



Kildare



The Tales of Dennis Roy Hales





This book contains the local tales of Dennis Hales, as he recalled them to us - Maxine, Katie and Georgia - in his own words. Grandad was keen that these stories weren't to be lost.

Italicised writings are written by us but otherwise the words are Grandad's. The photos included are from Grandad's own collection.

The beautiful drawings of birds and dogs dotted around this book are Grandad's own from his sketchbooks.



During lockdown we took it in turns to note down Grandad's stories while he dictated them to us. This picture was taken during one of those sessions.

Sadly, we didn't get to finish documenting Grandad's wealth of stories but something we know he wanted us to share was that he was from Royal descent. After tracing his family tree for his 90th birthday, we discovered that Grandad was a descendent of Henry III, Plantagenet King of England (1207-1272).





Grandad holding a parasol at Northfleet Green

I was born on the 21st January 1928 at Northfleet Green at Southfleet. They called it Scadbury Farm. There were 6 houses and 2 shops on Downes Road at the sharp turn.

Dennis was the second born son of parents Elizabeth Norgate, of Alton, Hampshire and Harry Hales of Singlewell, Kent. Their first-born son was Donald Hales, who died of pneumonia. He was baptised June 1st 1926.



Grandad's parents Harry and Elizabeth on their wedding day

Mother worked at a hospital for wounded soldiers from the First World War in Roehampton. Father was being nursed there. He was injured in combat. He was in France during the First World War. He joined the army before the war and was in the 11th Hussars. His Father bought him out and war broke out and he had to go in again. He was then in the 17th Lancers and got injured twice, back injuries, in France. Mother worked for a German family in London. She was a cook. She could speak German and do Braille. She was in service 1914-1918.



Grandad at 18 months old



Harry Hales with his horse whip





'The four brothers Albert, Bill, Harry & Ern, taken at Singlewell. If you'll notice they've all got silver watch chains on.'

My Granddad, Bill Hales, came from Hartlip up to Singlewell and took over the Post Office for a while whilst he waited for the farm to become available, it was Craggs Farm at Singlewell. He then rented the farm and farm house.



His wife Abigail (née Deadman) died young. They had 4 boys and 3 girls. Albert Hales, Ern Hales 'Scurry', Harry Hales, Bill Hales. He had 3 sisters - Eva 'Tots', May and Kate.

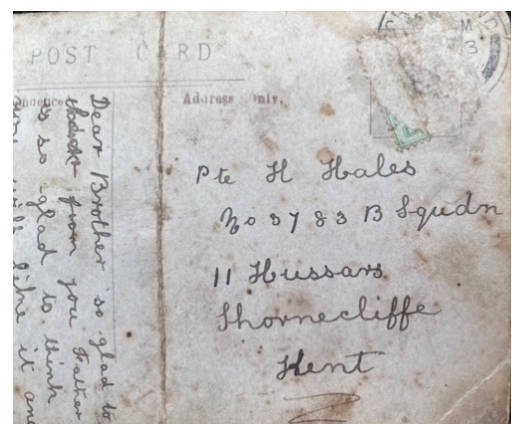
Father also competed at Olympia before First World War then he went in the 11th Hussars. He jumped 6ft 6 inches, in the competition. He was stationed at Shornecliffe. Once married, Harry and Elizabeth, they lived at Craggs Cottage, Singlewell.



Bill Hales (Grandad's Grandfather) with his 4 sons



The cottage at Craggs' Farm

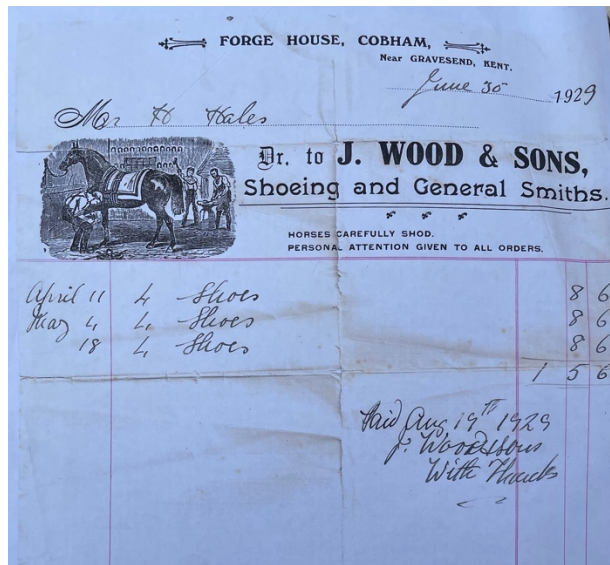


After the war, Father went back to working on farm with Grandfather Bill Hales. Then he went to work for Albert Hales who was a foreman for Edmeades at Southfleet.

