Barnmoor Farm, Claverdon

These are the reminiscences of Tim Boddington who was brought up at Barnmoor Farm, Kington Lane, Claverdon in Warwickshire. It was bought at auction (see below) in September 1945 by my father, Roddy Boddington, who was previously farming at Mistletoe Farm, Five Ways, Hatton, and we moved in November. He wanted a bigger property to expand his business.

This is the earliest known picture of Barnmoor Farm house and it was taken in August 1947 by Cyril Richardson, brother in law of Katharine Boddington. It shows the farm before my father made a number of alterations to the house and before the concrete Dutch barn was erected. The two original chicken houses are visible on the right. My father erected these – in fact I recall that he brought them in sections from Mistletoe Farm and re-erected them together with a smaller chicken shed located beyond them and not visible in this picture.

The track this side of the hedge in the foreground was fenced to use as a route for the cows the go to and from other fields. I well recall – I still have the bruises to remind me – that on one occasion when I was perhaps 6 or 7, driving the cows down this track, the last cow turned round, put her head down and picked me up on her horns and threw me over the hedge! She then resumed her amble to the cow shed. I landed on a pile of lime that had been put in the garden field ready for spreading. I recall my mother's disbelief that I could be in the garden if I was fetching the cows (there were no gates nearby). It took her some time to accept that the only way I could have got there was over the top.

The picture below was taken in the latter 1950s. It was taken soon after my father decided to diversify his farming activity by going in for broiler chickens. Each point of note is described beneath the picture.

A. 5,000 sqft broiler house, manufactured by Wigfield & Pluck Limited of Norton Lindsey. I worked for them at the time and joined my father in running the farm once W&P (and I) had completed the construction of the building. It was 45ft wide by 120ft long. An excavated area can be seen at the far end for a later extension of a further 120ft. We put 5,000 chickens in each half for each batch. The round dot at the near corner of the building is an LPG sphere containing propane for heating. The stipples in the field mark where battery chicken manure has been tipped from a barrow for later spreading by hand.

B. The Dutch barn was built in the late 1940s by a company called Beecham Buildings. It was entirely pre-cast concrete, even the foundations, with an asbestos roof. I recall they used a Ruston Bucyrus crane to erect it – very modern then; a collectors item today. Inside the barn the floor was some years later excavated to provide 7' deep storage for silage. At the time of the picture the silage was cut and taken to the cows in their yard (C). Later a wall was built around the end of the silo, alongside the drive, and the cows came and ate directly from the clamp. The picture was taken in the spring and careful examination shows that the new grass is being brought in from the far end and the barn is 2/3 full.

C. The cattle yard was built in the 1950s. It was a DIY job using war surplus steel I beams, round steel posts and the special couplings between them. The roof purlins were narrow gauge railway tracks bought from the Claverdon Sand & Gravel pit further down Kington Lane. The roof was war surplus corrugated steel sheets. The back wall was solid being made of war surplus concrete railway sleepers planted upright in concrete. The side open to the Dutch barn had a continuous manger where the animals could be held by the neck for feeding.

All these heavy duty DIY jobs required copious amounts of ready mixed concrete. My father gave standing orders to my mother to the effect that if he was injured and could not use a load of concrete before it set she was to cover it with manure and put the place up for sale!

D. This corner building was again constructed of war surplus materials and contained a workshop and used as a tractor shed.

E. The car garage – that's a black Ford Consul in there, MKV 910. The garage had at that time a very heavy one piece door mounted on rails – it can be seen across the end of the calf shed (F). My parents never had to take driving tests.

F. Calf shed – although it housed different animals at various times. Sometimes pigs, or cattle. Often used for storage.

G. The old barn. This is the oldest building on the site – several hundred years old. Originally an out building for this area of land, it was always in a poor state right from when we moved to Barnmoor in November 1945. I recall an early task for my father was to install a couple of adjustable strengtheners to support the collapsing roof trusses. If I recall this was brought to an urgent need by the huge falls of snow in the winter of 46/47 when we were cut off for a full three weeks, not just by snow but also fallen trees. That's another story …

   The lower floor of the barn housed, from the left, a pig sty in the corner, a rearing shed, the milking parlour, the feed passage, and a narrow store room (J). Upstairs was used for light storage – we never really used it much because of the poor condition of the timber; full of woodworm. There was window in each of the gable ends of the barn.

H. There was a heavy steel I beam across the corner of the yard to control the cows during milking. At the centre of this there was a weather proof feed storage bin. On my 7th birthday party (July 1949) I got up under this beam and split my head open; the resulting scar remains on my head to this day! Today one would have called an ambulance for such an injury. Then my mother washed it off and pulled it together with a plaster.

I. On the house side of the yard there used to be a row of pig sties. Because pigs are difficult to feed in an orderly manner the sties were provided with chutes through the wall from the house side into the troughs within. These sties had either gone before we moved in or very soon after for I do not remember them. However, their imprint remained on the ground for decades. We kept the coal pile on part of this area, by the steps, and building materials on another. There was a brick wall along the east and south sides of this area. These walls were capped with very fine half round blue coping bricks, common in 19thC Warwickshire construction.

