and I would take our old mealcart - a crude and weirdly fashioned rival of the pram - to Old Bradmore, a waste meadow on the Plumtree Lane. There we would drag the strange contraption up the steep and grassy bank in the corner of the field, and

steer it in headlong career down towards the hedge and willow-lined ditch in the hollow. We experienced many thrills, suffered many spills, and collected a colossal amount of clayey mud on clothing and boots.

In the middle of Old Bradmore stood a circular cow-pond. Sticky clay surrounded it, and I firmly believed the old village tale that the ancient village of Bradmore had once been built in this very meadow; that a stupendous upheaval had buried every habitation; and that the spire of the church might still be seen - when the water in the pond sank sufficiently - protruding through the mud in the very centre of the pond. Many a time have I poked about in the mud with a hedge-stake in a vain effort to locate the elusive weathervane, the only tangible outcome of my efforts being muddy boots and soiled stockings.

A Ducking

Talking of ponds reminds me of that slime-covered pool in the stackyard of the last farm on the Bunny side of the village. Gadd's Farm it was called in my early days, Mr and Mrs Gadd with their children, stock and implements moving into the farmstead next to ours on the very day of my birth.

In the middle of the pond lay an old barrel, and we boys (Tom and Fred Challands and Georgie Hallam, in addition to myself) were endeavouring to push it to the side so that we might take it in turns to paddle ourselves round the pond. With a long clothes prop I pushed with all my might, the barrel moved, and turned completely over; the prop slipped and I followed it with great momentum and a terrific splash into the foul waters of the stagnant pool. My brave comrades fled, and left me to my fate. I swallowed slimy weed and slimier mud, wallowed in the clinging filth and eventually emerged bedraggled and offensive to the smell. Slowly I crossed the stackyard, climbed the fence and entered our farmhouse "wash'us", announcing my arrival with the squelch of sodden boots and the aroma of stinking putridity.

A Bull's Eye

Another boyish prank was connected with one of the very early motor-cars. Living as we did beside the turnpike road, we were well situated to view those early chugging, groaning contraptions that painfully braved the ruts and stones of our first-class road.

It was conker time. We boys had collected a good store of chestnuts from the trees by Bunny's ancient pinfold, and had bored holes and threaded them on string to season. One conker had been overlooked, and remained in my pocket. One day when a load, alarming chug-chugging heralded the approach of a motor car, some imp of mischief made me grasp the smooth-skinned chestnut between thumb and finger and hurl it

with all my force at the snorting vehicle. It hit squarely amidships. I ducked behind the farmyard wall and waited, with fast-beating heart. The driver of the juggernaut pulled to a complaining halt, got out and made towards me, so, with terror in my soul, I turned and fled. Over the farmyard wall I dived, dropped into the lane and raced for the fields. Past Hutchinsons' orchard I flew, and across the "Winyards", a pleasant, path-intersected pasture, so called maybe because of its open position, finding as it does the winds that blow across the open moors from the westward and consequently christened the "wind-yards"; or alternately named "vine-yards" on account of its propensity for growing vines in the distant days when the manor house stood just over its northern edge, with a fair vista to the southward over Fairham valley, Bunny Woods and the hills of Charnwood in the hazy distance.

Over the high stile, across Moor Lane, into Randalls' meadow (where we skated on the pond in wintertime) and on past Stafford's barn to my father's moorland meadows.

Long I lingered in the solitude of the moors, until with the return of courage and the pangs of hunger calling me homeward, I slowly retraced my steps, climbed the stackyard wall, threaded my way between the stacks of corn and hay, traversed the farmyard, looked carefully over the wall beside the highway, and finding no trace of the car or its owner, ventured into the house. ever again did I throw conkers at passing motor cars!

No.4 The Old Farm House

What a grand old farmhouse I was born in! A massive structure, solidly built of hand-made bricks, it stands firm as a rock beside the turnpike road. Six rooms on the ground floor, five bedrooms above, four usable attics, plus a rush-floored bogey hole perched up beneath the rafters of the most ancient portion of the house. There starlings and house sparrows built their untidy nests of hay and straw filched from the stackyard. Then there were two huge cellars with brick benches and recesses for beer barrels and milk pancheons.

