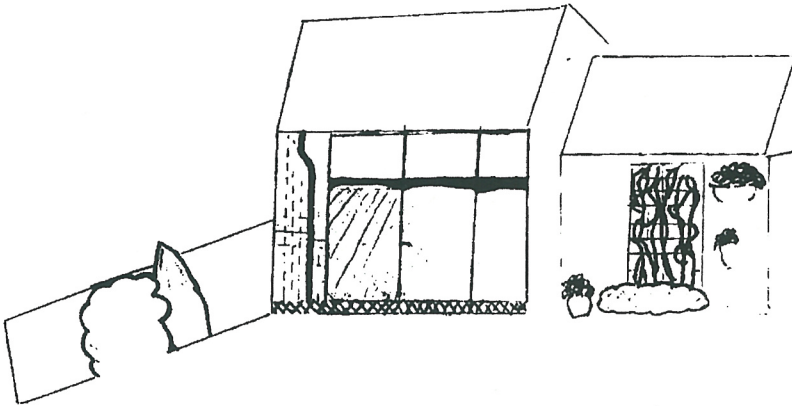


PART EIGHT

**INTO THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY**



Madeleine Ball, aged 9

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

MORE RECENT HAPPENINGS

Shocking murder in Norfolk. Terrible scenes in a field, mother of eight shot dead, suicide of assassin.

So read the headlines of the Eastern Daily Press on April 7th, 1908, after the peace and tranquillity of Welborne had been shattered by an event that not only horrified the entire village, but also upset the community for many years afterwards. Even today, some of our oldest residents can remember their parents relating this story to them generations later; such was the impact that this event had on the village. There are three sources for the facts, a newspaper article from the Eastern Daily Press, the Minutes of the Court of Petty Sessional Division of Forehoe, as recorded in the Hearing Book, and an eye witness account of 13 year old Mary Barham Johnson, the rector's daughter. Surprisingly enough, the event was not totally unexpected as the rectory gardener's reactions seem to imply. While it can be assumed that a 13 year old child's account might not be completely reliable, we can turn to the court records for the details.

The precursor to this appalling event appears to have been a deep seated fixation which James (Jimmy) Green developed for Ellen Smalls. Jimmy Green was a single man of 33 in 1906, working as a farm labourer and lodging with William Parling at Brick Yard Farm. His father, John was a gardener at the rectory working for the Rev. Henry Barham Johnson. Ellen Smalls, 34 was married to James Smalls, a labourer who worked for Mr Hubbard at a farm in the parish and they had 8 children between the ages of 4 and 19. As facts leading up to the event are sparse, we can only guess as to the cause of trouble between Jimmy and Ellen; as they were cousins, it is possible that a family dispute had been at the root of the problem. Maybe Ellen had upset Jimmy with harsh words or behaviour or perhaps he was attracted to her and she spurned his affections, or even taunted him but all this is pure speculation and we will never really know the truth. Suffice it to say that Jimmy Green began to stalk Ellen Smalls and even threatened to kill her.

On the 19th of November Ellen Smalls had apparently been 'picking acorns' at Church farm meadow, in order to supplement the family income, when she was approached by Jimmy Green. He pointed a gun at her over the

gate and 'he told her that there were a lot of acorns in another field close by but if she went after them, she would not get back alive'. The following August Bank holiday, Green was alleged to have told Ellen that he would 'put her light out.' We can assume that Ellen's problem was known to the Rector at this stage and it is possible that he had advised her about the matter which had been going on for some time. Perhaps he had encouraged and helped her to seek legal advice, for Green was summoned to appear before the Wymondham magistrates on 25th November 1907. He was remanded in custody until 3rd December. On that date he appeared before five Justices, and denied having threatened Ellen Smalls for the two years previously but there were two witnesses to suggest the contrary. Unfortunately their names have not been recorded although it is probable that the Rector was one of them. The result was that Green was found guilty as charged and ordered to be bound over and to pay a surety of £40 and to find two persons who would stand surety for him at £30 each. He was also to pay costs of seventeen shillings and six pence; ten shillings for the clerk and seven and sixpence for the witnesses. Obviously on a labourer's wage there was no way that Green could find £40; nor was he able to produce two persons who would pay surety of £30 each. It is doubtful that he would have been able to afford the seventeen and six pence costs. Consequently, he was sent to Norwich prison for a period of three months.

