

William Henry Simons

There are few places left in today's "hustle bustle" world that can offer us a few precious moments of solitude. A place to stand and stare as we attempt to put our daily problems into perspective. Yet, surprisingly most villages have one, the local churchyard. Even if it happens to be unfamiliar, reading a few headstones may provide us with that much needed dose of reality. Just how did Elsie Smith come to terms with the loss of the three children under 10, followed several years later by the loss of her husband in the great war, leaving her to raise the three remaining children alone? It makes the letter little Johnnie brought home from school yesterday, reporting an outbreak of head lice seem quite trivial. In another era it could have been a letter similar to the one received by Mr. & Mrs. Simons in the autumn of 1918, with news from their son William, the first line of which reads "We regret to inform you".

William Simons, the son of Charles and Harriet Simons was brought up with his four brothers and three sisters in a "two up and two down cottage" in the village of Brattleby. The bedroom ceilings were so low, they were unable to stand upright.

Like many other young men of the time he joined up for the fight for king and country, seduced by the prospect of a few months adventure in a foreign land, no doubt believing –as many did– "it'll all be over by Christmas". Unfortunately this statement proved to be widely optimistic, with the dreadful carnage raging on for a further three years, ending on the 11th of November 1918. William wrote the following letter to his sister on 14th August 1918.

Dear Sister,

Just a line hoping to find you both quite well as it leaves me at present. You will think I have forgotten you but it is such a job to get paper where we are now. You will know I am not with the battalion and my proper address is B Company 1st Lincolns attached to I75 Tunnelling Company B E F France.

I have got not yet got the parcel you sent I may do yet as it would go to the battalion and it might have got lost but I have got your other letters alright we are having a good time here and having some beautiful weather. I think the news is better and I don't think it will be long before it is over. I wish I was back at the old job again now it would be a change. I like this job better than the other and I can get on with it well I must now conclude hoping to hear from you again soon.
With best love to you both your loving brother William.

Tragically William was killed in October, and whether he received his parcel or not we shall never know.

His parents outlived him by almost 40 years oddly both dying on the 27th November 1947 within 30 minutes of each other in different hospitals. This story came to light during the restoration of the Brattleby War Memorial. Now after many years the once illegible names can now be seen again. One can't help but think of those immortal words by John Maxwell Evans "When you go home tell them of us and say, for their tomorrow we gave our today".

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Mrs. R. Allen of Helmswell for the loan of the photographs, and her kind donation to the Brattleby War Memorial Fund.

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M/S PENCE

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on March 3rd at 53 Cecil St.

I was born in Lincoln in 1923, not far from the Cathedral, and incidentally was confirmed in the Cathedral 50 years later.

I have not lived out of the County so I can say I am a real Lincolnshire yellowbelly, and there are many and varied interpretations as to how that term originated.

* My first memories go back to living on a small farm at Brattleby - my father must have rented it from the "Squire" who lived at the Hall, as I remember him putting on his best suit & cap, complete with collar & tie to go up to the Hall on rent day. Indeed, on looking back, I think most of the village must have belonged to the "Squire" ^(WRIGHT) as was the case with a lot of villages. But life on a small farm was not very prosperous - the first Christmas I can recall must have been 1926 when I was nearly four years old - I hung up my father's sock which was filled with nuts and oranges, and our Christmas tree was a bunch of holly hung from a bacon hook on the kitchen ceiling - I suppose the bacon was still in the salting tub as most people killed their pig just before Christmas, the fresher the better as that helped the quality of the meat.

The very mention of pig-killing is guaranteed to stir up a wealth of nostalgia amongst older people; nearly everyone in the village kept a pig which provided the mainstay of "country fare", and for many farm workers it was part of their 'deal' with their boss to be provided with a young pig to feed up; some bosses made free milk and firewood, when available, part of their deal.

Pig-killing day was the start of a spell of feverish activity - there was always a local man who went round 'slaughtering' - he used a knife - no 'humane methods' then - so I won't go into the gory details.

