

## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES.

These are the memories of **ETHEL MARGARET MORFEY, nee DANIELS.**

Born 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1907, at Abbey Farm , Salehurst, East Sussex. Died 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1986 , Aged 79 years.

Wife to **Frederick (Fred) Morfey.**

Born 27<sup>th</sup> November , 1904 at Rye Foreign, East Sussex. Died 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1976 Aged 72 years.

### **Ethel's Memories**

My daughter ( June ) wants me to try and write down some of the things I used to tell them about my childhood days in the country.

I am 69 ( therefore written in 1976 ), but I can truthfully say I remember back to four years old.

My father was a Carter on the farm and we had a farm cottage near the farm.

The farmer had a little boy about the same age as me, perhaps a little older. We played all day together. There was a big orchard with a pond in it. I remember one thing I had to do was when the apples were falling. It was to walk round behind him holding out my pinny ( pinafore ) as we called it, for him to fill with apples to throw at the ducks.

But the one really naughty thing we did, was to pour a big can of paraffin oil down into the well of drinking water. It caused a lot of trouble. My father, with one of the horses had to go a long way down the lane to the nearest cottage every day. He took a big thing called a bodge, the horse had to pull it along. They had to fill it with clean water for several weeks until the other one had cleared.

I started school from that farm and had to walk three miles. Then my father moved, not far away, but about another mile added to the walking. There was no such thing as school dinners, you just had the cold food you took with you. If it was very cold in the winter we were allowed to eat our dinner in the passage where we hung our coats. I think I shall always remember the awful smell of the wet clothes in the winter.

We had to go even when it was snowing, which it did in those days. We had no wellies, just pulled some old black stockings over our boots. Button boots for a girl of course.

The summer used to make up for it, I shall always remember the wayside flowers. My children laugh at me because I love Bumble Bees and all the Butterflies which we don't see now.

I was nearly seven by now and used to go with my father a lot, that's when I began to be interested in the big cart horses.

I must remember to tell you this farm was also a big dairy farm and the owner was a very big name, so I won't say it.

I remember the backache, because all of the children on the estate had to pick up acorns for the pigs. Big sackfulls for a penny.

We did have a party given to the workers at Christmas. I remember having to bow and say thank you for a red flannel petticoat. Our mothers had a grey one and the men a woollen waistcoat.

It was now the summer of 1914. I had forgotten to say I was the very youngest of our family. I remember my older brother Frank coming home after nine years in the navy and saying to my mother, " Look at that , a brand new kit bag. I'll be called back in a couple of months ". He was, to the 1914 war. He was taken prisoner at the Battle of Jutland (1916 ed.).

Now once more we move , but only two miles. But better for me for school, just time to run home the half mile to dinner. This was to a little place called Salehurst near Robertsbridge.

I was born down at the old Abbey Farm which of course has its history. My father told me that his granddad claimed to be one of the last people to see a man and his dog go into a tunnel that was supposed to go from Robertsbridge to Battle Abbey, then it collapsed and was sealed up.

But to go back to memories of the 1914 war, they never touched me. We were never short of food, as this farmer Mr Tom Hoad was a good man to work for . I remember going to get the eggs at the Farmhouse door, one shilling a dozen. The sister who kept house for him used to give me two lovely brown ones , for myself she would say. They also sold farm butter and of course there were plenty of rabbits.

My mother used to make a big cake and sew it all up in what I think was Butter Muslin, pack it in a tin and post it to my brother who was a prisoner. He told us when he did come home they were not treated too badly, he was a Chief Petty Officer which helped in those days. The one thing he longed for was soap. They knew the guards were hungry and made a bargain, a piece of soap for a piece of cake.

My other brother Jim (Baptised - Frederick James ) was in the 50<sup>th</sup> Royal Sussex Regiment. He went in when he was 17, by putting a year on. I remember him coming home on leave .

But I didn't realise why he had to go out into what we called the old bakehouse, I was just pleased to see him. My poor mother had told me since it was to bath in the old tin bath and burn all his underclothes . I feel sad now when I think of her dreading him going back. But thank God he did come back, but I think never the same person.