It is interesting and perhaps alarming to note that on his release February 1908, Jimmy Green had not learnt his lesson. Obviously, the Justices, whom most people of his social background would have found extremely intimidating, had had little effect on him. Nor had his three months incarceration improved his attitude towards his cousin or anyone who sought to interfere; he threatened to kill the Rector and "even stalked him with a gun." Here we will let 13 year old Mary Barham Johnson take up the story: "One day as Bridget (a girl who was staying at the rectory) and I were helping out gardener Blyth to plant out geraniums, we heard a shot and Blyth said, 'that will be Jimmy Green shooting Mrs Smalls.' Presently there was another shot, and as my father was out in the village, we were terribly anxious until news came that the villagers had found Mrs Smalls' body in a field where she had been employed picking stones, and Jimmy's body in a ditch. Bridget and I watched in horrified excitement as the bodies were brought in on hurdles and put into our coach house."

As one would expect, the incident as reported in the following days edition of the Eastern Daily Press, included all the gory details and no one was spared the horror of this unfortunate tragedy: "The little village of Welborne, one of the smallest parishes in Norfolk . . . was yesterday afternoon the scene of a

most disturbing tragedy; a married woman, the mother of eight children being shot by her cousin who afterwards turned his gun upon himself and blew out his brains . . . These events enacted as they were in broad daylight and almost in the middle of the village, which is only some 700 acres in extent, created a painful sensation . . . and last evening formed the sole topic of conversation in the place. The name of the victim was Ellen Smalls who with her husband lived in a cottage not a great distance from the church. Of her eight children, six lived at home. She is spoken of by the neighbours as a hard working industrious woman who augmented her husband's slender earnings by taking in washing and by field work for the farmers in the village. Her age was about 38 and she had lived in Welborne and Mattishall all her life." The newspaper report then highlighted the events leading up to the court case and Green's subsequent imprisonment: ". . . yesterday afternoon, he carried out the terrible threat, sending the poor woman into eternity without a moments warning and then ending his own life at a spot not many yards from where the victim fell. It appears that during the afternoon Mrs Smalls was engaged picking up stones on Mr Mathew Norton's farm and at half past two Green who was carrying his gun as was his custom came up to the gate and spoke to her. After a little conversation, the purpose of which will never be known, he walked away but about a quarter past three he returned, for at the time several villagers heard the report of a gun and upon looking in that direction from which the sound came saw Green hurrying away. . . . Walter Smalls, the brother-in-law, was among the first to reach the spot and he was horrified finding the dead body of his sister-in-law lying on the ground with a terrible wound in the back of her head the top of which had been blown off and her brains scattered about the place. A glance at her body shows that death must have been instantaneous. Immediately afterwards the report of a gun was heard in the adjoining field . . . the murderer was found in the dyke, Green having reloaded . . . and blown his own brains out. . . Superintendent Chambers of Dereham, P.C. Powell of Hingham and P.C. Smith of Mattishall were quickly on the scene while the doctor was also summoned . . . he pronounced life extinct. Reverently the body of the murdered woman was removed from the spot . . . to the disused schoolroom whilst the remains of Green was carried to an outhouse at the Rectory to await Coroner's inquest to be held on Wed. 1 o'clock."

Salt Beef and Celebration

"You must go and see her," they said. "She's 95 and she's got a wonderful memory. She remembers Queen Victoria's jubilee – not just the diamond one, but the golden one in 1887."