The animal was ^{they} hung on a tripod and left, usually overnight, then the slaughter man would come & cut the carcass up and the pieces to be 'cured' were put into a salting tub - a long shallow tub containing a lot of salt. I can't remember how long this process lasted but the next step was to secure each part in linen bags and hang them from the kitchen ceiling, and joints

were cut from them as required, hams and chine being the prime ones. But the best part was all the "goodies" produced from the killing - sausages, pork pies, scraps (from rendering down the fat), spare ribs, pork dripping, brawn and haslet - they all smelt and tasted so good and wholesome. There was mincemeat to be made and subsequently mince pies, and it was the custom to take a plate of pigs fry to the neighbours - this was a medley of pieces of pork and offal covered with a piece of 'veiling', a lacy looking fatty, almost transparent covering - and I never did know from what part of the pig it came, but then it was said you used everything but the squeal. The children usually delivered the "fries" - and it was considered ~~back~~ luck to wash the plate before giving it back, and often a penny was given for taking it - oh, what a lot could be bought with a penny.

Incidentally, I was an only child. The brawn was made by boiling the pigs face until the meat fell from the bone - chopping it up and pressing it into basins with the boiled down liquid added to make it "jel".

The farmyard, small though it was, offered wonderful places to play hide and seek, or my friends and I could go up the meadow - a veritable paradise of wild flowers and grasses; we played at house, shop, schools etc: in the outbuildings, making mud cakes in shoe polish tin lids, decorated with buttercup & daisy petals.

We had two horses and two or three cows, and the village pasture was a sort of communal grazing field for cows, maybe one of the 'perks' of being the Squires tenant.

Collecting the eggs was great fun because the chickens chose all sorts of secluded spots to lay their eggs, especially when they were 'broody' and wanted to sit on their eggs. It was vital that we found all of them because the money from the sale of eggs, milk and butter was the housekeeping money so we couldn't afford to use these things generously ourselves and I well remember telling my mother how my friends mother made much better cocoa than we had - of course, it was made with milk - their farm had more cows & seemed more prosperous.

The milk was put through a separator and the cream put on one side, then every Tuesday morning my mother rose early to make the butter in the cool pantry, but in hot weather

The handle of the wooden churn had to be turned for a long time before the "plop-plop" heralded the setting of the butter.

Harvest time, too, was exciting when we took hot meals out to the fields and picked blackberries on the way home - it was fairly predictable what the next day tea would be - rabbit pie and blackberry pie, & almost for free.

The fields were 'opened out' with a scythe, then the old binder came along, and when it got to the last few yards in the middle there was usually a few rabbits hiding there.

Small farmers helped each other when a bigger & workforce was needed, and threshing was one of those times. I remember, too, the big old steam cultivators which were used to draw implements from one side of a field to the other.

My father left the small farm in 1929 to be a farm labourer, and farm labourers generally lived in 'tied' cottages, so if you changed your job you moved house - quite simple - a farm wagon and two horses provided the transport and on to it went the beds, table, chairs, mats, dolly tub, wash tub, dolly pegs, pots, pans, trunks with clothes and bedding in them, and probably bicycles, and over and above those basic necessities families varied in what furniture they had like chests of drawers, wash-stand, sideboard, sofa, etc. For practical reasons they seldom moved very far until lorries came into use for "flitting".

Farm cottages were notoriously very basic, mostly brick floors, and the kitchen fireplace a main focal point, for not only did it provide the main source of heat but on one side was a side oven where everything was cooked by the fire heat, and on the other side a boiler full of water, also heated by the fire and that was the hot water supply - usually held a big bucket of water & was kept topped up by fetching water from the rainwater tub outside, or the yard pump. The oven shelves were used - wrapped in a blanket - to warm the beds.

The open fire was used for kettles and pans so the fire had to be lit to get your first "cuppa" in the morning.

The 'copper' to boil the clothes on wash day would be in an out-building. Most cottages had a second room with a small fireplace - only used on special occasions, and looking back to 1933, would cost 2/- to 4/- a week to rent, perhaps depending on what "perks" had been agreed.

It was always exciting when the farm animals had babies and we had baby chicks. Sadly most of them eventually had to go to market - they must have gone when I wasn't there as I don't remember how they were transported to market.