J. The narrow room at the end contained the electric vacuum pump for the milking machine. This was incredibly reliable – I don't recall it ever failing during more than 20 years.

K. The lean to on the end of the barn was the dairy. In here we kept a steriliser and the milk cooler. It wasn't very clean by modern standards but we never caught anything! The milk was despatched in 10 gallon churns in those days. They had to be taken to the end of the drive and lifted onto the milk stand for collection every day. We usually had 3 to 6 churns depending on the season. Originally they were steel churns, heavy even when empty. I can recall the relief when they were replaced with aluminium – suddenly they could be moved (empty) by us children!

L. This was a half round asbestos shed. It was built by my father to put battery hens in. It was built c.1950. It contained two rows of cages three decks high. The cages were of the latest design having conveyor belts to remove the droppings to one end for collection. The eggs were collected by hand from the front of each cage. We kept detailed records of how many eggs were laid by the birds in each cage.

   The battery hens were discontinued once the first broiler house was built – one couldn't keep both because of the disease control requirements – and the building was cleared out and essentially redundant. I recall we used it as a disco for my 21st birthday party in 1963.

M. This was a prefabricated timber chicken shed, complete with a timber floor, brought from our previous farm, Mistletoe Farm, and re-erected at Barnmoor together with the battery cages it normally contained. These cages were designed and made by a man called Burgoine who lived at a house between Chadwick Manor Hotel and Heronfield House, just north of Chadwick End. There remains a sign at the end of the drive with the name on it to this day (2010). I'm sure he was Mr. Burgoine but he was only ever referred to as 'Burgoine'. He was a very clever engineer. The battery cages were very simple to assemble and very heavy duty. He was also involved in the design and development of the military Bailey bridge (as was a Mr. Braithwaite who lived at Yarningale Common, last house on the right when travelling west, and whose sons I went to school with at one point – Arden House, Henley in Arden).

   To return to the timber shed – I always regarded this as a fearful fire risk because it was all timber, was regularly soaked with creosote and had a tar felt roof!

   On one side of this shed there was a small chicken shed which I cannot recall ever being used for that purpose. On the other side, in the corner of this plot of ground, there was a well with an old fashioned long handled manual pump (the kind sold in garden centres today as a garden antique) which provided us with water for the first couple of years. See below for more on water supply.

N. A second chicken shed exactly as M above, in the corner of the kitchen garden. There was a hawthorn hedge between these two sheds.

O. My parents maintained an extensive vegetable garden, keeping us supplied with a fresh and varied selection of greens as well as potatoes.

P. I remember my father building a small greenhouse which was heavily used for many years, particularly for the production of tomatoes. It was provided with shade by a flowering Cherry planted beside it.

Q. A flower garden with two lawns was laid out in front of the house. There was a concrete path leading from the front door straight up the middle with a flower bed on each side of it. In later years my father converted the path into a stream. He also extended the garden. The natural boundary extended about 100 yards from the house and the further half was used as a very small and inconvenient field for growing things like potatoes. First he removed the hedges to incorporate this land with the adjacent field. He then installed a new fence about 10 yards beyond the cultivated garden and built a new herbaceous bed across the end of the existing flower garden. I recall the effort that went into the design of this bed, all the plants being ordered from a supplier rather than home grown. The vegetable section was simply extended.

   In the early 1950s we were most excited to receive a wonderful swing set from Kington Grange. The Challen children had grown up and left home and Colonel John Challen asked if we would like this redundant child's play equipment. It constituted two vertical timber poles with a top piece extending beyond the uprights by about 4ft. Beneath the centre was a seated swing, a swing bar and a pair of rings. From one outrigger hung a climbing rope. The whole thing was about 10ft high and very stout. I remember it being brought from The Grange by tractor and trailer complete with the huge concrete blocks which held it in the ground. We dug new holes in which to plant these. It provided enormous fun for many years. John Challen died in about 2000 aged in the high 90s. In retirement he and his wife Audrey moved to Australia where their children Belinda and Alex had settled many years before. Audrey predeceased John by many years.

R. This part of the field was later included into the garden. The house was extended in 1972/3 and it was necessary to extend the garden to provide some free space around the new lounge. The garden was bounded by a curved fence which was recovered from some other part of the property, being of the wrought iron post and bar type – very strong, long lasting and delightful to look at. The house extension was designed by Francis Bromilow who lived at Woodside, Langley Road, on the other side of Hanging Wood. Indeed, his widow Doreen only moved out of that house in May 2002 to go and live at Norton Lindsey.

   To the left of R., in the corner of the adjoining field, is the location of the long term manure heap. Manure was stacked here, and usually spread in the winter, for years on end.