So I went to see the old lady. With a modesty nowadays rare, she emphatically did not want her name in the paper, so I will call her Mrs Robinson – Nellie Robinson. She was born and brought up in the tiny mid Norfolk village of Welborne. It has a few widely scattered groups of cottages, a church with a little school next door to it, one shop, and a public house called the Horse Shoes.

Nellie's father was landlord of the pub, but there was not a living in it for him and his wife and eight children. He was a bricklayer by trade, with a pony and a little tumbril to carry his ladders, bricks and tiles. He was out all day, doing building jobs for neighbouring farmers or for bigger builders than himself – for a time he was estate bricklayer to Morton Hall. He was a good craftsman, he would not do what he called slubbering work.

But a bricklayer's wages in those days were only 71/2d. an hour, and says Nellie, "father's trouble was that he never would charge enough for his work. He used to drive the pony and cart all the way to the edge of Norwich – where Woodlands park is now – to fetch lime, and he never charged for the time.

But, I asked, what about Queen Victoria's golden jubilee? "Oh yes", said old Mrs Robinson, "I remember it well. I was about five or six years-old. That was in a meadow at Welborne, and we sat at tables and had salt beef. The farmers wives clubbed together and made plum puddings. So we had salt beef and plum pudding, and there was a lot of beer for the men, but us children had ginger beer."

"What else", I asked. "Were there sports or games?"

"Well", said Mrs Robinson, "I suppose there were, and I think we had jubilee mugs. But somehow what I best remember is the salt beef."

(Johnathan Mardle, EDP June 22, 1977).

Memories of a rectory childhood

In 1990, we visited the home of Mary Barham Johnson, at Sheringham and spent the day listening to her talking about Welborne and the people and events that she remembered. In spite of her then being aged 95, Mary had an exceptionally active and lucid mind and gave us an amazingly honest and revealing insight into the Barham Johnson family. She allowed us to make use of the family diaries and papers and the following pages are a result of the visit.

There were three children in the family, Jack, born 1890, Geoffrey, born 1892 and Mary born 1895. Theirs was a somewhat different childhood from that of other Welborne children; one of nursery teas, nannies, governesses and absentee parents. Children of their social class rarely saw their parents for any

length of time, certainly during their early childhood. Instead they were looked after by a nurse or nanny and their social contacts were confined to the servants. At certain times during the day, they would be presented to the parents, clean and fed and usually ready for bed so that the encounter was a brief one. This routine was not peculiar to the Barham Johnson family but it was a ritual common to most middle and upper class families in England at that time.

While this segregation perhaps seems unusual or strange to present day society, there were definite advantages both for parents and children. Parents only saw their children at their best all tantrums and tears having been dealt with by the staff in the privacy of the nursery; while their offspring, who inhabited the world of the kitchen and the back stairs, were in that wonderfully delicious state, known only to children, of being in possession of gossip and secrets usually confined to the adult domain. Long before such information of the village and beyond reached their parents, it had already been ferreted out and discussed at length by the younger members of the family.

Among Mary's earliest memories, was a very important event, that of Queen Victoria's death. "Though I was only five and a quarter years old, I remember hearing the news . . . we were looking out of the Nursery window watching for the postman. When he arrived, he shouted up, 'the Queen is dead'. Then the cook came rushing up the stairs and she and 'nanna' wept on each other's shoulders. . . A little [time] after I was fitted for a dark grey suit with a velvet collar which tickled my neck. I hated it for replacing my lovely red one with fur edged hood. Everyone went into mourning or at least wore black arm bands. King Edward's coronation had been fixed for June 16th but at the last minute was postponed as he had to be operated on for appendicitis. However, at Welborne it was decided not to put off the sports, nor the service." When at last it did take place, "Jack and Geoffrey [now choristers at St. Georges, Windsor] both sang at the coronation."

