

Living Memories interview with Marjorie Longdin

Interviewer Lorna Payne

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I came to live at Wellingly Grange in 1949. I had been a nurse, trained at the General Infirmary at Leeds and it was quite a different atmosphere leaving a very busy hospital and moving to a very quiet farm, 2 miles out of the village, 300 acres, mainly arable, with sheep. At that time it employed 3 men, my husband and his father. Now there were no new buildings in Tickhill, the population was about 2,000, so we had to divide the farmhouse into 2. Now it's very well worth looking at is Wellingly farmhouse because it's very, very old. There's a low part that goes back to about 1550 and a high part which was the Georgian part which was put on and

about 16 something Robert Bradforth farmed there, who is thought to be the uncle of William Bradford and the 'th' became 'd' over the years and he probably stayed at Wellingly with his uncle. So it was quite historic but quite lonely. Now at that time, as I said, there were the 3 men and we grew potatoes sugar beet, and the corn crops. There were 4 carthorses, 1 small tractor but everything was mainly done with the horses.

And when was that?

1949. The corn was harvested with the binder which shot out the sheaves of wheat, which were then stooked to protect them from the rain. They were done in a certain way and being quite lonely I always used to go out to help the men and sometimes extra labourers at these busy times and I also used to help when it was time to get the potatoes up mainly for the company of the potato women who came down from the village. A lot of them belonged to the same family and one of them was, sort of, in charge, and when it approached potato picking time, John would go to see her and say, 'right, we want to start next Monday, how many can you bring?' Now it was very

important that nobody picked more than anybody else, and they were called 'stints'. They sort if worked out the length of the row and it was divided into the number of women. Now, I was spoilt, I was only allowed to pick half a stint but the others all had their stint and the potatoes were put in hampers and put into the trailer as it came along and they were stacked in the field, you know in those potato pies, covered in soil and ultimately straw. Also at that time when the stacks were made - and it was a real craftsman's job to build a stack of corn if you weren't going to thrash until a few months ahead. Now to me, I always thought it was very exciting when you could hear the chug, chug of the thrashing machine coming down the lane. John said, you have never carried chaff or you wouldn't be so keen but it was just one of those things - the thrashing machine came with the driver and his assistant and it was customary to feed them and they must have got really fed up with rabbit and hare - you know, people took the cheap way out so it would be rabbit pie or it would be jugged hare, probably. Well, the other men who came, and you often borrowed a man from a neighbouring farm. Now my father was a farmer and he always said that all those footpaths between farms, which have caused so much controversy, they were made there, not for people to walk for leisure but for workers to walk from one farm to the next to help at busy times. So, thrashing day to me was always quite exciting.

Now, it was 4 years before I had any babies and when I went to Wellingly in 1949 there was no electricity and the only way I would agree to get married and go to Wellingly was if I could have an AGA cooker, because I knew that if I had an AGA cooker I would have a warm kitchen and hot water, and that AGA in 1949 cost £110.00 but it was my pride and joy.

So did your husband live on the farm before?

Oh, yes, he was born there. Well, actually he was born in Wadworth but he went there in 1930 when he was a little boy.

Now, we had the 3 employed men. Now in years to come we had a farm student who went to Askham Brian, and he did a survey of the farm and he came to show John what he had developed and he said. 'You know, in the future, you are going to be able to run this farm with 1 large tractor and 1 man', and we thought, well, this is ridiculous, but believe me, Peter runs the farm now with no men at all. He gets contractors in to do some of the work and he's got to have people come when it is very busy, to help. But you couldn't believe it in those days, but in those days, everybody farmed everything, there were sheep, there were pigs, there was a yard full of cattle.

There were the 4 horses so there needed to be a horseman. Now one of the men had come out of the army and found that he got married and he couldn't really manage on the farm wage and he wasn't in a tied cottage, which they had free so he left to go down the pit so he wasn't replaced and then gradually as the others left, we got down to 1 worker.

I remember the day when somebody said 'There's a new machine that cuts the corn and thrashes it at the same time and it's called a combine'.

Everybody rushed to Firbeck where this machine was working to have a look at it. And then they brought in a potato lifting machine which only needed 4 women on it, so the mechanisation since 1949 has been absolutely unbelievable. Then the potatoes were all stored inside and you combined the grain and it was all put into silos.

So what did you actually do with the potatoes? Did you sell them locally?

Oh, yes, you see in 1950 we were still very short of food and one of the things I do think about now is that farmers were encouraged to pull up hedges because it gave a little bit more land to be worked – you could get nearer with the machines, so I think there was a payment to pull up hedges and plough up grassland because of this shortage of food in the '50's. It amuses me very much now because my son is getting paid to put hedges back and when I go down the lane to Wellingly where there are hedges planted it is quite amusing. The potatoes were sold through potato merchants and on a cold day like today they were probably riddling potatoes outside with 1 or 2 women to pick off the bad ones off the machine that riddled them, because all the small ones dropped through and potatoes of an even size went along.