   And to the left of this, where the yard joins the drive, there was a narrow gap in the fence to provide easy access for the cows into the adjoining field, No.6. This gap never had a gate. It was closed off by a small trailer which I cannot remember ever having been used for its

true purpose – none of father's cars ever had a tow bar anyway. The trailer was rather narrow, built between a pair of old spoked car wheels and, no doubt, the original axel to carry them. It had circa two foot high sides and front but no tailgate. It was probably a trailer for carrying a pig or two to market or the butcher when we were at Mistletoe Farm.

The Garden

My parents were both very keen gardeners. To some extent this was out of necessity – the need to grow enough vegetables to keep us fed throughout the year. I don't recall ever buying vegetables or potatoes; we always had a plentiful supply. Roast beef was an occasional item for Sunday lunch (chicken was more usual, of course – we had an endless supply of those), and we were lucky enough to have a lot of Horseradish plants growing wild along the hedge to the left of the garden. The sauce was freshly made every time.

The garden at Barnmoor on open days, top 1979, bottom 1980

Water supply

When we moved in, in 1945, the only water supply was from a well. We could not run a satisfactory dairy farm without running water so my father made arrangements to lay a lead pipe all the way across the fields from Four Winds. I believe that my father sold part of one of his fields for this house to

be constructed. The owners were Bill & Rosely Harper. Perhaps the water supply was part of the deal. I am fairly certain that the pipe was laid by Jimmy Albutt who ran a machinery contracting business at Preston Bagot, just on the sharp corner in the old road.

In the late 1950s the RAF took over much of the nearby sand and gravel pits for use as a plant training centre. The intention was that they would over a few years landscape the whole site, which was then like a moonscape, so that it could return to agriculture. This new activity had a number of advantages for us. Parts of the narrow Kington Lane had to be widened to accommodate the huge transporters needed, a proper water main had to be laid from Henley Road in order to provide the site, and all the other properties were immediately connected. The final advantage applied strictly to us children – at weekends we went to the site and drove the equipment courtesy of the three men left to guard the place! They specialised in really big machinery such as D8 bulldozers (25 tons) and graders, which were excellent for racing. I recall that we (or probably the guards) sank a D8 into a very soft area, right up to its bonnet, seven or eight feet! After struggling for hours to get it out it had to be abandoned and recovered weeks later when the ground had dried sufficiently to dig it out. Huge fun but unimaginable in today's heath & safety environment.

Once connected to the new main I recall that the price of scrap lead justified digging up the old supply pipe.

The sewerage system

Not the most pleasant matter to be brought up but there is an interesting story to be told!

In the field beside the yard was (is?) a septic tank into which the house and, I think, the dairy drained their foul water. I recall this tank very occasionally being pumped out as it should be. The overflow from a septic tank should be clear, if tainted, water; quite suitable for discharge into a water course. Our overflow went by clay drain pipes across the field and under the hedge at the lowest point in the lane between us and Cherry Pool farm where there was a natural spring rising. Now at this spot the road was slightly elevated above the verges. The verge on our side was always wet and particularly verdant; always growing a very heavy crop of grass. No doubt it was being very well fertilized. It didn't smell.

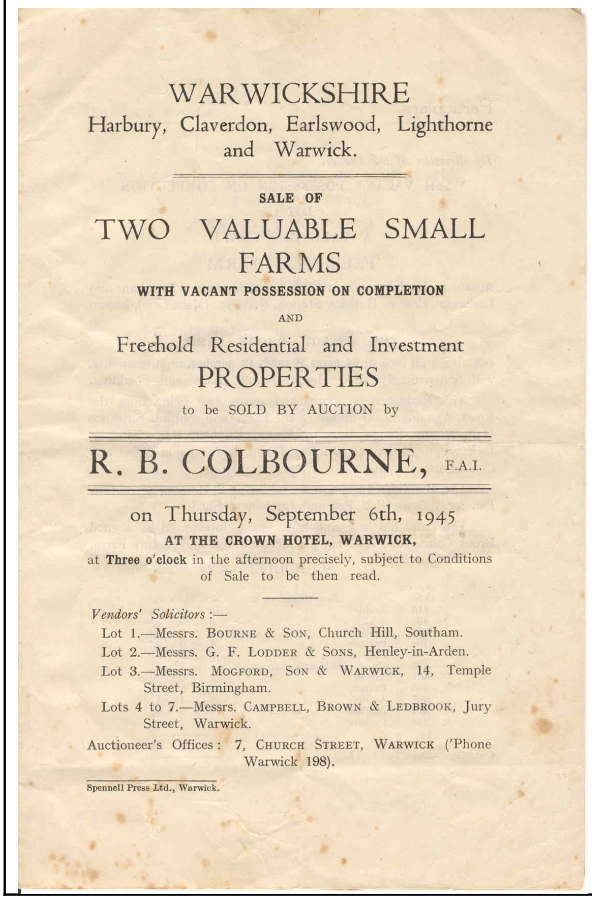
Nobody took much notice of this until one day somebody drove off the road. They simply disappeared half way up the bonnet. The car had to be towed out by a tractor. It was covered in black slimy stinking muck! My father knew at once exactly why! He had the over-full septic tank pumped out forthwith. We drew the grass back over the scars. That verge remains an unguarded hazard to this day.