The "brew'us" next to the kitchen, which took the place of the more modern scullery, contained not a white porcelain sink, an electric washer, a gas stove and tiled walls, but a gigantic brewing copper - a relic of the days when that part of the house had been a wayside tavern - and an enormous baker's oven, where bread was baked and huge pies cooked for those callers who preferred to lay a solid foundation for their beer. A weird and wonderful puclet stove beside the massive old fireplace in the oak-beamed kitchen also spoke of distant days of rustic comfort for

the inner man.

The Hide-out

In the bedroom above - the room with the old four-poster bed - was an ancient recess beside the broad chimney stack, boarded across and papered over. I was sure the landlord of the ancient tavern hid his money bags there in the wild lawless days of footpads and flintlock guns. I was confident Dick Turpin found sanctuary in that spot on one of his wild rides to York. I assured myself that some bold rebel spy from Lambert Simnel's forces, watching the advance of Henry VII from Coventry through Leicester, Loughborough, Bunny and Bradmore, on his way to offer combat in the Field of the Red Gutter at East Stoke, by the silvery Trent near Newark, had lain securely hidden there as the royal forces passed. I was certain that Cavaliers had crept safely to that bedroom hidey-hole as breastplated Ironsides mounted the wide staircase with heavy tread and ready pikes, and nought could convince me but that treasure, rich and rare, lay in the blackness of that cavity.

Alas for my dreams! The estate bricklayer Ernest Belton uncovered the roof over that very spot in order to place new tiles in position, and declared that the cavity was empty of everything but spiders.

A Heath-Robinson Dream

The mangle-room at the end of a long passage was a good play room on a showery day. It was a huge square room housing a mangle, the like of which I have never seen since my boyhood days. A huge frame of solid timber, some 10 feet long and 4 wide, carried a large rectangular wooden box of slightly smaller dimensions which was filled with stones. This box rested on heavy wooden rollers, and was moved backwards and forwards by means of a handle and rope.

On mangling days the handle was turned till the stone-filled box reached the extremity of the run, when it tipped slightly, allowing a roller to be removed. The newly-washed clothes were then carefully wrapped round the roller - a slow, laborious business - the roller was replaced and the handle turned in the opposite direction in order to roll the box to the other end of the base. Here the process was repeated with the second roller. Then the actual work of mangling began. Backwards and forwards went the heavy stone-laden box, and with many a squeak and groan this Heath-Robinson contraption performed its weekly task. Then of course the rollers had to be removed, the clothes unwrapped, and the whole process repeated until all the wash had been mangled.

On either side of the fireplace in the mangle room was a large closet or cupboard, one of which housed for many a year an old bell-mouthed blunderbuss, and an ancient flintlock shotgun,

complete with rusty bayonet, a relic of the days when some long-dead ancestor had acted as the village constable.

Next to the mangle room was the "little room" as we called it. Its brown-washed walls were lined with books, and here my sister and I studied for our examinations.

And what of our attics? Some of them had had the glass removed from their windows in those peculiar days when windows were taxed, while the door of one room had painted on it a date in the 18th century and the words "Dairy and Cheese Room", thus exempting that particular room from payment of window tax.

In the garrets too were stored the apples from the garden trees, ripening apples nestling on a bed of straw.

No.5 Local Characters

One of the bright spots of the year for the boys of Bradmore was Whit Monday. Not only was it the occasion of the annual Sunday School party, following the Anniversary of the previous day, but it was the one day in the year when John Warden of Keyworth set up a tiny stall beside Bunny church wall, nearly facing the Rancliffe Arms. Here were set out penny tin whistles, ha'penny brooches showing Queen Victoria's head, and during the Boer War period those of Lord Roberts, Kitchener, French, Buller and White as well; cardboard horns of the kind usually popular with the patrons of horse-drawn brake parties and wagonette outings, farthing sticks of toffee and other odds and ends calculated to delight the boys and girls of that simple age.

A few weeks ago Mr and Mrs Warden, who still reside at Keyworth, celebrated their diamond wedding. Mr Warden, although 80 years of age, is still hale and hearty and frequently drives his car, known locally as "The Bluebird", into Nottingham. Mrs Warden, who is a native of Keyworth, met her future husband when the Midland Railway line was built from Melton Mowbray to Nottingham.

After 4 years' work on the line, Mr Warden decided to settle down in this delectable corner of South Notts. He founded a very successful greengrocery business, visiting the surrounding villages with his pony and barrow on certain days each week.