Once Edmeades sold the farm to Kemsley that lodged in digs on Old Watling Street near Tollgate, Father went into business on his own. He had 8 heavy horses working on Main Road on Old Watling Street.



Dick Stockman with Edmeades' hounds at Southfleet.



Receipt from horses being shod. It cost 8 and 6 for a pair of shoes



Father bought land on Wrotham Road to build a house. He named it 'Kildare' after where he was stationed in Ireland in Army on horseback. As a baby, we lived at lodgings by the

Tollgate whilst waiting for the bungalow to be built.



Kildare. Still there today. 'The dog's name was Trix'.

Father got hold of some cartridges as they were rationed then and I remember watching him walking down the garden and hearing 2 or 3 bangs and he come up with a couple of rabbits for dinner for the week. Mother used to make pies and the little bolter rabbits, Mother used to fry them for tea.



'In the photo I was 8/9 years old. Was on a Sunday and I went with Father in a lorry on the road. Getting some straw for the cow sheds.'



I went to Meopham School for one day! I had to sit with girls and didn't want to go again.

I very first went to Dover Road, Northfleet – Headmaster Mr Johncot, teachers Mr Terry, Mr Smart PT teacher. Got a bus that went from Meopham to Istead Rise to Singlewell to school. It was open top and lads used to throw their hats off the top. I finished Dover Road when I was 11 years old. I got bit by a dog there and I've still got the scar.

Bomb was dropped on Collier Road at 11 years old. All the boys lost a lot of schooling then. I can

still remember some of teachers' names – Miss Evans, Head was Mr Probert. Bombed when I was 13 and I never went back.

After that, I went to work on the farm. The local blacksmith wanted me to do an apprenticeship but I loved farming and ploughing. I started on the tractors. You earned 25 bob - £1 and 5 shillings a week. Gave Mother £1 and had 5 shillings for myself. I would buy a packet of Kensington Cigarettes!



Grandad's school photos

2 farthings was a half penny and 4 farthings was a penny. When going to school I would go to a little shop and buy a toffee bar for a farthing at top of Dover Road.



Grandad at work

Ifield Cricket Pitch was on the right 20 yards back from cottage on the Landway. There were 2 sheds to do tea and Gravesend Rugby Club used to use it.



The George at Singlewell

I put 2 balls through the window of The George at Singlewell, one smashed all the glasses and the barmaid said 'look what you've done!'.

Grandad worked at Ifield Court Farm, when he started there were 45 men and 18 shire horses in 1941 and by the time he finished there were 2 men and 2 tractors.

You think, all those horses what were drilling in wheat there and now you think these days one man does it and a tractor and drill. Mind you it was all done properly in them days.

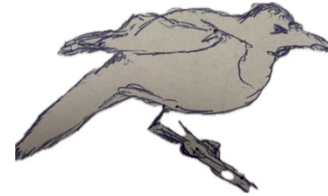


Ifield Court



Heavy horses outside local hop kilns

I used to go loading for Gerald Miskin. He used to share his lunch and flask of tea, he wasn't at all stuffy.

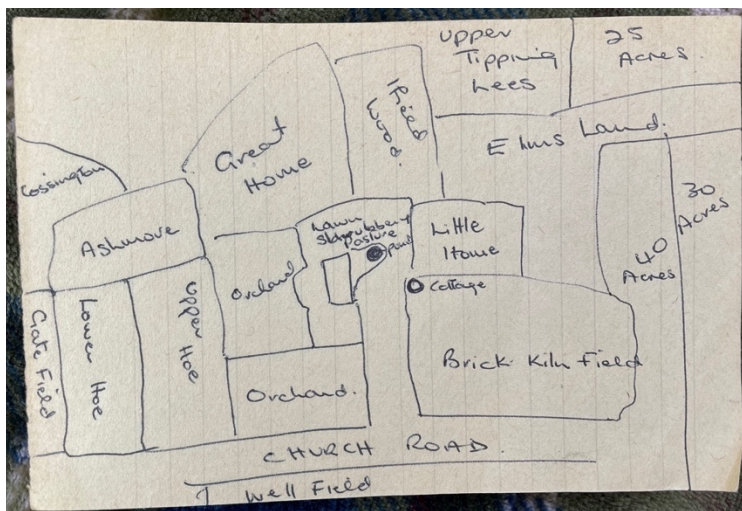


He was always concerned with his employee welfare and was ahead of his time. Before the war, once a month, they would hold first aid courses in the big house. His wife Mrs Miskin, you would have to doff your cap to her and say 'Good Morning Lady' and she would always speak. She drove a black Lancaster. They had a butler, cook, housemaid, houseboy and two gardeners.