Farming at Barnmoor

My father was a very progressive small farmer. He started with a smallholding, Mistletoe Farm at Five Ways, Hatton. There he produced pigs, eggs and poultry for meat. The fattened pigs went to local butchers and we often had a side or a cured ham hanging in the house for our own consumption. He sold the eggs and poultry direct to the customer. He had many commercial customers who required large numbers of eggs for their works canteens. Among these was Birmingham Canal Navigations who were

responsible for running the canal system in the Birmingham area, a system known today as the BCN. In the earliest days, the late 1930s, he transported all these eggs in the sidecar of his motorcycle! There were stories of breakages.

He simply outgrew Mistletoe Farm and, anyway, he wanted to go in for dairy farming. So he looked for a bigger property that was affordable. He bought Hope's End Farm at auction. It never occurred to me to ask him why he changed the name to Barnmoor Farm but I expect it was something to do with the oft quoted joke about it being quite literally Hope's end! Mr Hope had died there and the property had been put up for sale by his executors. I still have the auctioneer's sale flyer (below, Lot 2, shown further below).



WARWICKSHIRE
Harbury, Claverdon, Earlswood, Lighthorne and Warwick.

SALE OF
TWO VALUABLE SMALL FARMS
WITH VACANT POSSESSION ON COMPLETION
AND
Freehold Residential and Investment
PROPERTIES
to be SOLD BY AUCTION by

R. B. COLBOURNE, F.A.I.

on Thursday, September 6th, 1945
AT THE CROWN HOTEL, WARWICK,
at Three o'clock in the afternoon precisely, subject to Conditions of Sale to be then read.

Vendors' Solicitors :—
Lot 1.—Messrs. Bourne & Son, Church Hill, Southam.
Lot 2.—Messrs. G. F. Lodder & Sons, Henley-in-Arden.
Lot 3.—Messrs. Mogford, Son & Warwick, 14, Temple Street, Birmingham.
Lots 4 to 7.—Messrs. Campbell, Brown & Ledbrook, Jury Street, Warwick.
Auctioneer's Offices: 7, Church Street, Warwick ('Phone Warwick 198).

Spennell Press Ltd., Warwick.

Then called Hopes End Farm, it was bought at auction on 6th September 1945.

By another direction.

LOT 2.

WITH VACANT POSSESSION ON COMPLETION.

A VALUABLE SMALL

FREEHOLD FARM

situate at Kington, Claverdon,

KNOWN AS

HOPES END FARM

with modern built Residence in first class order, nine well built Loose Boxes and Yard, Garage, Implement Shed, Barn and Rickyard, and **43 acres, 3 roods, 33 perches** of very fertile Arable and Pasture Land.

The Residence contains Entrance Hall, Lounge with Three Windows and modern brick built Hob Grate, Living Room with Triplex Grate and Two Windows, Dairy, Back Hall, Scullery with 2 Pumps and Sink Copper and Electric Dynamo for the Well, Landing, Three Bedrooms, Bath Room with Lavatory Basin and W.C. Electric Light is installed in all the rooms, and there is a large Garden and Paddock in the rear of the House.

The Land is divided into Six Enclosures, with a frontage of about 650 yards to the Road, is very good working ground and capital Pasture Land.

SCHEDULE.

No. on O.S.	*Description.*	A.	R.	P.
61A	Pasture	2	3	8
69	Pasture	9	2	37
69A	House, Buildings and Garden		3	0
69B	Pasture	6	0	28
68	Arable	13	0	1
67	Arable	6	1	28
66	Arable	5	0	11
	TOTAL ACRES ...	43	3	33

This 'modern built residence' was then already 55 years old having been built in 1890. The two pumps were used for drawing water from the wells. One was outside but I recall that there was another in the scullery. I don't remember the electric dynamo for the well.

Bringing the cows home for milking

The house in the background is Four Winds, Kington Lane. The field is No.1, the largest on the farm. August 1947.

The fields were numbered in rows from the north so the left one against the wood was No.2, that on the roadside north of the buildings was No.3, the big field beyond the end of the garden was No.4 but divided into 4a and 4b because the two natural parts were often used for different crops, the right one against the wood was No.5, and the roadside field south of the drive was No.6.

In the earliest days the cows were milked by hand. An electric milking machine was soon installed.

Among my father's papers there is a wayleave contract with East Midlands Electricity for their rental of the ground space taken up by the row of poles bringing power to the farm and the cottages over the road – 1 shilling per year for each pole, that's 5p in today's money.

Until the early 1950s we grew wheat on some fields each year, indeed, I think we used a fairly traditional rotation and my father gradually ploughed up all the fields some of which were 'permanent pasture' when we arrived. Other crops that I recall growing included kale almost every year, turnips, oats, chicory once or twice in No.6, and potatoes in the little garden field.