Mr and Mrs Warden had a family of 9, of which number only a son - who carries on his father's business - and a daughter survive. They have, however, 14 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

The Shop on Wheels

Keyworth provided another weekly visitor to Bradmore - Mr Sam Wright, general dealer. Every Saturday afternoon, year in, year out, a

sharp rat-tat on the "wash'us" door proclaimed the fact that Sam Wright or his brother, Albert, had arrived.

Needles and thread, garter elastic, paraffin, vinegar, cough syrup, cups, pancheons, boot laces, clothes lines, lamp glasses, tumblers, clothes pegs, wash-tubs - Sam Wright could supply the lot. His business is still flourishing, and Sam himself is still going strong.

In my boyhood days our tiny village shop was not exactly a richly-stocked emporium, so that the weekly visits of John Warden and Sam Wright were greatly appreciated. Serious shopping meant a visit to Nottingham, and could not be undertaken except on market Days when Dick Jackson, with his carrier's van drawn by a patient old horse, plied between Bunny, Bradmore and Nottingham.

Hard plank seats down either side of the covered van accommodated the shoppers, the space down the centre being occupied with pats of butter, baskets of eggs, trussed fowls and homegrown vegetables for Mr Jackson's country-produce stall in the old market square of Nottingham.

This same van was used to convey the scholars of Bradmore Wesleyan Sunday School on their annual outing to Clifton Grove or Nottingham Arboretum. And that was indeed a true adventure for the children of the village.

What fun to race through the Grove, or take part in the games. The greatest thrill of all, however, was passing along Arkwright Street, Carrington Street, and the Market Place en route to the Arboretum. Jog-trot went the horse over the cobblestones, while the tram bells clanged impatiently behind us. We looked through the tiny rear window of the van at the approaching tram, certain in our country ignorance that the great raging monster would run us down and trample us under foot.

Known to everyone for miles around was Dick Jackson, expert gardener and member of the village choir. Alas, his deep base voice will echo no more among the oaken rafters, but his eldest son, Tom, plays the organ in Ruddington Parish Church.

The Dead Dog

In the commentary on local characters one cannot fail to recall Arthur Henson whose little cottage beside the turnpike road was demolished some years ago. "Old Arthur" as everyone at Bradmore called him, once "killed" his dog and buried its carcass deep in his farmyard manure heap. Some little while later an observer might have noticed a strange and unaccountable upheaval in that self-same dung-hill. Then a wild, dishevelled head appeared, followed by body, and a few moments later a whining, trusting dog was wagging its tail pathetically beside the cottage door. Old Arthur was

dumbfounded. he was sure his dog was dead and buried, yet here it was beside his door. "Dal it!" he muttered to himself, "I'll let it live!".

Old Arthur had the threshing machine once a year to thresh his little stack of corn. It was the local custom for the engine-driver and his mate to dine with the farmer whose corn was being threshed. Consequently David Holwell, the driver, and George Oliver, his mate, both of Ruddington, did not look forward with joy to a day's threshing for Old Arthur. They knew from past experience that dinner was likely to be a very meagre repast, but on one occasion at least, the two conspired to enjoy a really good meal.

They left their work ever and anon to peel potatoes, to stoke up the kitchen fire, and to scour certain pots and pans. On one occasion they were absent from their stackyard duties for quite a lengthy period of time. What were they doing? Why, catching, killing, plucking and dressing the old barnyard cockerel, to be sure! A bird of uncertain parentage and hoary history, it was at length placed in the pot and left to boil. Dinner-time arrived, the engine whistle shrilled the "Cease work" and David, George and their host repaired to the kitchen to enjoy a well earned repast. But alas! no amount of boiling could transform a tough retainer into a tender and succulent youngster; and the once-dead dog enjoyed both bones and flesh, and for one occasion in his woeful life partook of a sumptuous repast.

No.6 The Stone-Breakers

As we Bradmore boys wended our way along the highway to Bunny School we passed the stone-breaker, and sometimes paused to watch him at his task. At Keyworth-lane end, as well as at the big bend in the turnpike road, where a wide grassy verge and a stile set into the hedgerow beneath the ancient elm trees betokened a field path leading to Hutchinson's-lane and Farmers'-street, were always to be found huge heaps of field stones. These had been gathered by painstaking diligence on the part of certain Bradmore ladies who, at certain seasons of the year, supplemented their slender incomes by working in the harvest fields, gathering potatoes, hoeing turnips and gleaning the golden stubbles.