In 1901, "the postman used to arrive by Pony and Cart from Dereham; the pony was put into the rectory stable until afternoon, when he collected letters to take to the post office. A leather bag with keys was kept at the rectory for this purpose." By 1906 "the postman had a bicycle and cycled from Dereham, I remember one day cook gave him tea – he came into the kitchen (as mother was out), however he didn't sit on a chair as he wasn't a guest – he sat on a flour bin." Social etiquette still had to be observed even among the servant classes.

Nurse Celia Catton was in charge of the Barham Johnson children and "Geoffrey and I went with her . . . to her house at North Elmham. Her sister

gave us each a horseshoe covered with pretty material to hang up. Geoff had a carthorse one covered in green. I had a donkey shoe covered in pink. The frequently absent parents did not always appear even for special occasions in their children's lives. Mary recalls, "I spent my 6th birthday there [at North Elmham] I had nine presents, a lovely doll, a book, a box of chalks." Even disciplining the rectory children was left to the nurse, "who used to punish us by swinging us by our arms in front of the fire and threatening to throw us in." Once when they had been particularly troublesome, "Cook locked us in the cellar and we sat on the steps in the dark . . ." It is not recorded whether the parents were aware of these incidents and if so, what their reaction would have been, given the severity of punishments which were commonplace at that time.

As many people will recall, Mary Barham Johnson was a musician of some note, even at the age of one hundred she was still a competent harpist. Her musical interest began with "Mr Blake of Easton who took a great interest in our musical education. He gave Jack organ and piano lessons, Geoffrey the cello and me the harp. He lent me a small [harp to begin with]. I learnt piano and organ with my mother, who also taught Jessie Symonds (Matthews) to play the organ." Older parishioners will remember that Jessie was Welborne's church organist for many years. General education for the children was given at home and they had regular lessons in general subjects with their mother. "Mrs Blake gave me French lessons." However, later (1906) when both Jack and Geoffrey had won scholarships to Windsor choir School, "I was sent to Hingham to share lessons with the Upcher children, our cousins, who had a governess." Gone were the carefree days when Mary and Geoff (her constant companion) roamed the lanes and meadows and rode their bicycles around the village, "free wheeling from the rectory, all the way down to Barnham Broom." Obviously this was on the old road, now closed, which ran past Claypit Farm and followed the valley to the river.

Mary's recollections of the Welborne murder in 1908 have already been related. However, she recorded, "Mr Henry Edwards of Hardingham Hall heard how much this had upset my Mother and he . . . offered my Father the 'living' at Ashill, which his son-in-law, Mr Gawne, was about to resign. . . . Too good an offer to refuse . . . a much larger parish with more scope for my father and the income was about £1000 a year, where Welborne was only £200. So it was decided that we should move there in June." Mary was then thirteen years old. "By going to Ashill, . . . we broke the Yaxham – Welborne – Hingham triangle but by then most of our cousins were moving away." But Mary was not so anxious to move as her parents, "We missed our dear little round – towered church at Welborne."

Welborne had indeed made a great impression on the young girl, her childhood here had been a happy one and although she left while a teenager, she often returned as an adult to visit those she knew. Later, she left instructions that on her death, the funeral was to take place in Welborne Church and that she was to be buried in the churchyard. It was a source of some amusement to John Curson, then churchwarden (until 1990) that she was in constant contact with him regarding her proposed burial. She sent him a photograph of the plot with instructions to keep it in good condition. These were kept with the parish papers; sadly John preceded her to the churchyard by two years; Mary died aged 100 years and seven months and was finally laid to rest in her beloved Welborne in 1996. Her interment marked a watershed, as it was the last burial in the old churchyard, which had been closed for some years prior to her death.

Looking Back

Childhood memories are usually more vivid during old age than at any other time in a person's life. To enhance the picture of village life during the first two decades of the twentieth century, we have turned to those who were children during that period and who are now amongst our oldest inhabitants.