It's amazing; I don't think of things like this but to you it was life wasn't it?

In those days, actually, the marketing was very staggered. I mean, today, after potato time all the potatoes are in store and can be got at at any time. The same with the grain – it's all in store all over the country so it can all be sold like that but when you relied on thrashing days, there was only so much corn coming on the market depending on how many thrashing days there were. So marketing was easier in those days than it is today. One interesting thing was, we used to have 2 Irish men came to help get the sugar beet up. Now, they lived in a barn outside which was built for that sort of labour because it had a fireplace in it and they used to make a bed with straw on a ledge and I used to cook them a mid-day meal. One was called Tip but I

can't think of the other one. Well, they got paid on a Friday tea time and by Saturday lunch time they would have spent up – they'd have gone to Doncaster and spent up. But it was always one of the yearly events when the Irish men arrived.

And always the same ones?

Well. Each farm had its Irish men.

So how many farms would there have been in Tickhill at that time?

Well, there was a farm where Scarbrough Close is. Just below Scarbrough Arms – a little farm there. There was a farm just where York Road & Lancaster Crescent meet. There was a little farm just at the end of St. Mary's Road where it goes into Dadesley Road. There was Wellingley, Stancil which had a site of a Roman villa – it's under the tennis court actually now. There was Gally Hill Farm on the outskirts, but the history of Wellingley is quite interesting because there were 3 walnut trees and looking into the history of Wellingley, it had once belonged to the abbots of Roche and the abbots always planted walnut trees on their outlying farms. Now another thing, there was a manor farm – you know the big house that's been built by the chapel? Well, it doesn't upset me at all, that house, because it's 10 times better than what it used to be where the big vehicles are and the Oxfam shop – that was Manor Farm and it was a big 3 storey house, snowcem- ed white with steps that came right up to the pavement and where St. Mary's Mews are at the back in St Mary's Road, was the stack yard. So that big house to the right of the chapel isn't half as big an eyesore as the Manor Farm house was. That was right in the village and at that time in '49 there was this lovely grocer's shop called Jarvis' and one day my mother-in-law said to me 'I think I ought to take you down to the village and introduce you to Mr. Dick and Mr. Harry Jarvis'. Which she did, and where the flower shop is was Jarvis the drapers. There were so many shops. There were 3 butchers, Dawson's, Glasby's and I can't remember the other, 3 fish and chip shops, 1 in Westgate where the house is for sale now with the double bay windows, 1 where it is now, and 1 up near the Royal Oak. Now.....somebody should tell them at 'The Oak' that the 'Royal Oak' means something but 'The Oak' doesn't. Because they've taken the 'Royal' away.

So what would 'The Royal Oak' have meant?

Well, it's my birthday actually, Royal Oak day. It was when Charles second hid up the oak tree to hide away from Cromwell and it was always labelled Royal Oak Day.

So they shouldn't have got rid of the 'Royal Oak' I wonder why they did.

Because everybody used to cut it short and say 'The Oak'.

You know it was very feudal was Tickhill in '49 – '50. In the fifties the WI started and it was an immediate success. In those days the West Riding used to have a West Riding food advisor to the domestic economy and we used to have lots of classes. Lea Hurst which is now 2 houses down Sunderland Street, the lady there was a member and she had a very big kitchen and we often went there and we did jam making, sweet making, how to draw boiling fowl. We had all these classes and also the WI bought some bottling equipment so we could bottle our own fruit because it was this food thing in the 50's. Also there was a very big Sunday School – there must have been because I remember they used to have quite a few coaches every year to take the Sunday School on a day trip to Cleethorpes.

And what would the Sunday School have been? The Church or..

The church - with Cannon Cook. It must have been very big because there were always so many coaches and there was always a very big garden fête at Westgarth. Now Westgarth is just down Dam Road. It was one very big house but it is now 2 houses and the buildings have been made into 2 houses and it has a swimming pool on the lawn where all the stalls were set around and everybody wore a hat. Also the Sunday School children did Maypole dancing. Another thing is that the castle used to be a school. Yes, in the 50's there was a private school at the castle. It belongs to the Duchy of Lancaster, as you probably know, and I think the school must have closed and it was then rented out and one of the people I remember was a very good tenant there was a Mr. & Mrs. Waters and he was head of music in the West Riding, and she was Rosemary Horsman in her own right of the BBC's Woman's Hour. Whilst they were there, he arranged the Beating the Retreat by the Royal Marines Band in the grounds of the castle. They started marching from the buttercross and it was absolutely wonderful. Then they moved on and there were a couple called the Gentry, who lived at the castle! And he was to do with music in the West Riding.

So did they teach music there?

No, they were responsible for organizing the music in all the West Riding schools.