'Shooting Party at Ifield Court just after the war. The Land Army was just finishing their time and we had a partridge shoot. Its Mr Miskin, Mrs Miskin and several local farmers.'

The house at Ifield and agricultural land was rented by Mr Miskin from an elderly lady. It is owned by the Earl of Maxborough.



Local fields names

In 1942, I was working on 'Barn Field' at Nash Street ploughing when tractor stalled, I jumped out to restart and starting handle caught my wrist and I broke my arm, it left my wrist dangling. An ambulance was called and taken to Gravesend hospital and put in a plaster cast.



Grandad with a plough

Guvnor would not let us cut the clover on the bank until the partridges had finished nesting. If we accidentally mowed into the nest we would take the eggs and fry them! But daren't tell the Guvnor.



We used to eat the plover's eggs for breakfast if we found them nesting on the potato banks – they reckon the Old Queen Mum used to eat them for breakfast.

We would never touch these - robins, wrens, martins and swallows because:
'Robins and Wrens are God's best friends,
Martins and Swallows are God's best scholars.'



Horse Show at Ifield Court



Grandad at work



One day while I was going green cutting I was standing on the corner at the bottom of the Landway. Nana came along the road and asked where Miskin's farm is? I told her which way to go and when she left I said to my friend Fred Sparks 'I will marry that girl'. Fred said 'don't be so silly, have you seen her?'. Fred walked away down the Cement Road. I married that girl.



Daisy Hales née Grant (Nana) in the Land Army



Fred Sparks – 4th from the right – with the Land Army girls



Grandad's Guvnor built Bramley bungalow for him and Grandad lived there all his married life.

Bramley Bungalow was named after the apples in the orchard on the farm.

The big piece of wood above my door, the lintel, was from a boat.



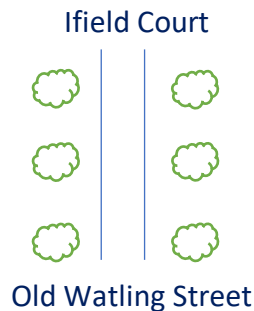
Grandad outside Bramley bungalow

Harry Accleton's bungalow next door was named Mayfield after hedge going up the road.

Assorted Recollections

Gerald Miskin originated from Hundred of Hoo, Will Pie (The Pies) from Cobham were his cousin. They used to call 'Old Man Pie' the 'The King of the Hundred'. Gerald Miskin went to Scotland fishing and took unwell. He came home and died after a day or two. This was in the early 60s.

There was an avenue of old massive Elm trees that went from Ifield Court all the way down to Old Watling Street.



My Uncle Bill was foreman at Ifield Court Farm. Bill Miskin was Gerald Miskin's nephew. He was a Major in the army. He became the farm manager. He was known to all the workers as Snowball because of his white hair. When Gerald died he took over and rented the farm. He didn't know anything about farming before the army he was in a solicitor's office.

Then Mr Tickle came, he went to agricultural college and got called up for the army. Then came back and worked on the farm. When Bill Hales died, Mr Tickle took over.

The Cement Road Original was 3 ¼ miles long. Rainham Engineering laid it – 3 of them, 2 squares of the road a day. The road was made by Mr Miskin, it was a dirt track. Harry, my cousin, had 6 months farming leave from the Army to build Cement Road.

Cherry Orchards - one at Ifield, one at Nash Street, one opposite Craggs Farm, Wrotham Road. Orchard men used to start work at 4.30am directly as it was getting light. In those days, starlings, sparrows and blackbirds, you would see thousands and thousands. They could strip a cherry tree bare in no time. They would have windmills that would have a piece of chain attached and bang on tin to make a noise to scare them off. Cherry picking was done by men. 3 men did cherry minding. They would start at half 4 until 8 at night watching the birds. They would shoot them. They had 3 ladders for big cherry trees – took 2 men to put them up, they were 65 stays tall. The cherries would split open when it rained. They couldn't be sold then and they would throw them out.