In 1918, thirty-six dwellings made up the village, consisting of small farms and the homes of those connected mainly with the farming industry such as



Some of Yesterday's Children

blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter and labourers. There was also a public house, a shop with a post office, a schoolmaster's house and a rectory, the home of Welborne's priest. Almost every baby born in the village was delivered by Nurse Ford who lived in Mattishall and "walked to her patients either day or night unless someone was able to fetch her in a pony cart." Most families had "between four and eight children" and given the size of most cottages, it must have been difficult to find room for all. When one considers how children today feel justified in demanding their personal space, one can only assume that a great deal more tolerance and patience must have been exercised in households at that time.

Many people today find it difficult to imagine life without television and radio and children would probably declare them absolutely essential for their well-being. While many families had a wireless set, it was considered primarily for adult use and especially for listening to the news bulletins. Telephones were not a common household item and urgent messages were sent by telegram from Mattishall Post Office. Boys on bicycles delivered these and to receive one, was not only a unique occasion but also usually meant bad news such as a death in the family.

The average home was very basic, with no heating other than in the kitchen where the cooking and baking took place usually using an oven in the wall by the side of the fire. Logs and coal were used for warmth too in the winter and if the family had a living room, then a fire would be lit there too. Bedrooms were icy during winter months and "we all took a stone hot water bottle to bed." Thick ice formed on the windows and "the only time a fire was lit in a bedroom was when the occupant was ill."

Plumbing and sanitation were non-existent and "drinking water was drawn from a well, clear as crystal and we didn't have fluoride put into it to kill the bacteria; the frogs and lizards swimming around did that." Many cottages shared a well, often three or four families had to draw their supply from one well, "tramping through a neighbour's garden at all hours to fill their buckets was quite common." During hot summers when the water table was very low, families had to be careful not to take more than their fair share for fear of offending their neighbours. Needless to say every cottage had a rain barrel or water butt to catch the run off from rooftops; this was used for washing both bodies and clothes.

"There were no flush toilets, they were all of the 'thunder box' variety, emptied once a week by the Council into what was known as 'the honey cart'. They were all outside, dark, cold places where spiders lurked and to "go down the garden" on a cold winters night, with only a lantern to cast gruesome

shadows for company, must have put fear into the heart of many a small child. In spite of the absence of a warm, sophisticated life style, the Welborne residents appeared to be a healthy and robust breed. It should be remembered that the National Health Service did not exist until 1947 and consequently when illness struck, it was not always possible to call for medical help. Doctors had to be paid by the patients and General Practitioners were only called upon for serious illnesses and in such instances Dr. Griffith Williams, who resided in Mattishall would appear in the village riding in his smart limousine, complete with liveried chauffeur, Mr Eastell. Whatever ailed the patient, medicine usually came in the form of a 'bottle of mixture' dispensed by the doctor himself at his surgery.

One lady recalls, "In my childhood, the village was almost self sufficient with its own shop, which was a general store run by the Leamon family. It was also a post office, with a letterbox in the wall as well as a butchers shop. I can recall the slaughter house adjoining the shop and on the way home from school we would stand outside and witness the pigs being taken squealing in and even see their throats being cut, resulting in the blood being swept down the drain in the corner. What an outcry there would be if such an event occurred today." But not all the children enjoyed this horrific spectacle, one little girl "dreaded being sent on an errand to the shop for fear of catching sight or sound of a poor pig," about to be dispatched.

Both men and women worked extremely hard years ago, "Mother never sat idle, always mending, sewing or knitting." Household chores were hard, tedious labour especially in the winter when men and children often arrived home soaking wet from wintry weather. "We only had two sets of clothes, work and best and work clothes had to be dried by the fire in time for us to go out again to work or school." Money was far from plentiful in the average household and rarely if ever wasted, as parents struggled to provide for large families. "In the 1920's a farm labourer's wages were very small indeed, Christmas dinner sometimes being a brace of wild rabbits given to Father by the farmer for whom he worked." While married women did not go out to full time work, many supplemented the family income especially with seasonal jobs. "Mother would earn money currant picking at Jewson's orchard at Runhall, she also made raffia baskets and sold them to stores in Norwich and as far afield as Rusts at Cromer." One lady recalls cleaning in the 'big house' in the district and looking after babies.

