

The following memoir is by Frank Hargreaves Snr.

Overton Memoir

Speaking of the Past March 1991 (From around 1930)

Being an Agricultural, Fishing, Boat-building, Cart-making and Wheelwright and also our own Shops, Post Office, Police Station, Prison, Blacksmith and Undertaker, Local Parish Rural Council with Maintenance Workers for all the Roads, Drains, Stiles, Footpaths and Wrecks on the Marshes brought each day by the incoming Tides, our Parish was nearly Self-sufficient.

In 1930 I was a boy of six years old. All other children in the outlying areas had to walk to Overton Old School, which consisted of three classes. Infants were taught by Miss Gration, Standard 1-2-3 taught by Mr Miller, Classes 4-5-6 taught by the Headmaster, Mr Charles Ward who lived in the schoolhouse. I will produce a photograph of the Headmaster and family at the Schoolhouse. When we reached 9-11 years of age examinations were taken to attend Morecambe Grammar School. If you gained a pass you went free of charge, if you failed a fee of nine pounds was charged for you to attend the school.

Overton School had an attendance of around 60 pupils and we had a very good basic education. In my experience no pupil came out of school who could not read or write. The Headmaster had a kitchen garden and part flower garden which pupils used to dig and set each year. Also the school had its own vegetable garden on Lancaster Rd. it had eight plots, each plot was maintained by a boy and girl for a whole season, the produce was then taken home as it matured. This quarter acre of land is right next to the new Overton School. At this time there were no houses on Lancaster Rd., the first properties to be built were two agricultural houses for farm workers and let by the Rural Council at a rent of 10 shillings per week. These were built in 1940,

Our school playing field was known as Bottom Fields which is today the Pedder Estate. It was then farmed by Mr F.J.Baxter, the farm name being Pedder Farm. I think the name Pedder came from a Rev.T.J.Pedder who owned properties here in earlier times, because the name appears on some of the Pedder Estate Deeds.

The Bottom Fields were used for every occasion in this Parish, being Overton and Districts Sports Field. Sports were held every year around the middle of May, organised by local farmers and villagers. Children's sports 1-30 to 5 o'clock, then tea for all the children. Adults sports 5-30 onwards consisting of all races from 100yards flat to 440, 880, 1mile, 5 mile hill race, Pole Jumping, Long Jump, High Jump, Pillow Fighting, Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling. A lot of these competitions were Open to Lancashire and Cumberland, as we had in this area some quite good athletes. While this was in progress, a Fancy Dress Parade was being held through the village, from the Old School to the Globe Hotel, and prizes were given to the winners. In the evening after the Sports a Dance and Social evening was spent in the Old School. I may say that these events were very successful each year and were carried on up to 1939.

1933-4-5-6

As time moved on our School-master and Teacher retired, and a new School-master took over namely Mr. Wolstencroft who also lived in the School-house, and schooling and games carried on as before. One little difference was a Cane was kept on the Master's Desk, and it was used every day. A very strict discipline was maintained. Around this time a new Vicar came to our Parish, a young man and his wife, Rev. W. Lancaster aged about 28yrs. old. He was a great success in the Parish, he quickly organised a Sports Club, Cricket and Tennis being the games. All the young men rallied round and a Cricket Team and Pitch were soon in play. The ladies also had a very good Tennis Court, it was while we were playing that the German Zeppelin

(Hindenburg) came sailing right over us. It was May time 1936-37, and as we know, it came to a disastrous end when it came to the end of its journey.

Everything in this Parish seems to run so well up to 1939, P.C. Atkinson our policeman had a "Bobby's Job" his worst offenders were people cycling without lights, and young people stealing fruit from local Orchards, of which there were some very good Orchards in this area. Other mischief was on the 4th Nov. when all the garden gates used to disappear.

In the Spring-time the boys used to go to our local Blacksmith Mr. George Jackson whose Shop and Forge was in the Ship Hotel yard to make us a Steel Bowler and Hook, we used to stay and help him make a dozen sets of these, we used to bowl everywhere, up to July our Mid-term break, then it was Whip and top time, in between we would play "Tin-Can-Squash" A can was placed in the centre of Overton Square, and you had to come out of hiding, punch the can and return to hide before the finder caught them. There was very little traffic in those days. In Sep.-Oct. time we used to creep into the Globe Hotel garden and pick up all the chestnuts, take them home and bake them till they were rock hard, then play "Conkers" for the rest of the winter. I remember one lad had 120 victories with his Conker before it got bust.