People used to come and do 'piece work' hoeing fields, paid by row. Some people used to come, old soldiers who were amputees. One had a wooden leg. In rain it would sink in ground.



Women came out for work from King's Farm doing potatoing – some picking up 30 hundred weight a day. They would wear an apron. Some would pick 2 and ½ ton. They would put the potatoes in their apron then put them in bag. They were paid by the bag. Piece work – some did cabbage cutting, this was women as well. Potatoes and cabbage were done by the women. They would fetch the children along in pram and they made sandwiches.

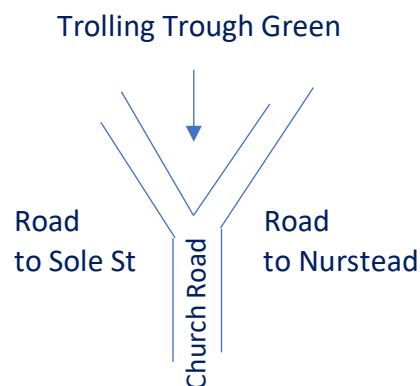
A wagoner was a man who looked after horses. If he had 4 horses, he would have wagoner's mate. They would plough an acre a day – 10 miles. They used to walk from Singlewell to Key Street with the wagons.



Grandad with onions

Gerald Miskin had a share in Van Veldon, a dutch man, who had a nursery. I used to go dancing lessons with his daughter 'Arta'. We also had dancing lessons in a bungalow (Cynthia) 4th one along from Great Nan (next to Lewes House).

Billy Hart, Rene Lock, Pat Collison, Pauline, Betty Costin. Betty was a professional golfer, after the war a golf ball hit her in the eye and she went blind.



They used to try people for sheep stealing at Trolling Trough Green. After the war, the Green was done away with when youngsters were buying up old army motorbikes. It was dangerous so they done away with it.

5 years before the war, me, Father and Uncle Bill got a taxi (Dixies Taxis) from Gravesend and went to Horton Kirby to the Agricultural Suppliers 'Garretts' where a man called 'Ripper' demonstrated the first electric fence to keep sheep in pens.



Mouse in a boot



Grandad, his Dad and Uncle Bill (foreman at Hazel's and later Ifield Court)

I found a mouse in a boot while cutting down the Elm trees. As the tree was lifted it was stuck on one of the roots. I was woodcutting with the local farmer Mr Shove from Lillechurch Farm, Higham.



Old Tollgate

When they filled the 'Old Tollgate' in it was a pub in the hole. The farm is now gone along with Old Tollgate as A2 goes over it now, but they rebuilt the 'Tollgate' we all know now in 30's. There were '3 Shrimps Brand Cottages' – they belonged to Truman's Brewery. There were a pair of semis. The Police lived in one and a chap who worked in docks lived in another. There was a single cottage 40 yards away from pub as well.

At Tollgate, the first motorway went over the top in 1923. I recall in about 1938 the first lot of electric lines came up from Dungeoness Power Station. People could not believe it.

Wartime

During war time, I ploughed up Nurstead Park with my father. Old Major Edmeades always told us that the park was a golf course years and years before.



Nurstead Park

Late one night, I was walking up Tollgate Hill and saw a soldier up ahead. I ran to catch up with him. The soldier asked me 'how far is it to Istead Rise? I'm looking to meet my family.' I explained 10 minutes. I carried on walking home. Once I got in the door knocked and it was the Canadian soldier. He was my cousin.

German and Italian prisoners of war came to do labouring on farm from Swanscombe and Borough Green Prisoner of War camps. They had to be kept apart at lunch as we didn't get on. A mosquito aeroplane crashed right next to the Tollgate. I was ploughing next to it when it went down – I was working for Gerald Miskin at Ifield Court. I went home to dinner at Istead Rise when I got back I saw army troops guarding the wreckage. The 2 German pilots were instantly killed.

A bomb took the roof off 'Kildare' during World War Two. The bomb dropped on bank behind on poultry farm. I was in house. The roof and windows blew off. Germans were aiming for the gun sites at Northumberland Bottom near Tollgate. Before the war ended there was lots of snow. The German prisoners dug out the road from the Tollgate to Istead Rise then it got windy and they had to do it all again.