Children also had to earn any money they received, as parents could not afford to provide pocket money without receiving some return. "As boys we often had to cut the chaff for cattle, three of us would turn the handle of the

chaff cutter while father fed it into the machine. A broom handle was fixed to the fly wheel especially for this purpose so that the three of us could turn the handle at the same time.” “Saturday mornings were often spent looking after cows as they grazed on the roadside. Pasture was scarce and the verges were used by all the farmers for this purpose.”

Other chores for children included ‘grinding mangles, weeding and cutting thistles. “Sometimes I received two shillings for hedge trimming which was very hard work.” “Most farmers employed nine or ten men and during very hard winters when work on the farms was impossible, the labourers sometimes found employment digging snow from the roads after a bad storm. As boys we longed to help. I remember one very bad winter when the men dug all the way from Welborne to Brandon Parva.” All the farms were small and mixed with both crops and stock, “My father kept about five or six cows, which were hand milked twice a day. The milk was turned through a separator (father always whistled while doing this). The cream was put into stone pots and churned to butter every week. The separated milk was fed to pigs, calves and cats and the cream was sold at the door along with some of the fresh milk, butter and eggs.” The cows then “were short horns or red polls unlike today where the fields are dotted with European breeds and there is hardly an English cow in sight. They had names rather than numbers, names such as Daisy, Molly, Polly and Buttercup were popular.” The large shire horses and ponies as essential to farm work as the tractor is today, boasted “names such as Prince, Boxer, Blossom and Tom, and after World War One names such as Colonel, Duke and Captain became well known.”

One of the greatest changes in village life has come about because of the mechanisation of farm implements. The shire horses, so vital to farm work, have long since gone and costly machinery has replaced them. Agricultural engineering is now big business as more and more complicated and labour saving devices are invented. With the demise of the horse, the blacksmith, tanner, saddler and wheelwright, all those whose livelihood was connected to the welfare and maintenance of the horse, have disappeared. Horses are now in most areas purely for recreational purposes and the working horses only seen at county shows. The skills that accompanied the work involved, too have been lost although they are slowly being revived purely for historical reasons.

Perhaps one of the greatest differences in village life today is the lack of pedestrians; not only did people walk or cycle if distances were very great but people also walked for pleasure. The farmers walked to their fields to inspect the crops and women and children walked to the shops both in this village and the surrounding villages.



More of Yesterday's Children

“On summer Sunday afternoons Mother would take us down the lanes to the meadows where there was a host of wild flowers.” Fortunately for us today wild flowers can still be found in the hedgerows and ditches of Welborne, primroses and celandines grow in great profusion and the churchyard is carpeted with winter aconites.

“Children didn't start school until the term after their fifth birthday, and had a choice of two schools as Welborne school closed in 1902: Brandon Parva school which was situated at the corner of Candlestick and Stone Road, or Mattishall, now called First School. Brandon Parva was a one room stone building, heated during the winter by a coal fire, the infant class and senior class were divided off by having a curtain drawn across the room.” Most children walked to school and for five year olds this was quite a long trek from the farthest end of the village to Brandon Parva and even longer to Mattishall. One family of five who attended Mattishall school “mostly walked unless it rained when father would drive us in the pony cart, but sometimes we drove a donkey cart to school, although he [the donkey] wasn't always very quick.” One day the ‘not very quick’ donkey decided to stop altogether, and had to be persuaded by one of the boys, “my brother Mark, put a holly branch under his tail” and that day the donkey made record time to the Swan Public House where he was stabled while the children were in school.