Other past times the girls and boys used to go swimming in the River Lune, but we always took inflated rubber tyres in case anyone got into trouble. There were some very good swimmers amongst us, after our swim we would all collect "Samforth" which grew wild on the sands on Sunderland Marsh, also "Water-cress" out of the farm dykes, take this home, wash it well and make thick bread sandwiches and eat until we were bursting.

At week-ends some of us would go to Middleton Sands to watch Motor Cycle Racing and watch the Aeroplanes take people for rides, also there was a small plane called a "Flying Flea" which would often try to take off, but would always finish up with its nose in the sand. While we were there we used to walk the Tidal Wreck Mark from Middleton to Sunderland Point. We found Beach Balls, Rubber Dingies, Small Balls, Messages in bottles, Tennis Rackets, Cricket bats, all these used to be washed up from the beaches of Blackpool and Fleetwood. We were never bored as children, we had no money, but always found something to occupy our time.

Overton Village was very quiet in the 1930s, the traffic was mainly horses and carts or the hired farm workers going to plough or do other jobs. During the evening in the summer all the farmers, farm lads and village lads used to collect under the Old Tree which was situated right opposite Glebe Farm House to discuss what they had been doing the week or to criticize or gossip about any one passing at the time, girls in particular.

Each Whitsuntide April-May and Michaelmas 11th Nov. Farm workers came to the end of a six-month hiring. They would tell the farmer for whom they had spent the last Term, if they were staying another six months, if they left the farmer, they would then be for hire, The Hiring Market was at Lancaster, in the street entering Lancaster Indoor Market. Farmers wanting a servant for a new Term would go to the hiring street, after agreeing wages, clothes and any other conditions, the new servant would be given 1/- they were then classed as hired, and was expected to honour their agreement. It was when these new servants came into the village that new excitements took place, courtship and weddings. A quarter of Overton's population was made up of workers from the Cumberland area settling down here.

About 1937-38 a disaster happened with our Old Tree meeting place. Somebody took a saw late at night and sawed it down. It has never been revealed to this day who was the culprit, this person is still under sentence if he is ever found out, Ever since it happened men have never collected there to talk. In the Winter evenings village men and farm workers would go to the Reading Room built in 1897 which was situated on Lancaster Lane on a piece of ground where the Telephone Exchange is now built. For a subscription of 7/6 we were members for one year, to enjoy Billiards and Darts, read books in front of a big fire and last of all play cards. Our favourite game was playing "Nap" for matches as we had no spare money and I well remember, one lad to this day still owes us 36 boxes of matches. This all came to an end in 1939.

Electricity and Water was brought to this area around 1934-36, Water was laid from Lancaster to Sunderland Point. About 30 men were employed to dig the trenches for pipes. Before this took place the only heat we had was Paraffin Stoves and coal fires, and lamps and candles for light. Paraffin was supplied to our local shop, our biggest problem was getting Carbine for our cycle lamps, 1/2 doz. Pieces of carbine in the bottom cylinder of our lamps would supply the power for our cycle lamps, when we put a match to it at the burner end.

Water was supplied by good Wells and pumped up by hand, there were some very good wells in this Parish. Other methods were to use Windmills to pump up the water from dykes into very large tanks, then piped out to houses or farm stock as required. There were only 4 windmills in this area, the water then was very clean but had to be boiled before being used for human consumption. We got along alright without modern facilities, but what a great relief to all when they were laid on.

We had 2 Public Houses The Ship Hotel which had a wonderful collection of birds eggs, ranging from an Ostrich egg in the centre, in a circular design down to the very smallest egg. They were collected over a period of 50 years by a member of the Jackson family. At weekends the Hotel yard used to be full of Horse Drawn Wagons holding 12 people, and Landaus holding 4 people, out for a tour from Morecambe or Lancaster. On top of this the Ship Hotel yard was also the Corporation Bus Terminus. A small bus called the "Whippet" giving us a good service of, 1/2 past the hour to the Battery Hotel Morecambe, for a fare of 5d, and a return bus at 10 past the hour. This little bus had a capacity of 25 people, but it often had 35 people on board so as not to leave anyone stranded. After the war Double Decker Buses were used but it was dangerous reversing, in the Ship yard and a new Terminus was built on the Blue Potts.

The Rose Gardens at the Ship Hotel were very well kept, also a nice bowling Green at the bottom of the gardens, but I don't recollect a lot of bowling taking place. At the top of the gardens were 6 Public Swings which children regularly used, being in the centre of the village they were very convenient.