During all this long time I was leading a very happy childhood. My father was very happy on the farm. I think his wage was thirty five shillings, five more for being a Carter.

He had two lovely horses to work with Diamond and Blossom. I have a lovely photo of him when he had been ploughing with them. It was a huge field and every furrow was as straight as a die. I still look at it now and can't see where it looks any better than it did. The tractor is time saving but surely it can't give you the satisfaction.

One little incident that I was told by my mother was the day I was missing when I was three years old, but my father had an idea where to look. He told my mother how he felt when he stood in the stable door and saw me under one of the huge carthorses trying to tie my hair ribbon round its big leg. He said that he said quietly ' stand' to the horse and called me out. They were so gentle.

But back to my own memories. I used to go up the stable every day with my father to Rack Up as he called it. Some old Sussex name I expect, as my father was very Sussex. I wouldn't know how to spell some of his words. Anyway, it was to feed and bed down Diamond and Blossom while he was putting their clean straw down. He used to let me get their food ready.

In the little room just through the door was a huge bin with different places in it. As I remember one was for corn, one for the (evots ? ), otherwise oats. One had a kind of bean in it, I think they were called Locas Beans- they were black looking and tasted quite nice. And then there were great slabs of cake to break up.

I can see it all now so plainly with the old stable lantern hanging on the wall for light. He used to give them some medicine called Salt Peter. They evidently didn't like it much as I used to hear a lot of ' come along Blossom old girl' and 'give over Diamond '. They knew my fathers cough, as we came up the road they would answer him.

As well as those there was Mary, she was a lighter horse . She was for taking the milk to Robertsbridge Station every night, for the London train. I knew her and loved her, but didn't have so much to do with her as my fathers helper called a Carters Boy did the harnessing of Mary to the milk cart every night, about five I think.

If we wanted to get a lift up to the doctors at Robertsbridge we had one with Mary and the Milk Churns in the back. My brother-in-law was one of the milkmen, as my sister was fifteen years older than me. I loved to watch the old doctor making up the medicine, a little of this and a little of that, a look along the shelf and another little drop of

something. Much more exciting than our boxes of pills. He cycled about four miles from Hurst Green to Robertsbridge until he was eighty.

In the summer on a Sunday, twice a year the farmer would let us have Mary and the trap. We went about twenty to thirty miles to Headcorn in Kent to see my father's brother. We enjoyed the ride and so did Mary as she didn't have enough to do. I am afraid my father got a bit sleepy, as my uncle made his own cider. My mother never worried, she said Mary would take us home. Of course there was not much traffic then.

Thinking of traffic makes me think of how terrified I was of the Steam Roller when I first started school. Living on the farm and not going out to the main road much, I had never seen one. Two bigger girls had to drag me by it, the children now would think I was mad. I wasn't frightened of the Threshing Machine which came after each harvest to thresh the corn.

I had a little black and white terrier called Spot. My father took him up to the farm when they were getting to the bottom of the stack, as he was such a good ratter. I heard my father say he had twenty five a day.

I also had a big black tomcat I called Dick, he used to bring rabbits home to my mother. He used to wait while she got it skinned and cut up for us, all he wanted was his pieces. Today's cats are so well fed to bother. I never saw such a thing as cat food yet he was so heavy I had a job to have him on my lap, which he liked. He used to let me put a dolls bonnet on him and would clown in front of the fire with me and the dolls and Spot.

I wouldn't have had time for television.

I had a cripple brother also ( George – believed a polio victim ) who of course in those days nothing was done for , except by the rector. The Reverend Ward I think was vicar for fifty years, he used to go and try to get him to make little rugs, he would also read to him. So nights I used to tell him what I had done at school . We had a big scrapbook which I used to paste pretty cards in.

Then sometimes in the winter we would sit round the fire and my father used to sing old songs to us. One I am sure must have been an old Sussex folk song. I have never heard it anywhere at all since. It was about a servant girl that got herself in trouble and was turned out. I always remember the lines where she put her box upon her head and 'ganged' it along, well that's what it sounded like. Others were Wrap me up in my old Stable Jacket, Dick the Carters Lad and I'll take you home Kathleen.