When no such interesting work offered, they still turned their leisure time to good account by stone-gathering in the fallow fields and stubbles. Farmers were only too pleased to grant these ladies the freedom of their fields, that boulders harmful to ploughshare and scythe might be removed.

Many a ton of smooth-surfaced stone has been gathered and placed in heaps on the headlands by such well-remembered stalwarts as Mrs Harriet Smith and old Bessie James. The heaps of stones thus gathered were carted by the farmers of the

village to the usual heaping places, there to provide unceasing toil for the patient stone-breaker.

The Big Hammer

The sturdy figure of old Mac Hardy, of Ruddington, was daily to be seen by the wayside in my boyhood days, as his mighty hammer cracked the boulders and sent up showers of sparks as though from a blacksmith's anvil. Mac Hardy wore rough goggles to protect his eyes from flying chips of stone; his swarthy face was deeply tanned by sun and wind; and his muscles bulged ominously as he raised his huge hammer in threat of calamitous retribution if we schoolboys took his precious stones to throw at sparrows in the hedgerow.

Then there was Neddie Cumberland, of Bradmore, who also plied the big hammers of the stone-breaker. He met a sad end, for he fell off the front of a cart or wagon on Gotham Lane, Bunny, and a wheel passed over his body, so seriously injuring him that he never recovered. I remember the day of his accident well. I was sitting on the wall, watching for a friend to play with, when a light cart passed. From the depths of the vehicle came a heart-rending groan, a sound I have never forgotten. No childhood happening is more vividly stamped on my memory than poor old Neddie's groan of anguish as that jolting cart rumbled slowly along the rutted highway carrying a broken body to its humble home.

Bradmore Lighthouse

Stone-breakers were paid by the ton, but the smashed stone was not weighed. It was carefully packed in rectangular heaps which were measured by the local assessor, a certain cubic measurement (which no-one now appears to recall) representing a ton. It was a strenuous task, and poorly paid, so that the crime of taking broken stones from the prepared heap by thoughtless schoolboys was heinous indeed, and almost deserving of confinement in the village stocks which, long before my time, stood at the junction of Hutchinson's Lane and Farmers' Street, near Miss Lucy Attewell's house, and facing the short piece of roadway leading to the turnpike road where the maypole once stood. How long a time it is since a maypole was plaited there one cannot even conjecture, but the name still clings, although, since the erection of a solitary street lamp on the site, certain humorous bus conductors have been heard to call out to their passengers "Anybody for Bradmore Lighthouse?"

Near the village stocks there stood in my boyhood days an old tumble-down cottage which on demolition disclosed the fact that at least one gravestone had been used in its construction. This seems to support the theory that Bradmore

Church once possessed its own burial ground, a supposition strengthened by the discovery in the garden to the west of the old church tower - a garden rented for many years by Dick Jackson, the village carrier - of a varied assortment of human bones.

But to return to the heaps of stones - they were used by the local authority, the parish meeting of village farmers, to repair its own village streets and that section of the turnpike road coming within the parish boundaries.

Great care was taken not to overstep these boundaries, and for that reason they were very clearly defined. A post on the grass verge away over Spinney Hill, near the site of an ancient windmill long since demolished, and a few yards on the Bradmore side of Long Farm Lane, marked the spot where Bradmore and Ruddington parishes merged; while to the south of the village another post near "The Rowends" - where the waters of a ditch ran by way of a culvert, under the roadway - marked the spot where Bunny parish commenced.

In passing, the name Rowends is supposed to be a local adaptation of Rowans, so it signifies the place where rowans or mountain ash trees grew. Although there is not a single mountain ash in the vicinity now, the old name still clings as it has done for generations past.

It may also be of interest to recall that a few yards on the Bunny side of the parish boundary post, in the roadside corner of a little meadow, once stood a shadowy pond overhung with tall bushes and a willow tree. This sinister pool was supposed to be haunted by the ghost of someone who had once been drowned there, and even in broad daylight we boys were none too fond of climbing the fence and exploring that particular corner of the field.

Opposite this pond - long since filled in - and across the broad highway, stands the house built by the late Mr H S Watson, headmaster of Bunny School, who retired to this spot at the conclusion of his scholastic career.

The turnpike road through Bradmore was, in my boyhood days, a rutty, dust-layered track in summer and a veritable quagmire in winter.