The corn harvest was stored in the Dutch barn until the winter. Harvest and threshing required a large workforce – not something a one man farm ever had – and it was normal practice for all the farm workers on neighbouring farms to work together around the farms till the job was done. I recall that two of these men were old Mr Clark and his son Con who lived in Kington Cottages just by Kington Grange. Mr Clark later took a job sweeping the local roads for the council – with a hand broom and shovel. Con went on to manage the Grange farm. I can remember the jugs of tea that my mother brought out to replenish the gang – it had a wonderful refreshing taste that one rarely finds in a cup of tea today. Perhaps it was all that lead in the water! More on threshing below under mechanisation.

The ICI era – the making of Barnmoor

From the outset the farm would have looked like and been run like any other in the locality. Then in the early 1950s my father was visited by a representative of ICI, the major producer in the new business of agricultural chemicals, especially fertilizer. ICI had a proposition and it was this – my father would follow ICI farm management advice particularly in the use of fertilizer for a period of ten years. He would also keep detailed records regarding all inputs and outputs so that the data could be analysed in great detail and used to determine the success or otherwise of various strategies. In return he would receive a fee of £500 per year plus the benefits of a more profitable farm.

I believe my father jumped at this outstanding opportunity and he remarked later that it was his making both financially and as a well known agricultural figure. There was no doubt that it was a major success with a big increase in the number of cows kept on the 40 acres (three of the original 43 had been sold to Mr Harper at Four Winds) and a huge rise in the milk output. The farm always looked lush with vast quantities of grass half of which was cut for silage, then a relatively new method of winter feed storage.

ICI paid enormous attention to this and the other farms in the scheme (I think there were ten) and their experts visited almost every week to study, discuss and advise. They used a number of publicity techniques to show the world how the modern farm could be run to increase its productivity and earning power.

Each summer they would hold several open evenings when dozens of local farmers would be welcomed to conducted tours. I well remember sitting on the style at the farm gate handing out copies of the programme. There was always refreshment afterwards provided on trestle tables in the garage. ICI also produced a 16mm film called *Milk and Money from Forty Acres*. Lasting about 20 minutes, this was premiered to the family at a dinner held at the Swan's Nest hotel in Stratford. I recall it was the first time I had ever been 'out to dinner' at a posh establishment! Because a copy of such a film was very expensive then, and the equipment required to play it beyond a domestic budget, we never had a copy. Much to my regret, I never saw it again. Many years later it was believed that all copies had been destroyed.

This picture was taken about 1952 by an ICI fieldsman who was recording the outstanding growth of grass. Barnmoor Farm, Claverdon is in the background and this field was known as No. 6., all the fields then having numbers rather than names. The farmer was Mr Roddy Boddington and the child in the picture is his eldest son, Tim (who writes this).

Along the left hand hedge are two items leaning over the hedge. I remember these being there but unfortunately cannot remember what they were.

This picture was scanned from a positive transparency which has become very dirty. The colours have also badly faded – the grass should all be more like that in the bottom left corner. I have digitally cleaned the picture to some extent, without altering any significant details, and raised its brightness. It requires further colour correction, but there is no mistaking the quality of the grass.

My father was also on several occasions a guest and the subject of the farming programme broadcast by BBC TV very late in the evening, just before closedown. Video recording was in its infancy then and the programmes were largely broadcast live. We would go to the studios in Birmingham early in the evening and watch the whole programme being put

together a piece at a time with rehearsals, modifications and more rehearsals. Come the broadcast time off they would go, studio discussion interspersed by short film clips taken at the farm the previous week. It also became obvious that some short parts of the programme had been recorded during the rehearsals and were being used in the broadcast. The thing that amazed me most was the crudely hand painted text boards which looked wonderful on screen! TV was all in black & white in those days of course.

During the ICI years we got to know many of their technical staff who became firm family friends for very many years beyond the scheme. These included George McHargue, Jimmy Mitchell, Ken Deighton (whose widow we are in contact with to this day), and others whose names have faded into history.

Of course all this success and publicity meant that agricultural salesmen would make a bee-line for the farm. They became a significant nuisance so my father employed various techniques for putting them off. He was one of the first extensive users of the electric fence – it was used to manage the strip grazing and to create the cattle walkways all across the farm. Almost anywhere there was a handy fence close by. So the eager salesman would approach my jovial father, hand outstretched for that all important first handshake. My father would respond with his, but with the other hand firmly attached to the electric fence!

Mechanisation

When my father moved to Barnmoor, in 1945, agriculture was only just getting out of the horse-drawn era. It is probable that he didn't have a tractor at the start – he wouldn't have needed one at Mistletoe farm. However, it could not have been long before he acquired his first, a Fordson Minor with spade lug wheels.