I do remember the carriers bus took my lilly goat to market in a crate - he fell out of favour when he butted me over

My Uncle was a single waggoner and "lived-in" at the farm where he worked. He fed and watered his horses very early in the morning, then returned to the farmhouse for breakfast, then out to the fields to work, taking his "snap", probably a thick bacon sandwich and a bottle of tea - usually cold by the time he needed it. He would return mid afternoon clean out the stables and carry in clean straw, feed the horses and sometimes turn them into the paddock for a while

Of course harvest and haytime called for a different timetable when they worked until dusk and men & horses were weary, but at all times the horses were tended again just before bedtime

He was paid once a year at "May-day", and if men let him wish to change their employer that was when they did it they went to the hiring fair, in his case it was Brigg, and there deals were struck and agreed with a "fastening penny".*

There was few opportunities for girls leaving school - most of them went into domestic service or worked on the farm - this was in small villages, of course.

When the second world war began in 1939 I was working at the Church Farm at Harpswell. Six of us girls quickly became part of the regular work force and learned to turn our hands to almost anything - things we would never previously have been expected to do. Farmworkers could get exemption from the armed forces, but we were still left short handed.

We learned to load waggons with hay and sheaves, and to handle the horses. We had tractors but fuel was precious so almost everything was done manually - planting cabbages & potatoes & harvesting them, weeding, hoeing and spreading manure and fertiliser from a cart.

Other root crops to be harvested were sugar beet, beetroots

parsnips and carrots and most of this fell in the cold weather - we scrounged gloves from anywhere and after a bitterly cold foggy frosty day pulling up beetroots and twisting off the tops, my hands stiff & swollen, I would wonder how I had got through the day - but there was a war on - no skiving - even when you had been up all night firewatching.

We cycled to other farms in the surrounding area which were owned by our boss's family to help out when needed - we cycled over roads packed down with snow - there was no resources for clearing them - sometimes some coarse gravel was applied but they remained treacherous throughout one very long spell of winter weather. We fed the beast in the cattle yard, giving the bull a wide berth, it was hard work by any body's yardstick, and it was only towards the end of the war when more mechanisation came our way - combine harvesters, balers, elevators, cabbage planter - quite medieval compared with the ones we see today.

I never thought there could be a machine to harvest potatoes - it really was one of the most arduous jobs, not just picking them into a basket but carrying the full basket over rough, unharvested rows of potatoes to a weighing machine - where we riddled them by hand, flipping them into the mouth of the sack hanging on the "scales". (this was a deft knack & you either mastered it or wasted time picking up potatoes which hadn't gone in the sack) all potatoes were dealt with in 8 stone sacks & when the sack was full it was taken off and replaced with another empty one.

When the lorries came to fetch them, usually 10 tons at a time, we loaded them, working in pairs with a "kicking stick" - this was a sturdy round length of wood about $\frac{3}{4}$ yd long, and here again, there was a knack in tipping the full sack back on to the stick and swinging it up on to the lorry.

I weighed less than a sack of potatoes myself - but

when seed potatoes were delivered I did my whack of carrying them up the granary steps on my back.

We made the best of a hard job and often sang our way through some of the most boring jobs like weeding and hoeing - the songs then had proper words, many of which I still remember.

Throughout the war our daily wage increased very little and my last days pay was $7/6$ ($37\frac{1}{2}$ pence)

I had always been very much involved in social life and various fund raising in the village so when it was decided to start a Women's Institute in 1953 I was in with both feet at the deep end, and throughout the 38 years of Hemswell and Harpswell W.I. I was an avid member, taking a turn at all offices except Treasurer - (that is not my forte) I was President for 11 years, Secretary for 16 years. I gained a great deal from the W.I. - had to have a go at most of the demonstrations we had. I went to the A.G.M. in the Albert Hall in 1981.

Four of us are now members of the Springthorpe and Heapham W.I., and in all my years as a member I have missed twelve meetings.

I was involved in our Evergreen Club (for the senior citizens) for most of the 18 years it was in being.

Our village school closed in 1970 and eventually we acquired it for a village hall which I was very much involved in. But in 1990 I felt I could no longer pull my weight, but

I continue as a member of the Church Parochial Council with responsibility for the cleaning and flowers rota, and am still a Parish councillor and ensure new residents to the village are welcomed with a leaflet giving details of what is available - shops opening times, roundsmen, social activities etc. - I started this in the W.I. and have continued by courtesy of the Parish Council.