True, the ruts were levelled and filled in with stones and caked mud, but the constant passage of farm carts laden with corn or hay, turnips or manure, soon laid open the ruts again; while the footpath became a long succession of ridges and hollows following the daily parade of milk cows to and from the nearby fields, for these animals invariably follow in each other's footsteps when walking in file.

No.7 Boyhood Pranks.

The advent of the bone-shaker to the village raised a storm of protest - and many a cloud of

dust. The gay young "bloods" of the nineties loved to "scorch" along the highway at a tearing ten miles an hour, leaving behind them thick clouds of dust that covered the hedges with a thick white blanket.

But the patient farm horses and the spirited nags were not accustomed to such monstrosities, and immediately developed the jitters.

It was Mrs Elliott who expressed her feelings nobly on this subject on one occasion at least. Driving towards Bunny, along the turnpike road, she met a reckless rider astride his "boneshaker". She pulled in her restive nag, and in no uncertain voice told the dust-covered "velocipedean" what she thought of him and his two-wheeled contraption. She declared him to be a menace to the community and a disgrace to the village. What Mrs Elliott and other Victorian dames of the countryside would say today of speeding motor cars, careering coaches and roaring aeroplanes boggles the imagination.

A Smelly Process

My two brothers were the proud owners of a boneshaker - co-partners in this "menace of the highways". The vehicle's solid tyres occasionally came loose, and threw them. If the back tyre came unstuck, its loose end had a nasty knack of striking the rider forcibly in the small of the back, painfully reminding him of a repair job to be carried out.

This ritual was invariably performed in the mangle-room. A lighted candle applied to the rim melted the evil-smelling composition solution and completed the removal of the tyre. Then fresh solution was run into the rim, the tyre replaced, and the burning candle once more applied in order to melt the composition sufficiently to force it to grip tightly. It was a long and smelly job, and the odour clung to the house for days afterwards. There were no punctures in those days, and what with rutty roads, sharp-pointed stones cracked by the stonebreaker, and a galaxy of thorns left on the highway by careless hedge trimmers, it is really fortunate that pneumatic tyres had not come into general use.

One brake only was supplied with the boneshaker and that, when applied, jammed down hard on the tyre of the front wheel causing the machine to kick and, as often as not, to deposit its rider in handy mud-ruts or a wayside patch of nettles.

We boys knew where blackberries hung in clustering bunches on bright September days; where mushrooms could be gathered by the basketful; where crab-apples might be had for the picking; where magpies and wood pigeons built their nests. I once climbed laboriously to the summit of a tall hawthorn hedge in the heart of Bradmore moors, carefully and painfully wormed my arm through the tangled thorns of the huge domed nest, and removed the magpie's eggs that

reposed within. I placed them in my pocket and commenced to descend. The frail branch on which I stood bent downwards beneath my weight, and precipitated me into the heart of the nettle-tangled ditch beneath. My clothing was torn, my body a pincushion of thorns, my hands and face well nettled and, worst of all, my jacket pocket was a sticky mass of putridity. Nor was that the only occasion on which I tore my clothing. I was playing on a hay cart in the stackyard one Sunday afternoon, when I tore the seat of my brand new trousers on a protruding nail. One of my elder brothers gallantly came to the rescue. He fetched needle and thread from the house and painstakingly stitched the rent together. The only kind of sewing he was accustomed to was that of bodging up holes in corn sacks with the aid of thick string and a huge curved bagging needle, so I am afraid the later condition of my Sunday pants was little better than the first. Howbeit, all went well until bedtime. Then when I attempted to remove the offending garment I discovered to my horror that trousers and shirt were securely sewn together. My mother's aid had to be sought; the whole story of the catastrophe was told and my heinous crime of playing on the Sabbath Day was revealed in all its infamy.

Oft-times I tore my hand-knitted black stockings, too, on barbed wire or hedgerow brambles. When that happened I immediately searched the farm yard for the moulted feather of one of our black leghorn hens, carefully inserted it betwixt white flesh and black stocking, fastened up my garters, and hoped for the best. But my mother's eyes were keen, and even if not immediately the "cat was out of the bag" as soon as washing day came round.