The Fordson had a single peddle which on depression first disengaged the clutch then, as it was pressed further, applied the brakes. My first job on the farm, at the age of four (summer 1946), was to 'steer' this tractor along the open field while my father loaded sheaves of corn onto the following trailer. No great steering ability was required! I just had to try and maintain a straight line. When it was necessary to stop he would jump on the back and press the peddle which, was of course, far out of my reach and I wasn't heavy enough to depress it anyway! However, as time passed I grew and he fitted the tractor with a lever connected to the pedal which provided some advantage enabling me to stop the tractor. By the time we had a little grey Fergie, a Ferguson TE20 built locally at Banner Lane, Coventry, I was bigger but that tractor was much lighter to operate so I had no difficulty driving it, probably from about 7 or 8.

Many tasks requiring tractor power were undertaken by contractors or borrowed equipment. For instance in the early days, a binder was borrowed to cut the corn harvest. The sheaves were stooked in sixes or eights by hand and left to dry in the air. They were then loaded onto carts and taken to the barn for storage until winter.

During the winter the threshing contractors would tour the district spending a few days at each farm. It was a Marshall's drum, as the threshing machine was known, hauled and powered by a Marshall single cylinder tractor. There was also a straw baler. It can't have been many years since the whole rig was

hauled by a steam traction engine but they had been replaced by the Marshall by the end of the WWII. This equipment was located on the concrete track between the barn and the cow yard. The baler was of the old type – huge and producing equally enormous wire tied bales; at least two hundredweight (cwt) a piece, about 100 kilos. The grain was bagged off from the drum into 2cwt jute sacks. Men must have been a lot stronger in those days. Today 25 kilos is about the limit!

Within a few years all this super heavy weight machinery had gone to be replaced by the combine harvester and the small towed baler. The whole job of harvest, threshing and baling was now completed in a couple of days in September with the bales brought into the barn within a few more days. A massive improvement in efficiency.

The Fordson, too, was replaced by a grey Ferguson TE20 running on Tractor Vaporising Oil (TVO). This tractor was revolutionary at the time, introducing the three point linkage for connecting implements and with its hydraulics for lifting the implements. There was various equipment available to attach to this linkage and I recall that we had at least a two furrow plough, a cultivator, a scoop and a box. The scoop was bought to excavate a large pit behind the barn in which to put more silage – more cows needed more winter feed. The box was the most useful item and was the default attachment used to carry all manner of items around the farm. So much easier than a trailer.

Before silage the winter feed for cattle was hay and making this was a very important summer time occupation. First it was cut using a Ransomes mower. This was of a 19th century design made mainly of cast iron components, a simple gearbox and an engineered cutter bar. I remember my father using a file to sharpen the triangular blade teeth – a sharp blade was essential for smooth running. These old mowers had very often been designed and built for horse haulage and then converted for tractor use. Ours still had a seat on the back from its horse days. The shafts had been replaced by a single arm for attachment to the tractor.

When silage became popular there was a demand for suitable equipment to harvest it. At first my father continued to cut the grass with the Ransomes mower and then used what was called a buck rake to collect it up and transport it to the silage clamp. The buck rake was mounted on the Ferguson hydraulics, on the rear of the tractor, and consisted of a back frame with about 20 long tines sticking straight out the back. In use the rake was lowered to the ground and adjusted so that the tines lay flat. The tractor was then reversed along two rows of cut grass gathering it up on the tines. In theory, once the rake was full, it was lifted by the hydraulics ready for delivery to the clamp. In practice, particularly when the grass was a bit wet, the rake stayed on the ground and the front of the tractor lifted into the air! This was remedied to some extent by adding weights to the front of the tractor. Often, a load was taken home with all the weight on the rear wheels and the front wheels just bouncing along. Steering was then effected by depressing the individual wheel brakes – a very useful feature of the Ferguson tractor.

On arriving at the clamp the load had to be dumped as high up as possible. The clamp became a huge ramp upon which more and more grass had to be deposited. With the passing of time and with constant rolling from the tractor, the clamp subsided, excluding the air from within, thus ensuring the

preservation of the grass rather than allowing it to go rotten. This is the principle behind silage making.

In time better equipment was developed for silage making. The most important was the invention of the harvester/blower. The first version that we had was a machine fitted with two contra-rotating cutter blades – each blade was actually a square steel plate with one of those triangular blades taken from the old mower bolted to each corner. The cutters were rotating towards each other so that all the grass was thrown together in the centre. It then passed backwards into a chamber in which there was a very high speed rotating paddle which generated a draught and a throw to send the grass up a shoot which was directed at an open trailer towed behind or separately hauled beside the harvester. This early machine was very rudimentary and made an enormous amount of noise. It could easily be heard in Claverdon village, about 1 mile away, and was known by everyone as Moaning Minnie.

One of the first discoveries on using this machine was that a TE20 lacked sufficient power to drive it. I well remember running the machine with the tractor struggling hard on full revs and then creeping along in first gear, which was really too fast. The engine would go slower and slower, which meant the revs of the harvester were insufficient for it to blow the crop up the spout, and the whole rig would come to a stand still, requiring it to be cleared of grass before beginning again.

