

# **'Tell Me About Old Wheathampstead, Granny'**

by Kate Lamb

## **MARJORIE LAMB**

**MARFORD FARM**, where granny still lives with her daughter Carol, was originally two cottages. My granny is Marjorie Lamb, who married Sidney Lamb in April, 1941. He was tenant of Marford Farm, Wheathampstead.

The previous tenant was Charles Blain who had run a milk round from there. Mr. and Mrs. Blain built the house on the opposite side of the lane. They called it "Orchard Farm" because in addition to a large Orchard, they rented the Church land at the back of it and also some land on the Kimpton road.

Marford farm was all grass and granny and grandpa had pigs, poultry, some calves and sheep. The cows came afterwards. They made hay each year but the war agricultural committee members came round and said "Some of the fields must be ploughed, to make more for the war effort".

This was because England couldn't get any imported stuff from Europe, so granny and grandpa grew potatoes, mangolds, oats and dredge corn.<sup>1</sup> The threshing drum came in from Sheriffs which had an old man called 'Johnny' in charge of it. A gang of land girls and Italian prisoners<sup>2</sup> came to help on the farm. Granny says she has vivid memories of the Italians who were mostly quite young saying "Are you 'appy Johnny?" or "Johnny, are you 'appy?" He was in fact the most miserable of old men.

Granny's daughter Carol, who was a toddler then, always had a supply of sultanas and almonds in her overall pockets, from the Italians' Red Cross parcels. Granny's son Tim (my dad) who was just a baby then, often had his pram rocked or wheeled around by a young Italian who couldn't bear to hear him crying.

One of the Italians made pasta for Granny on her kitchen table. She said he rolled it so thin you could see through it, and then he cut it into strips and dried it. Meanwhile he cooked a rabbit to have with it. She says it was delicious.

Marford Farm is in Sheepcote Lane. The house near the top of the lane (now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Thompson) was bought by a Mr. Nagele, who wanted it for his family to use when London was having a hard time during the Blitz. The red brick cottage above it has now been modernised, but it was lived in

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<sup>1</sup> 1 A mixture of peas and oats and vetches (little yellow flowers) cut for hay.

<sup>2</sup> The Italians, and later Germans, used to live at Batford and Lemsford in P. of W. Camps. Only the well-behaved ones were allowed out. They were brought in a lorry and fetched back at night.

by Mr. and Mrs. Chapman, their son, and daughter Ruth. Marford Cottage belonged to Dr. Flora Shepherd, who wanted to be near Bocket Hall, which had been taken over by the City of London Maternity Hospital.

The railway line ran not far from the farm, which people found very useful. This was because a train ran through every afternoon at 4 o' clock and you knew whether you were late or early by the answer to the question, "Has the train gone yet?" Another train ran through in the dead of night which carried tanks from Luton, on the way through to Welwyn Garden City, and then to wherever they were needed.

Granny was a member of the W.I. and she can remember that they used to can a lot of fruit.

Grandpa had a grey cart horse which he used for hoeing rows of mangolds, harrowing and lighter jobs. He kept it in a field near the river with a horse that belonged to Mrs. Hall, the baker's wife. Grandpa could never catch his horse because it knew that he wanted it for work, but granny was good at it - the horse knew she would have something for it to eat!

Once some bombs dropped on the village, Granny thinks one dropped at the back of the church, and all the windows fell out of the rectory. Another one fell along the river, in Sherriff's field, it was on a bend. It was at night and grandpa was up with the sheep, he heard the bomb whistling. It hit the river and made a bigger bend.

In the village the rector was Mr. Baird-Smith. He and his wife had three beautiful daughters. Mr. Hall was the baker, Mr. Simons the butcher, Mr. Chennell was the Postmaster, who granny found terrifying because he would glare at you. The post office was in the region of where the Midland Bank is now. Mr. Stapleton had a grocers shop where Gateway/Fine Fare is now. He bought a wool shop for his wife and daughter to run. Mrs. Collins ran a hardware shop which was the house next to where Country Cutters is now. Grandpa went there to get his petrol because there was a pump in front of the house. Mr. Wren the Wheelwright lived in a house which was right on the road. This was in the region of the present garage and supermarket. The blacksmith was in the Swan yard and he moved down to where the Bull car park is now.

"Oh dear" said granny "there are lots of people in the village who can remember this much better than I can". But I was pleased with all she told me and will ask her some more another day.

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