Mushrooms

Mushrooming was great fun, for those who managed to get away with their spoils. Mushroom gatherers arrived late at night with huge baskets, having walked from Nottingham. They slept in a wayside ditch, or beside a haystack until the first rays of returning dawn showed. Then they arose and worked fast and furiously, for if they happened to have chosen for the scene of their labours any of the fields farmed by the late Mr Thomas Walker, they had little chance of making a successful haul. At 5 o'clock or shortly afterwards, when the cows had to be fetched up for milking, there would be a sudden clatter of galloping hoofs on Plumtree Lane, a gate would be flung open, and a horseman would come tearing across the dewy meadow, whip or rabbit gun in hand. The mushroomers dropped their spoils and ran for the nearest hedgerow gap, and Will Walker, Mr Thomas Walker's son, slid from the saddle, gathered up the scattered fungi, bagged them,

placed the sack before his saddle, and rode triumphantly homeward.

In passing I would like to pay a tribute to the sterling worth of Mr Thomas Walker, "father" of Bradmore Wesleyanism, inspirer of the new Sunday School, parish councillor, local preacher, guide, philosopher and friend to many a poor and troubled village person. It was indeed a sad blow to the village when he passed away.

No.8 -Village Excitements

Never shall I forget that dark, cold dawn when the dread cry of "Fire!" woke me from my slumber. I sat up, rubbed my eyes and saw to my horror a flickering light playing on my bedroom window. I leapt out of bed, thinking the old farmhouse was burning, but as I reached the window the cry rang out again "Fire! Fire! Our wagon hovel's on fire!" It was the voice of Mr Hallam, bailiff of my uncle's farm next door - the last farm on the right of the turnpike road as one leaves the village for Bunny and Loughborough. I realised at once that the flickering light I had seen emanated from his wildly swaying lantern, the candlelight of which he played on our bedroom windows in order to arouse us the quicker. My father and my elder brothers quickly rose, partly dressed, then hurried away to assist in putting out the fire. Every available bucket was brought into commission, and very soon the flames were extinguished, thanks to a good supply of water from the farmyard pump and from the very cow-pond into which I had fallen a short time before.

Investigations led to the supposition that a tramp had sought refuge from the biting wind in my uncle's wagon-hovel. He had made for himself a cosy bed of straw and had covered himself down with empty sacks. No harm in that, you say? Certainly not, but unfortunately he had enjoyed a smoke before dropping off to sleep and had set fire to his comfortable bed. Doubtless the flame and smoke awoke him and fearing the consequences of his act, he had unceremoniously fled into the darkness of the surrounding countryside, leaving the early-rising farm bailiff to discover the outbreak and to fight the flames as best he might.

Galloping Horses

Another fire, and one that was as spectacular as it was disastrous, occurred at Long Farm, out in the moor fields. Mr Philo Mills, the American farmer and cattle breeder, was the owner of Long Farm at that time with Mr Jabez Harrison as his resident farm bailiff. The huge rickyard filled to capacity with stacks of corn and hay, the complete harvest of some of England's most fertile acres, Dutch barns crammed to the roof with stacks of clover, hay and straw, cattle in the sheds around, horses in the stables, the farmhouse

nearby and a pitiful lack of water! Such was the setting when the curtain of fire arose. Hundreds of village people from Bradmore, Bunny, Ruddington, Gotham and even farther afield scrambled over hedge and ditch to render what assistance they could. The Nottingham Fire Brigade turned out, panting horses galloping along the turnpike road and up the long farm lane.

“Make way there, make way there! the horses are flying,
The sparks from their swift hoofs shoot higher and higher,
The crowds are increasing - the gamins are crying:
‘Hooray boys! hooray boys! Come on to the fire!’
With clanging and banging and clatter and rattle,
The long ladders follow the engine and hose.
The men are all ready to dash into battle,
But will they come out again? God only knows!”

Hundreds of yards of hose were led out to field ponds and the farmyard pump. Heroic firemen worked unceasingly at the hand pumps, willing villagers eagerly taking their turn at the pumps or into the bucket chains. Deeds of daring were performed as wild-eyed cattle and maddened horses were released from their scorched and blistered stalls. The iron supports of the Dutch barns sagged and twisted grotesquely in the intense heat as rick after rick was enveloped by the insatiable flames.

Standard Topic of Conversation

My eldest brother Will took me to see the fire, after a good deal of coaxing. Up the village street we went to the top of Moor Lane, and over the stile and down the sloping fields in the murky dusk. I stumbled in the furrows and the clayey ruts, and completed the journey, to my entire satisfaction, astride my brother's shoulders. Unlike the farmer and the labouring firemen, I thoroughly enjoyed one of the most spectacular scenes it has ever been my lot to witness. The fire at Long Farm was the standard topic of conversation for many a day afterwards, and hundreds of sightseers in the weeks that followed flocked from near and far to view the ruin and desolation following the most disastrous outbreak of fire that had occurred in the Bradmore district for many a year.