The Globe Hotel is at the end of the village, standing on 3 1/2 acres of Gardens, Trees and Parking areas, these garden areas were also very well kept by the Pearson family, with Putting Ground Green and Bowling Greens it used to be very well used. Again the parking used to be full of Landaus and Wagons, also during the week there was a Ribble Bus service to the Village of 4 buses per day. These were very useful to the farmers and Sunderland Point for people shopping, as the service went through to Lancaster.

In this Parish there used to be collected a Corn Tithe and a Dashwood Rent. This began in the year 1824 with 2 men appointed to collect this each year. It was a small fee of 3d to 12d for private houses, and £3 -£4 for Farms. It was then given to our Parish Vicar, to be passed on to the Vicar of Lancaster Parish Church by Whit Sunday of each year.

This collection carried on until the last two collectors died in 1967, after this, builders in this area which built Church

Lane (Probably either Chapel Lane or Church Park), Church Grove, Lancaster Road and Barret Estates were asked to Redeem the "Tithe" which they did do. The "Dashwood Rent" for the Parish was redeemed with a Legacy left by one of the Collectors. I have the old Books concerning these Corn Tithes and Rents but they are not for Public viewing.

1937-8-9-40

One of the great events which took place in 1937 was the Coronation of George 6th and Queen Elizabeth. A television had just been bought by Mr Fred Jackson of Trailholme Farm and we were invited to watch this occasion. It seemed unbelievable that a picture in London could appear on a 14inch box in Overton.

We were now reaching the age of 12 and 13 yrs. of age, which in those days we had to rise at 5.30 every morning and help to hand milk cows, feed all the stock, also make 6 horses ready for work, then go in for breakfast and get ready for school, which began at 9 o'clock and finished at 4 o'clock. When we arrived home we changed into working clothes and again had to help with the

stock feeding, We used to look forward to the 1st May each year, because that was when all our stock was turned out to pasture. When we wanted a day off from school, our attendance officer on his next visit would ask us out in class to enquire "Why we had missed school" and our usual excuse was "My father was building a hen cabin and we had to hold the nails while he knocked them in". We realise now why the officer used to turn his head and smile. I myself left school at the Mid-summer Term instead of the Christmas Term, as a result my father was summoned to County Court and fined a fee of 30 shillings. The next few years were quite hard for us everything was done by hand and walking everywhere, the only mechanisation we had was a self binder. During grain harvest time this was pulled by 3 horses and when it was in use farmers would come from far and wide to watch, because it did away with sickle and scythes. We did not realize at this stage that our future life would be destined by machinery which would do automatically 80 percent of our work.

In 1937 a Japanese family Mr. & Mrs. Kamiya came along to Middleton Towers Farm, then farmed by Mr. L. Baxter and bought the whole farm, and turned it into Middleton Towers Holiday Camp. Chalets, Shops, Pleasure Parks and the main dining hall was built to represent a ship with a large funnel on top, when seen from incoming liners in Morecambe Bay. With accommodation for 3,000 people it was quite successful up to 1939, when all was then taken over by the Military Forces. This also applied to Morecambe Bay Holiday Camp which was situated at Heysham Towers, accommodation 1,000

At 11 o'clock on the 3 Sep. 1939, the Prime Minister declared war on Germany. We as lads of 14 and 15 years wondered, what was to happen next, well, we found out in the next 6 years. All the men from 18 years had to register for Military Service.

1939-1946

World War Two Years One of the first big War Efforts to take place in this area was the purchase of 90 acres of land from local farmers in the Middleton, Heysham areas to build a large munitions Factory. A large number of Irish Navvies were employed to do the rough work, and these people had large huts built to accommodate them all through the war. These workers were paid very high wages and this brought wonderful trade to local shops and particularly to the Ship Hotel Overton, where we had a landlady called Mrs. Macluskie (Ma Mac) in short, who could throw drunks out of her hotel, better than any Police Force. Very sad to say that Mrs. Macluskie lost her oldest son (John Macluskie) in the war he was a fighter pilot (R.A.F.) abroad. Up to 2,000 local people, mainly older men and women were employed. All the young, men and women were called up for the services. Then Anti Aircraft Gun Sites were set up at Meadow Farm Sunderland Point. An area of 20 acres was taken over for the Radar Systems, Searchlight Batteries and Gun Batteries. Another similar site was set up at Middleton, on the site which is now a children's playing area. Also another site was, taken over on Barrows Lane at Heysham. An Air-Raid siren used to sound 30 minutes before any German aircraft would pass over, or raid us. I am very fortunate to say at this point, we never had any serious Bombing Raids in this area all through the war, although we did expect them, with the Factory, Harbour, and so many military personnel in this area.