And of course, there was a little private school near the Royal Oak in a wooden hut. The Misses Goodwin. Well, my husband didn't go to that – his sister did but he went to the ordinary school, and he always said that the building of all the new houses were a great improvement because the quality of the school children went up. He remembered them all, some of them with no shoes and patched trousers. It was a feudal village, you see, there were the big houses and then there were the work people and of course always the pubs. Everybody employed a lot of labour you see in those days.

I remember also doing meals on wheels. I don't what decade that was but there were 12 people got meals on wheels and we used to collect it from Harworth Colliery. There were 2 of you – 1 had to have a car and we'd put them in the boot.

Was that WRVS?

It must have been WRVS then of course, like a lot of good things it was taken over by the Local Authority and of course, nothing gets better does it? The Carpenter's Arms there, had a room, a schools room, that used to run down where these houses now are and the Misses Ashmore, I think, taught dancing there. And some of their pupils became Tiller Girls and Bluebell Girls.

Mr. D'Eath came down for the grocery order on a Thursday morning which was delivered, all £2.00 worth of it and was delivered on a Friday afternoon by George Winfree (or Winfroe) who was a lovely fellow who sang in the choir. You know, in the 50's things were still rationed I think when I got married, the meat ration was something like 1s 6d a week each and sugar and butter. It was quite a long way into the 50's before everything stopped being rationed. And, of course we used to kill a pig. My mother loved pig killing day – during the war you were allowed to keep a pig so everybody who possibly had somewhere to keep a pig, did and then the time came for it to be killed and if it was staggered in an area, people a bit of somebody else's pig and then passed it back. The thing you often gave to a neighbour was the pig's fry which was some of the offal, the heart, kidney, liver & little bits of meat and the custom was that they did not have to wash the plate, they gave you the plate back dirty or it was unlucky. I know my

mother used to love pig killing day, or what she used to say 'putting a pig away'.

How would they do it then?

Well, there used to be somebody in the district who was a pig killer or the local butchers and they'd come and kill the pig on the farm and it would be hung up in an outhouse overnight and the next day they would come and start - and there was a certain way of doing it. The first thing they cut out was all the fat around the kidneys and that would be chopped up into little bits and put in the oven and rendered down and then it was put in great big pots and that was lard and the little crackly bits you'd salt and have them for tea that day. So you'd got your lard cooling and you'd got the kidney and they'd be put on one side with the heart and all those pieces.

And I guess it was all eaten?

Yes, everything but the squeak. Then everything was jointed. Now at Wellingley, in the old dairy, which is now a modern kitchen, there was a big pig curing slab - a stone slab and it had a ridge going around it with a hole at one end. Now when you were killing a pig you used to get these great big slabs of salt - block salt - and you used to have to crush it with a rolling pin. You'd cover the pig curing slab with this salt and then the ham and the bacon pieces would be laid on it and saltpeter was always rubbed into the joints of the ham - it cured it better. Everybody had their own recipe for how they did the bacon and the ham. Possibly a little bit of sugar might be added to the ham and rubbed in and a liquid drained out and it went into this ridge and you had a bucket under the hole and you kept them there but everybody had their own thing about how long they kept the bacon and the ham for curing. You find that in most farmhouses in a kitchen or a back kitchen there would be hooks in the ceiling and that was to hang the ham and the bacon on. Sometimes people would put them into muslin but the bacon was usually pretty fat. Now my father lived to be 97 and he was brought up on boiled fat bacon with as much salt and pepper as you could eat - everything that they say today that you shouldn't have.

Are there any other changes in Tickhill that you can remember?

Well, the doctor's surgery was attached to the house which is the big red brick house which is this side of the Traveller's Rest, just before the turn to

Worksop. You went into a waiting room which was a little bit like one of those old railway carriages, without a corridor, and you looked to see who was in to know who you went in after, but quite often you could hear what Dr. Coutts-Wood was saying. In those days there was just Dr. Coutts-Wood in Tickhill and Dr. Redfern at Harworth and they would relieve each other a bit. Then Dr. Coutts-Wood got an assistant – Dr. Kelly when the village grew.

The village started to grow roughly about 45 years ago. I lived on top of my in-laws for 13 years and my father-in-law retired but there was just nowhere for them to move to in the village – there were no new buildings and he was a bit funny about where he would move to and then one day my mother-in-law saw Mr. Sinclair who lived on Wong Lane at Quintways, and he said “I hear you are wanting somewhere to live in the village – well you know my mother-in-law has died and her bungalow is for sale. It’s £4,000 and there are a whole lot of people wanting it but you’ve got first choice because we know you’ll be quiet!” They were so thrilled and then quite soon after that, Firths got permission to build St. Mary’s Crescent. So that was about the start of it really. Then Ben Bailey got permission for York Road and Lancaster Crescent which was the beginning of Tickhill growing to be what it is today.