At Christmas we had a lot of friends and relatives in. Two of the farmers nephews used to play the Hand Bells, I haven't heard them played for a long time. They used to play the Bells of St.Mary's. My mother lit the fire in the old bakehouse. If you have never seen one, it's a big brick place and you got it ever so hot and then raked out the ashes. She made Christmas cakes and something called flead cakes which we all liked a lot. She even made my wedding cake in it in 1925, probably the last time it was used as we moved away soon after.

The one thing I really miss today is the way families kept together. My mother was one of seventeen children. I think there was only about four died as babies, so you can guess at the amount of Aunts and Uncles we had. My cripple brother and I used to amuse ourselves, but we visited them and they visited us. We used to walk about six miles to Ticehurst and back the same day. I remember my mother kept saying ' Are you tired ' and I said ' No, only my legs ache '.

I remember my uncles big old pantry with all his wine in, not like the stuff they make now. He had Elderberry, years old, when you held it up it was a lovely clear ruby colour. He also had Dandelion and Parsnip, looking like whisky. I had some lovely times there. He used to play his concertina and the whistle beautifully. They had one of the old round cylinder type gramophones or should I say phonograph. One old tune was called The Vacant Chair.

I am sorry this is so muddled but memories crowd in so fast I don't know what to put down.

My mind has just gone to the horses again. One of their other jobs was to come out to the Hop Garden and get the bags of hops, as we picked in the bins in the hop garden then.

The farmer used to come round and call " Hops ready ". We cleaned out the bigger leaves that had fallen in the bin and he measured them out with a Bushel Basket. I think we had two pence a bushel then in 1915. But he was very good , if

at the end of measuring it was only half he called a bushel. I had to stay by the bin and pick six boxes in the morning and in the afternoon, then I could go and play.

After all my new winter clothes had to come from that money. I had to take last years best coat and hat for school and have a new Sunday hat which we did in those days. I am glad I have never had any photographs of myself in my Black Beaver hat with red cherries round the side. I loved it, but my children would have laughed their heads off I expect.

We had to have a trip to Hastings for the new clothes, I expect the whole outfit was only about three pounds. I remember the first coat I bought myself when I was fifteen years old, it was only thirty shillings, a lovely thick one.

There wasn't a Woolworths in Hastings then. Only a tiny little Marks and Spencers, and that wasn't for clothes, just two long counters with odds and ends and little ornaments and Hastings Rock.

I have strayed from the horses again, they took the hops to the Oasthouse, where my father dried them. He had to leave everything else for that. We didn't see him much as he had to have what sleep he had, on an old bed made of posts and wood across and straw filled bags on. But it was lovely and warm there as they dried with fires under the kilns in those days. He had a mate, so one watched the fires while the other had a nap.

My mother used to wash some big potatoes and say "take these up to your father to bake in the fires", they were lovely with lots of butter on.

There wasn't much my father couldn't do, he used to thatch all the haystacks. But I must say I never saw him near the cowsheds, each man to his own job in those days I expect.

I used to have to go up every night for our milk, we had three pints of milk. If I was there early I used to watch them milking, by hand of course then. They took it across to the dairy and poured it through the cooler, some of it went through the separator to get the cream to make the butter. I used to like to see the butter making, all the patting with the two little wooden butter pots (?pats Ed.). Then the final glory to me was the pattern of the thistle and leaves on the top of the half pound pots (?pats Ed.).

I said we had a very nice rector. We had a lot of people at the church in those days. I was in the choir until I was fifteen and loved it. Church three times on a Sunday, eleven o'clock, three o'clock children service in the afternoon and six at night.

We lived close to the River Rother and used to go paddling in it, it wasn't so deep as now as it didn't used to be dug out like it is now. The flowers along the banks were lovely. We used to go for long walks along its banks right through from Salehurst to Bodiam and get big bunches of flowers to take to school.