The only bombs here were at Heysham Golf Course and a stick of bombs along Laureston Avenue Heysham causing casualties and deaths. These were mainly dropped by German Bombers trying to get away from our night fighters and Anti Aircraft Gunners.

The whole parish used to rock when the guns were firing. About 20 R.A.F. men were billeted in Overton in the houses. Their job was to run fire decoys at the East- side of the village, near to Colloway Marsh to distract the Bombers away from Military Targets. Quite a few of these men married local girls, and left us after the war. Also we had 20 evacuee children from the big Southern Cities billeted in our homes where they could be housed. All windows had to be blacked out, cars, motor cycles, bicycles all had to have special hoods on their lights, you were only allowed a small amount of light.

Identity Cards were issued to every person in Britain. Any cards found issued before May 1940 were suspect as German Agents and were reported. Gas Masks were given to everyone and had to be taken everywhere you went. We all had gas Mask training Ration Cards, clothing coupons and Petrol coupons were given to everyone, looking back it was amazing how people could live and work on so little. Anyone caught (Black Marketeering) was heavily fined or put in prison. All the shop counters were empty and food and cigarettes were very hard to get. A householder was allowed to kill two pigs, one before Christmas and one after, all with Ministry Permits only, but no Animal food coupons were allowed to householders. Pigs had to be fed on household waste.

All Farms and Smallholdings were controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. German U-Bosts were sinking such a large tonnage of our Merchant fleet. We were getting desperate, so all farmers were allocated so many acres to plough up, this in the 1st year of the war was very awkward because there was very little ploughing equipment available and also a lot of farmers and workers were not skilled at using them. Our family was skilled at all ploughing work so we had to jump over the hedge and show our neighbours how to set about the job. Big farmers were allowed Fordson Tractors and equipment but small farms had to use horses. To overcome this problem, a local man Mr. W.Ellis took up as an Agricultural Contractor. He was allocated all equipment necessary by the Ministry to do the job. He ploughed, prepared seed beds, cut the grain crops when ripe, thrashed the grain on all the farms, which was an all Winters job from October to March. It would take 10 men to run a thrashing machine, so the farmers had to help each other all season till it was done. All the grain was bagged and weighed in 10 stone Hessian bags, yield were around 27-32 Cwts. Per acre for Oats and up to 40 Cw. Per acre for Wheat. As seasons followed we had to add Beans and Peas to the Oat crops, for more protein in the mixture when fed to our stock, which was all ground up by our Contractor. Along, with this we grew heavy root crops to help out the grain supplies. We were allowed to hire for a day at a time, soldiers from Middleton Towers Camp to assist us to gather our crops, and they used to enjoy it, To them it was like having a day off. We only had 3 Land Army Girls in this area and they did a very good job. One of them married a local farmer. Our clocks in war time were put forward 2 hours this was a real nuisance to us because we harvest by the sun not the clock time.

Everyday as we went about our work, soldiers were in training, creeping up hedgerows or ditches in the daytime. At night they were on exercises in the fields, firing Parachute Flares which used to light the sky like daytime, next morning we used to pick up the parachutes which were made of silk and 3ft. square and make them into handkerchiefs.

In the sky our Bombers and Fighters were continually in training. On one occasion sea 'mist came down quite suddenly and to our surprise 2 R.A.F. Spitfires came down in the next field to where we were working. Out stepped two Polish Pilots completely lost, what a job we had to explain to them where they were in Britain, also pointing on their maps where the nearest airport was. (Blackpool) When the sea mist lifted off they went.

When the call came on the Radio for Volunteers to man the boats to rescue our men at Dunkirk, a small fleet sailed down the River Lune on their way to France and our thoughts and prayers went with them. I do not know how many boats returned, but when the Dunkirk Soldiers returned about 200 came to the Lancaster and Morecambe area and they were in a shocking state, dressed in German Jackets, Pants and Jack Boots. An immediate collection was organised by the Womens Voluntary Service to buy them all free beer in the Hotels. My own best friend came back to Heysham and his first words to me were "Keep out of this Inhuman Hell"

In 1940 the Home Guard, Air-Raid Wardens, Special Constables, and Auxiliary Fire Service were formed. All these sections were mainly old soldiers of World War One. Ex Officers and Regimental Sargeant Majors did all our training, We had two platoons of Home Guard in this area, we served till 1945 and were then demobbed.