No.9 Chuckles, and Farewell

The massive homestead at the corner of Far Street and Farmers Street was rented in my later boyhood days by a Mr Stafford. Austere, he was, and “dead nuts” on trespassers and poachers, so we boys maintained a wary eye whenever we sought mushrooms or blackberries in any of his fields. Equally severe was his good wife, who

mixed but little with the village people.

Mr Stafford had a meadow in the moors, and the moorland footpath ran along the edge of this field and by an old open wooden shed. Here swallows built their mud nests on the rafters, but we village boys never dared to enter the shed unless one of our number remained outside as a very vigilant sentry, so great was our dread of being caught. This Mr Stafford was no observer of the Sabbath, and had been known to turn his hay on a Sunday afternoon. Little wonder that we boys, brought up in the strict Wesleyan creed, fully expected the old farmer to sprout horns and change himself into a personification of the devil at any moment. Mr Stafford's farmhouse is now owned by the Misses Pyatt, well loved people who not only interest themselves in the welfare of Bradmore and Bunny folks, but who offer sanctuary, hospitality and care to any and every sick or stray animal or bird of the vicinity. But in my very young days of the placid nineties, Tommy Morris is was who occupied the house and rented the farm from Miss Hawksley, the lady of the manor.

The Battered “Topper”

A quaint old fellow was Mr Morris, and one who unflinchingly donned his ancient “topper” of a Sunday. How many long years he had worn it none could tell. Doubtless it was his wedding hat, but since that happy day, it had been put to many strange uses.

Like all good farmers' wives, Mrs Morris made the butter week by week. She skimmed off the cream from each day's milking, and placed it in a huge pancheon in her capacious cellar. One churning day she took up her well filled pancheon of cream, poured the contents into her church, screwed down the lid and patiently turned the handle. Alas! When the butter was set and the lid removed, what did she find but the carcass of a bruised and battered rat within the churn. Unfortunately no one can recall what happened to the butter. Sad it is that village history is so lacking in its finer points!

There was one Bradmore farmer of long standing who, despite the fact that his farming prospered, continually assured every inquirer after his welfare that times were deplorably bad, that he could not even afford a new suit of clothes, and that the time was rapidly drawing near when he must of necessity thatch his naked body with straw.

That a large appetite and a small oven are not conducive to marital bliss was evinced in my boyhood days in the case of at least one village household, but the housewife concerned overcame the difficulty in magnificent style by moulding pasties that actually turned the corner of the oven, in the shape of a gigantic letter L. With one of these jam-filled monsters in his dinner basket, plus a bottle of cold tea, all was

well with the husband and peace reigned once again in the humble cottage by the village street. Threshing day was a huge delight. Under the able superintendence of William Challands, our faithful and long-serving waggoner, our horses and those of our neighbours were harnessed to the great engine, to the massive drum, and to the long straw picker, and away they went from the stackyard where threshing had just been completed, along the village street and in at our gateway. A crack of the long whip, a horse command, and the incline was tackled in fine style, the machines coming to rest beside some well built corn sack in our compact rickyard. The engine chimney was pulled to the upright, the great fire stoked up, the water butt filled, the belt fixed, and the master of ceremonies - David Holwell - started the engine. Then the sheaves, each with its band deftly cut by a sharp knife, fell rapidly into the feeding trough, the corn piled up in the hooked-on sacks, and the straw heaped itself into great mountains and was dragged up to the summit of the picking machine, to fall gracefully on to the rapidly-forming straw stack below.

When the engine whistle blew, forks were dropped, busy workers wiped perspiring brows, red-spotted handkerchiefs disgorged thick hunks of bread and slices of boiled bacon and bottles of cold tea, which David and his mate retired to the farm kitchen for their midday repast. They sat at the huge oaken sidetable by the wall, and ate their fill of good farmhouse fare. On threshing day the pudding course, which invariably came first, consisted of huge Yorkshire pudding spread thickly with bubbling jam!

Alas, those happy days are over. Yet my heart is still at Bradmore, and ever will be. And may the fair and peaceful village of my birth mean as much to this and to succeeding generations of Bradmore boys and girls as it means to me!