Behind every gravestone inscription is a story.

Sometimes it is of loved ones being snatched in their childhood or of

much-loved grandparents who leave behind a large

and dotting family. **Mike**

Spencer, from Brattleby, has been looking at just

one of the tales which came to light during the

restoration of the village War Memorial and it

makes fascinating reading...



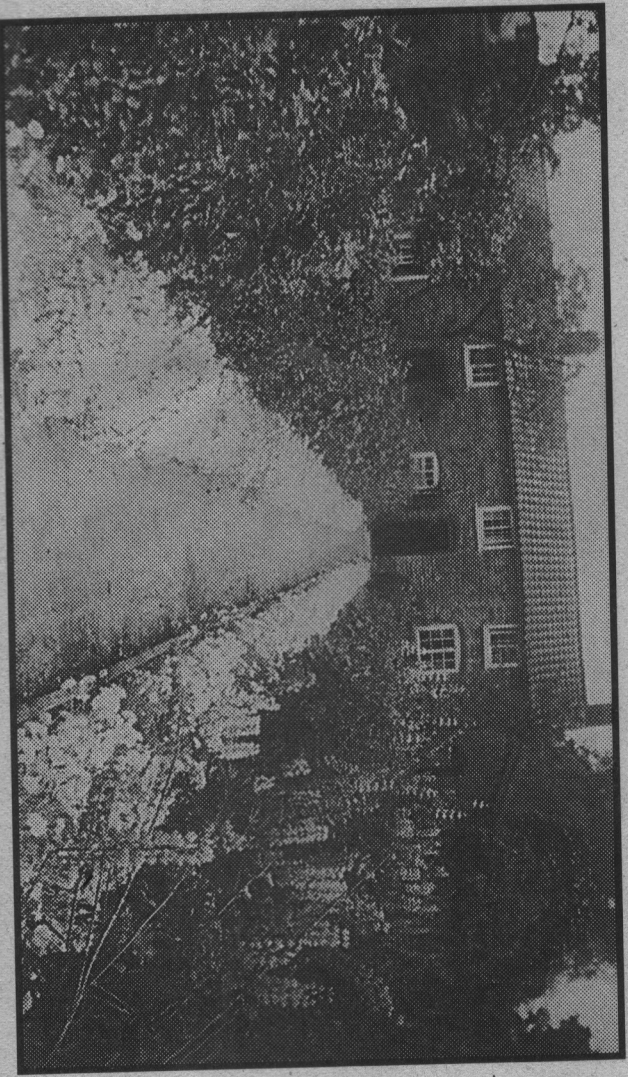
HERE are very few places left in today's world of hustle and bustle which can offer us a few precious moments of solitude – a place to stand and stare as we attempt to put our daily problems into perspective.

Yet, most villages have one – the local churchyard. Even if they happen to be unfamiliar, reading a few headstones may provide us

with that much-needed dose of reality.

You may find yourself asking questions like: “Just how did Elsie Smith come to terms with the loss of three children under 10, followed several years later by the loss of her husband in the Great War; leaving her to raise the three remaining children alone?”

It makes the letter little Johnny brought home from school yesterday, reporting an outbreak of headlice, seem quite trivial! In another era, it could have been a letter similar to the one received by Mr and Mrs



... Above left: Now just a memory the two-in-two-down cottage which was home to the Simons family at Brattleby. (Above, right): The name of William

Simons in the autumn of 1918, with news of their son William, the first line of which read: "We regret to inform you..."

William Simons, the son of Charles and Harriet Simons, was brought up with his four brothers and three sisters in a "two-up, two-down" cottage in Brattleby, near Lincoln. The bedroom ceilings were so low, everyone was unable to stand upright.

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"Your loving brother, William."



TEENAGE DAYS:

William Simons, above, riding in the wagon at the age of 14. Left: William's mother Harriet (standing left) with Miss Dobson, a governess at Brattleby Hall and Harriet's daughter Louise.

Tragically, William was killed in the October and whether or not he received his parcel, we shall never know.

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