Barrage Balloons

There were 6 men to 1 balloon. They were dotted about all over the place to stop doodle bugs and there were 8 balloons around the farm. The RAF men had a bell tent next to barrage balloons where they could sleep and was 18 inches below ground level so if there was a bomb they wouldn't get the full blast. They brought down many doodle bugs, including one on Cement Road. You could hear doodlebugs coming – Take Shelter! If the anti-aircraft guns started the farmers would take the harnesses off the horses and let the horses run back to stables freely. RAF cookhouse for local barrage balloons was up 'The Wents' at Trolling Trough Green.



Barrage Balloons © Art.IWM ART LD 2750

There were anti-aircraft guns at Northumberland Bottom - opposite Morrisons. There was a farm, Post Office and pub there years gone back and you went down 76/78 steps to the farm.

Bombs

2x big land mines at Ifield Court Farm
8x Barrage balloons
10x bombs
And a doodle bug

After the war, Gerald Miskin had foreigners over from Holland, Sweden and other parts of Europe. I took them round on tractor and trailer to show them how the farm was operated.



Grandad showing the foreign visitors around

Istead Rise

From the Tollgate, Kildare was one of only three houses along the right side of Wrotham Road.

First house, Lewes House, on the right. Opposite there was an airport on banks. Monoplane – twin winged plane. The hangar was opposite Lewes House. A plane came to land one day and crashed in front garden of Kildare. Opposite Lewes House during WW2 there was a searchlight battery for zeppelins as they were used to drop bombs by the Germans.

Lewes House in WWI was used as flats. It gave places to live. It went back to being a house after WWI. Around 1937/8 the Army took it over and the officer's name was Captain Rossiter. The maid was German and she was called Anna. She was back to Germany at outbreak of the war. They then used Lewes House as a barracks for the army. There was another house, used at the top of the Rise and the army officer's name was Major Gaydon. Lewes House was around 3 acres. Next to Lewes House there was a new bungalow. It went up during the war. Bevan, who owned it, put it up. Bevan had a big room with a $\frac{3}{4}$ size billiard table and he used to hold dances there. When it was Christmas, they would turn the billiard table into a table and put food and drink on it. I used to go when I was about 13/14.

From Kildare to Istead Rise there were three houses built by the Knoles. Knoles were two brothers who did dodgy dealing. They had money and used to dress as army officers and go into the Tollgate. Father was wild about it. The end house along from the Rise was the old woodwork teacher from Collier Road School. His name was Mr Baylis.

The three cottages on the opposite side of road where you come up opposite the Rise on the bank, they're next to the roadway and footpath to Ifield. McAlpine pulled three cottages down when they built Watling Street in the twenties and rebuilt them there.

On the opposite side when you come to footpath and reach Wrotham Road. There's two pieces of woodland. There was a kennels called Marlborough House. Bob Hawkins. Greyhounds. When first built they generated their own electricity and pumped their own water. They had a big windmill. They printed Spanish money (bank notes) and they went bust. Went to Trosley Towers after living there.

Next door to there, was about 5 acres of land that belonged to the Merry's. It was only producing a bit of old fruit. During the war, Miskin bought the orchard out to grow fruit and it went back after. Opposite side to the orchard was small poultry farm.

On Ifield Court Road there used to be a small holding and Dave Williams had it and the Post Office at Singlewell.

Going down Istead Rise there were 5 houses on the right-hand side before you got to shops at the fruit farm. Left hand side going down there were 4 houses. Fair sized. One with three acres of ground was owned by people named Hurst. Second one was about 11 acres of ground. Next was a poultry farm – 3 acres – owned by Dennis. Then it came to the big house where Captain Gaydon was - there was an orchard behind. When Bullish finished, Van Veldon, the Dutch man, took it over. There was a big nursery on top of Istead Rise opposite shops. The Rise got built up in 60's.

One of the ladies on left hand side going down the Rise used to write the Myrtle cartoon in Daily Mirror.

The baker used to come from Perry Street in a 3 wheeled trike with a box at the front. McLean's was the milkman. Evans at Longfield delivered milk after McLean's packed up. Weekly groceries in a van from Burton's at Gravesend. Sugar, butter, bacon. The butcher was Robinson's from Gravesend. When they packed up it was Turks the butcher. They did some lovely sausages. Haircut was done at Collison's at Manor Road in Gravesend, when I was a school boy. Pat Collison, daughter of the hairdresser, was in Land Army. When I was 5 or 6 Mother took me to Basnet in Stone Street. The barber cut all my curls off and Mother went mad.

In Sir Collier Ferguson's big house there was an old people's house at the back. The Kent Show was held in the meadows. There was loads of land.