We got ourselves a bigger tractor – a Massey-Ferguson 35, a diesel tractor more suited to the task. But when I see them today they are still a very small tractor! It also helped that grass harvester technology moved along and a subsequent machine did the job with less power – and a lot less noise! I think we used the MF35 to pull and drive the harvester and the TE20 to pull the trailer.

Neighbours

While we lived in a fairly isolated spot we did have a few neighbours. The nearest were the two cottages opposite the farm gate. Much of the time we lived there the right hand cottage was occupied by the Dew family, husband, wife and six children. Mrs Dew was a very large lady and my parents often joked about the weather and that there was a heavy dew over the road!

In the left hand cottage was a family whose name I forget but I used to play with their son Melvin. The only notable thing I can remember is that they had a bath downstairs right behind the back door (an afterthought as there was no bathroom in these houses). The bath was notable because it never seemed to be used for its intended purpose – bags of coal were kept in one end and the other was filled by a huge pile of Dandy and Beano comics which we loved to read because we were not allowed to have them at home!

These cottages belonged to Cherry Pool Farm. The farmer there was Mr (and Mrs) Lambert. So far as I recall they didn't actually work on the farm at all. We only saw them once a year when we children were invited on Christmas Eve to go and get a small gift off their Christmas tree.

Around the corner was Kington Grange, 'The Grange', occupied by the already mentioned Challen family. I recall that in the early 1950s Colonel Challen got contractors in to dredge the large pond located close to the house. Two steam traction engines were employed; one was located in the

driveway, the other was way down the field beyond the garden. Between these two a cable was drawn, attached to horizontal winding drums under the boilers of the engines. On this cable was a bucket about six feet wide. This was drawn back until it sank into the mud at the back of the pond and was then drawn through the pond by the far engine. When full it would rise above the water and run along the ground across the field. There was a mechanism (I can no longer recall how it worked) which tipped the bucket forward and emptied the dredge onto the land. It would be spread thinly by the continuing forward motion of the bucket. And then the bucket would be drawn back for the next load.

Continuing along Kington Lane, on our side of the road, there were a pair of semi-detached farm cottages and, later, a detached farm house.

The first cottage was occupied by the Albutt family. They arrived from Wixford (by Alcester) when I was six; 1948 or early 49. They had three children; Tim, who was just six weeks younger than I, Susan who was then 4 and Richard who was 2. Later a second daughter was born – Sarah, who was the first baby of whose birth I was conscious!

Frank & Ruth Albutt were, respectively, groom/gardener and housekeeper/cook at The Grange. Ruth was a brilliant cook and was famed for her culinary presentations at dinners and other events held at The Grange.

Inevitably we became very friendly with the Albutt children. We did most things together throughout our childhood. The entire family were incredibly welcoming and we frequently stayed to tea and joined in with other events and parties held there. There was always a lot going on! We remain in contact today. Tim became an outstanding engineer with his own very successful business and lives in Birmingham, Susan and Richard both live in Canada, and Sarah lives in Herefordshire.

Con Clarke lived in the second cottage. I recall him marrying but I don't remember any children.

Con's parents lived in New Farm House. New because it was built in the 1950s, I suspect at about the time Con needed a house of his own. The Challens were extremely socially minded and would have built this to enable Con to get married and to ensure that his parents were not left homeless.

This generosity extended to when it was time for the Albutts to retire, and the Challens wanted to sell up and themselves retire to Australia. They acquired a cottage in Herefordshire for the Albutts. It needed a full refurbishment and enlargement and Col Challen enabled us all to undertake the work on a DIY basis. We had weekend working parties over there for months. It was a beautiful house by the time we had finished and Frank & Ruth lived there very happily for many years until Frank died. Ruth then moved to another house in Leominster, which was more manageable for her, the Challens attending to all the financial arrangements involved in the sale and purchase of the properties.

Beyond Kington Cottages there was the sand and gravel pit on the right with its derelict brickworks. Quite some way beyond that there were two early 20thC cottages and then a house on the hill, again on the right. This was occupied by the Coverdale family. Mr Coverdale was a paint scientist and

there were rows of samples on racks in the garden, presumably to see how they stood up to the sun and rain. This garden also contained a fair sized pond; I recall it all being rather nice. I suspect the garden was actually recovered from the extremity of the sand and gravel pit.

Opposite the drive entrance to this house there was (still is) an absolutely delightful little cottage that had giant butterflies and other insects artistically spread across its walls. A little further up the hill there is now a house that wasn't there when I was a child but which I had a hand in building in the early 1960s. It is notable because it is timber framed, very innovative in this country in those days, and, because of its position deep in this little valley, built up side down – living rooms on the top, bedrooms on the bottom. At the time I was designing modern timber framed houses and bungalows for Linton Timber Buildings, a subsidiary of Wigfield & Pluck, who built this house.