I am sure I am right when I say the evenings in the summer when I was child were much longer and of course much hotter. We played outside because it was too hot to go to bed.

I slept in our big attic, so it was hot under the roof. It had a part that was curtained off, where my father stored all his potatoes and carrots which he had grown to last the winter. They were in big wooden tubs covered over with straw. But I loved my attic bedroom, my mother kept all her oddments of material from sewing up there too. I used to look among them for pieces to make dolls clothes, as we played with dolls a lot in those days.

My older sisters spoiled me. I think ( Louise ) the one that worked in Hastings for a German Countess married to an English Gentleman, bought me a lovely dolls pram. When we went to see her ( Louise ) I had to go in to the drawing room to see the Countess, she was very kind to her maids. She always gave my mother a big jar of cod liver oil for me, as she said I was growing too fast. Lucky for me my father liked it, because I hated it. She had a lot of Doves in an aviary and several dogs, my sister had to look after them. When my sister got married the Countess sent her two telegrams, one from the doves and one from the doggies. I suppose she would be called eccentric nowadays.

I just can't understand all this deepfreeze mania now, we had some lovely food. The butcher came three miles on a bicycle with the big basket on the front and we never had bad meat. I only wish I could get some of those lovely home made pork sausages now that were about one and sixpence a pound.

Of course everything wasn't perfect. I was just thinking of sharing the old lavatory outdoors with the neighbours and having to wait ages while the son was sitting there reading. My mother kept complaining until the farmer had another wooden one put up, and of course in the winter I was afraid of going down there in the dark.

My sister was married during the war and lived with us as her husband was in the navy. I remember she was expecting her first baby and I wasn't supposed to know anything about it. I had to pretend such great surprise when I got home from school to be told I was an auntie at eleven years old. Yet last week I heard my granddaughter of the same age asking her mother what the hospital had said about the check up, progress I suppose.

We are now near the end of the war, when we heard it was over we were excited at the thought of seeing my brother. One morning going to school this big man passed us and asked us where Mrs. Daniels lived, that was my mother. I had not seen him since I was seven, but I said to the others " I think its my brother ", I turned and raced home ,I said " Mum Frank is coming up the road ".

She said " It doesn't matter about school, go and find your father ". He was ploughing in the big field I have talked about, but he tied the horses up and came home to see my brother who had a lot to tell us.

I think times were hard for a lot of people then, but my brother went to work on the farm and also my brother in law.

I left school when I was thirteen years old and went into service. I am afraid it didn't go down very well after the easy time I had been having. I met my husband when I was sixteen and we were married in 1925 when I was eighteen and a half years old and we had our Golden Wedding last year.

I have a lot of memories, some of them hard times. My husband was out of work for the only time in his life in 1927. I remember we were in two rooms in Hastings, seven and sixpence a week. We had twenty six shillings dole money, all I can remember is living on beef sausages at eight pence a pound. Then my mother wrote and told us that a Captain Townsend of Bodiam Manor wanted a second gardener. It was for thirty shillings a week and a old cottage, which we took because we had no choice. My husband worked there for four years, but he had to go indoors and cook as they couldn't keep anyone.

So we looked for another job and got a big lift up as Chauffer/Gardener at a big house at Sedlescombe for two pound a week and a much nicer house. My husband had to learn how to drive the big new green Humber car and he had a dark green uniform and a peaked cap. He had to take the daughters to the Hunt Balls. His one dread was the boss taking the wheel , as he was eighty years old . My husband used to sit with his feet pressed to the ground with fright because the old man drove so fast and he was shaky.

My first memory of cars go back to 1912. The big ( important )gentleman Mr Luxford that my father worked for bought two cars and done away with the horses. They were a Daimler and a Rolls Royce, the poor coachman had to learn to drive. We children used to run along the road to see them come down the drive, but we were really scared of them. Great big headlamps gleaming, Mr Luxford was a small man with a little white beard. He used to sit up so straight on the back seat staring straight ahead.

Ian Morfey. January, 2008