On a Sunday, from the Rise, we walked to nurseries at Springhead and would get watercress for tea. It was owned by Elliott's then.

Across the field from Istead Rise there was a chalk hole. Travellers used to pull in it in October when I was potatoing. There was a bag lady, who lived behind there for 2/3 years and she died. She had a son who came over. The MP paid for the expenses of her burial. Sad. You would hear her scream.



Other Local Tales

Opposite The George at Singlewell, they had a farm and an orchard. Under the orchard, the RAF had a bunker where they operated airport during WW2. The farm was called Hever Court Farm.

When Father was working on the farm, fish that didn't sell were sent direct from Gravesend Market to be put on the fields. People would get fish – Dabs. Bring their plates. Fish from the Thames and beyond.

A boy from Denton went out to Dunkirk. A lot of boats that went out to Dunkirk came from Gravesend. John Edward Atkins. He was 15 and he was blown up by a mine.

Woodlands Park and Battle of Britain were both overgrown before the war. During the war they opened it all up. There were sheep in Woodlands Park when I was a boy. They started to build round there after. The big house at top of Woodlands Park was a farm house. When Father came out of the Army the farmer wanted Father to foreman for him but he said no.

There was a piggery owned by James and it was on New House Lane up near the Battle of Britain. After the war APCM, Cement Works, used to take clay from Cobham Woods down to Northfleet Cement Works. The pumping station was at the roundabout under A2 near Morrison's – the electric people have it now. Sometimes clay pipes used to burst and clay used to go all over the road at Watling Street.

Bluewater – from Ebbsfleet turn off all over to Bluewater there were two chalk pit quarries. 2000 acres in total. The surveyor there told me that when I was working there with him.

Bob Sharpe owned the café at Singlewell that is 'Sparks' now. When he died it was left to Vera Sharpe, his daughter. Vera married Harry Acclerton and he was my cousin. He was stationed in Germany in the Army. He came out the army on farming leave when war was finished. He came to farm to build Cement Road by Rainham Engineering Works. They did 2 squares a day. He went back to Germany and then he got 'de-mobbed'. Harry was Father's sister, May's boy.

There was an isolation hospital at Valley Drive for people who had come from abroad. And the piece of ground there along Valley Drive that has a seat on it. It's never been built on. A man told me when I was 14 that it will never be built on because a man in Australia owns it.

I went to school with a lad named Marden. They had the big farm at Pepper Hill where Sainsbury's is. When they moved, they moved to Marden! Beslee took it over after. The shopping centre is there now.



This poem was written by Thomas Redsell, who was cousin of my Father, Harry Hales

I am but a poor old horse,
Wandering about;
My good master turned me out.
Although it's very kind of him
But it may be wrong to say,
He would have done me far more kindness
To have taken my life away.

It was at the age of three years old,
When they put me in the team,
And, although I am not boasting,
No better colt was seen.
I went in front for a day or two
And as I went so well,
The wagoner took and altered me
And put me on the wheel.

Sometimes I would get frightened
When I was on the plough
I was always fit to run away,
At the very slightest row.
Our wagoner would then stop me
And fill my heart with joy;
He would come and pat me on the neck,
And say "Whoa back! Steady boy!"

Our coats would shine, especially mine,
For our wagoner kept us clean,
He always was delighted
To talk about his team.
He would feed us with a bait sieve
And water us with pails,
And now I am going to tell his name,
And that is Young Bill Hales.

One day we had to go to drill,
So we had an early yoke,
We had not gone but many went
When something suddenly broke
Our master came and mended it
And said "This field is big,
"But I want you chaps to finish it,
So you'll have to hop the twig".



Thomas Redsell



Albert Hales with Bill Hales won 1st prize for ploughing

So after breakfast away we went,
With all our main and might,
We were all bent to finish it,
If we were there till night.
So to and fro the field we went,
We made the old drill rattle,
You'd have thought it was the cavalry
Charging into battle.

I wish that I was young again,
I only for a day,
And then with my three other mates,
We would show you all the way.
We would go and plough our acre
And would not turn a hair,
And for anything you wanted done,
Well we four would be there.

But I know it's no use talking,
I know my day is done,
I know I've done my duty,
No better battle won.
So take me from my misery;
You can shoot me with a gun
And bury me out in the fields
Where I worked when I was young.

“Eden Villas”, Round Street, Cobham, Kent



Heavy horses at Craggs Farm outbuilding



***May God bless you and keep you in his care, Grandad. We love you so much.
Thank you for everything.***

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