Back to Barnmoor and if we turn right out of the drive we come first to Four Winds where the Harpers lived. Bill was a very quiet man and I never really got to know him. Rosely was a delight, having a most attractive foreign accent, Italian I think. They had two daughters, Jill and Jacky. My parents were very friendly with the Harpers since the 1930s. When my father had a motorbike and sidecar Bill wanted to try it. He set off and the pull of the sidecar immediately turned the outfit round and he finished up in a ditch!

Just beyond their drive was a bad corner and just past that on the left was a new farm house which I recall being built – indeed I was on the site while it was under construction and was responsible for laying a number of bricks! I don't recall who lived here.

Right next door to this house was a very decrepit timber bungalow; a rather frightening place for a child, and I don't recall going to the door more than a couple of times.

Next, on the left is the common, Barnmoor Common. This was a very open area with ungrazed grass when I was young but over the years it became covered in brambles and hawthorn bushes.

Opposite the common was a beautiful cottage with a very long thin garden beside the road and a garage at the very end. The Bowmer family lived here. I recall they had three daughters, all much older than us. One was named Neppity, (spelling?) a name I have never come across since. Mrs Bowmer was a school teacher at the school we were sent to at Hampton on the Hill, near Warwick. This was very convenient because Mrs Bowmer was able to take us to school and back until we were 8 years old, so we walked along the lane to her cottage each school day.

I didn't know anyone else who lived in Kington Lane.

Claverdon Hall

In 1952 it was time for me to go to boarding school. This would be a considerable expense for my parents. However, by great good fortune at just the right moment my father had a visit from Sir Ivan Stedeford. He was an illustrious businessman and owned the Claverdon Hall estate. He had heard of my father's farm improvement and was impressed with him and his management of the farm. He wanted my father to do the same for Claverdon Hall.

A small farm, especially one that was undergoing the changes that Barnmoor was going through, was a full time job for a man, so taking on the management of another, much bigger, farm would be a huge undertaking. But the rewards for doing so, about £1,000 pa., would be tremendous and would more than pay for the children's education. Always one for a challenge, my father accepted the position. And with the job came the use of a Land Rover. They were pretty simple then – they first came out in 1948 – but believe me it was a lot better across the fields than a Ford Popular! This was the first road vehicle that I drove, across the fields, aged about 12. Remember, I'd been driving tractors for eight years already so it wasn't that much of a step up. (We farm boys were permitted to drive the school tractor on the country lanes around our school in Hampshire from the age of 14 – completely illegally of course!)

My father had an office in the stable yard at the Hall. As well as managing the farm he also paid special attention to training up the senior employee, Jack Masters. Jack was an ambitious chap who learned fast and a few years later took a farm of his own, one of the County Council owned farms.

Broiler farming

While Barnmoor was primarily a dairy farm, my father recognised the need to maximise his productivity. He needed a second activity on the farm which didn't take up much land; that was needed for the dairy side. It might well have been an expansion of egg production – he already had a few hundred layers.

However, at that time, broiler rearing was the new in thing. New chicken processing plants were being built and they needed a constant supply of fat chickens. There was clearly more money in this than in egg production, which was also more labour intensive – no good for a one man operation.

And so the first chicken house was purchased from Wigfield & Pluck at Norton Lindsey. 45ft wide by 120ft long, it was state of the art, fully prefabricated, highly insulated, containing 5,000 chicks from day old to 10 weeks. Once full grown they were all picked up in a single night and loaded into crates on a couple of lorries and taken to Devizes for 8.00am opening time at the packing plant.

This first house was a huge success and it was extended to its full design length of 240ft. Later still a second house was built. Design had moved on by then and this house was 70ft square with what was called a plenum ventilation system. A third house was built behind the second, again 70ft square.

Disease control required that the farm was free of all chicken for a fortnight between crops so all the birds, about 36,000 in total, had to be the same age and all picked up and loaded over two nights – no easy task, one requiring many volunteer local hands. However they were well paid for their trouble.

Winding down

Having left home to follow my own career in the 1960s, some of the dates are uncertain. My father closed down the dairy side. This was not only because he was getting older, and milking is a very hard task at the best of times, but also because changes in the industry meant that the rewards were getting

slim – and they haven't improved since which is why Britain is close to losing its dairy industry in the 2010s.

In the mid 1970s my father handed over to my brother and retired with a very satisfactory career behind him. He achieved a great deal in farming and he gave a great deal of help and advice to many other farmers which no doubt was of value to them. He was also a first class councillor, attending to and supporting in a very practical way many of his constituents.

He died at the farm in 1980, aged 70. His funeral, held on Christmas Eve when everyone has a lot else to attend to, was attended by over 300 relatives and friends, demonstrating the great regard and respect he had earned. He is buried in the parish churchyard at Claverdon. Katharine, his wife, was laid beside him in 2002.

Family tree: http://bit.ly/1pYZDzj

Tim Boddington
Written over a long period but completed on 7 January 2010
Rev 1, 5 October 2014 (small amount of additional info, some dates refined).