The Headmaster of Mattishall school in the 1920s was Fred Brayley. “He lived with his wife in a bungalow in Welborne.” One pupil recalls. “Each day he drove to school in his blue open two seater car, and on occasions when my

friend (Joan Turner) and I were walking the one and a half miles, Mr Brayley would give us a lift in the dicky seat.” Mr Brayley used to leave a pile of exercise books, that he had marked the night before, outside his house and, “my brother was expected to collect the books as we passed on our way to school.” A large pile of books were very heavy for a small boy especially when walking one and a half miles and, “one day my brother decided to rebel and refused to collect the books from Mr Brayley’s as we passed. The headmaster was very puzzled, when enquiring was told, “I didn’t see any books sir.” However, the trick was not repeated as trying your luck once too often could have drastic consequences. Most of the pupils remember their teachers very well. Brandon Parva was a two teacher school and employed Miss Holly who taught the infant class to help the headmistress Mrs R.J. Shirraz. Mrs Shirraz recalls how “she daily cycled from her home in Rymerston, often through snow during winter months, carrying her own small child with her on her bicycle.” At Mattishall, “the teachers were very strict and Mr Brayley . . . would even use his cane on a naughty boy.” Children were expected to do as they were told and rowdy behaviour was not tolerated and parents usually supported teachers in this respect. “Miss Polly Wright, a teacher who lived at East Tuddenham used to brandish a poker . . . as she taught her class.” Miss Mildred Edwards was remembered as “very nice” and at least for one little girl, “school was really enjoyable because Miss Coates was interested in dance and formed . . . a country dance troupe and she would arrange for us to compete at St Andrews Hall, Norwich, against other schools in the area.” One old pupil from Brandon Parva school maintained that he “didn’t remember very much about school,” but he recalled vividly playing truant and spending the day on the Glebe land in Common Road. “My friend Dick Thurston came to try to persuade me to return to school knowing that if I didn’t I would get into trouble, but I clipped his ear and sent him back determined to stick it out.”

School began at 9 am and woe betide late comers for punctuality was expected as a matter of courtesy. Boys and girls were usually taught together and sat together in class. Compared to today’s children who are not confined to desks, these pupils spent a great deal of time sitting upright and learning by reciting aloud multiplication tables, poems, geographical statistics and historical dates and facts. As talking in class was forbidden, they probably welcomed the opportunity to chant aloud. The subjects taught included mental arithmetic, history, geography, reading and writing. Great emphasis was placed on neatness and legibility. “The Symonds family were well known for their beautiful handwriting,” recalls one pupil and “put the rest of us to shame.” “We also made things from plasticine and papier maché and the girls did

needlework while the boys did gardening.” “Miss Edwards [one day] gave me one of her silk stockings to mend [during the needlework lesson] a very long ladder, but my work was so unsatisfactory that she returned it to me to do again, as I hadn’t finished it properly.” While the girls sewed under the watchful eye of Miss Edwards, the “boys learnt gardening with Mr Brayley and grew vegetables, which were sold and the money was used to buy seeds for the following year.” “We grew marvellous celery, carrots and potatoes as well as flowers. I remember being sent to Hewitt’s Butcher’s shop to ask for a piece of uncured pig’s skin; this, which had a good thick layer of pork fat on it, was used to rub over all the tools after they had been thoroughly washed to prevent them from going rusty.”

Games were played in the school yard and according to season ranged from ball games, skipping ropes, spinning tops of all colours, which were made to spin by wrapping a leather thonged whip around them and then whipping them to keep up the momentum. “We played football a lot but used an old tennis ball, which doubled as a cricket ball in the summer.” “The girls were very good at throwing two or three balls against the school wall but they would never let us boys join in.” At Brandon Parva school there was only a very small tarmac area for the children to play but nowhere for sports or other activities. Instead “we listened to radio programmes as a change from lessons and these we enjoyed very much.”

Because of lack of transport, most children stayed at school for lunch; the modern ‘school dinner’ as we know it, did not exist. Packed lunches were taken by most children who lived any distance from school and a former pupil recalls, “we took sandwiches and ate them at the Mattishall/Post Office, the home of our Aunt, the Post Office was at that time situated on the corner of Burgh Lane.”

At Brandon Parva, Mrs Shirraz used to heat milk for the children in the winter and bake potatoes for them in the hot ash of the fire. “Each child would bring a potato from home and their name would be pricked out with a fork so that come lunch time, we all got our own potato.”

As in any small community, social events in Welborne although not frequent, were regular and considered extremely important. “We made our own fun and our own entertainment inspite of not having very much money we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.” Canon Busby’s staff, under the supervision of Mr Wythe, Head Gardener, kept the rectory grounds in immaculate condition and had two lawns marked out as tennis courts where we were taught to play properly; we enjoyed many happy hours competing against each other.” “One of the highlights of village life, was the Garden Fete which took place each



Tennis at Welborne Rectory

year in those lovely grounds and where we were allowed to roam freely and enjoy their beauty.” The Fete was always held on Whit Monday when children and adults alike had a days holiday. It was usually opened by an important person, local gentry or some well known figure. “One year we had Graham Bell, a newscaster from Anglia News and Dr. Costigan, an academic. There were stalls that sold home-made cakes, jams and pickles and local produce from the farms and gardens. The ladies of the village had sewing parties once a week and a stall at the fete provided an outlet for their efforts. “The Bran Tub and the Hoop La stalls were favourites with the children and there was always a ‘cockerel in a coop’ whose weight had to be guessed and of course ‘bowling for the pig’. Both cockerel and pig were highly prized and to take home either of them pleased any family.” The fete was always “a splendid well organised affair with flags and bunting. It was planned well ahead of time and everyone pitched in to help. People were busy for weeks preparing to cater for the influx of visitors from the surrounding villages.” “Most people in the village did not have money to spend on holidays such as we have today and our greatest treat of the year was the Sunday School Outing to Great Yarmouth at the cost of one shilling per head. We travelled in an open-topped lorry sitting on long benches

and were accompanied by Canon Busby, who took it upon himself to look after all the children and to provide us with pocket money." He arranged and paid "for us to have our midday meal at Googes Hotel on Yarmouth's seafront, such luxury for us then. And such freedom to roam the beach and paddle our feet in the sea and to buy ice creams, rock and small gifts to take home." All this "left us blissfully happy and refreshed as school and authority seemed to dispel in the sea air." We always concluded that "all those hours spent attending Sunday School was after all, worthwhile."

"Christmas and its celebrations provided us with another great social gathering when a sort of party get together was held." During the evening "Canon Busby would play the grand piano and refreshments were provided and the whole village attended." Other events included "whist drives, dances and music sometimes provided by a dulcimer and piano player."

In 1935 the Silver Jubilee of King George the Fifth and Queen Mary "was celebrated with much joy and fun" mainly in the form of a sports day held in Farmer Mathew Norton's meadow. The sack and egg and spoon race provided a lot of laughter and a huge tea was laid on in one of the barns, which Mr Norton had decorated for the occasion. We sat on bales of straw and enjoyed



Planting the Tree

lots to eat and drink.” To mark the occasion, “a chestnut tree was planted in the centre of the green outside the church rooms.” Mrs Green of Hill farm, then ninety years old had the honour of performing this task and along with all the residents of the village was photographed for the occasion. The tree which today flourishes on the green, had something of an unfortunate beginning. One evening a local farmer returning home late with his small herd of cows, allowed them to stray too close to the newly planted sapling. The chestnut tree received the first and most drastic pruning of its young life as hungry cattle closely cropped the branches. However, as all good gardeners can testify, pruning only stimulates growth and perhaps this is why Welborne’s Jubilee tree has grown into such a fine specimen.

“During very wintry weather skating parties were sometimes held on a particularly low lying area of meadow at Church farm, where the water readily froze, providing us with a skating rink.” In the evening lanterns would be lit and the skaters young and old would take to the ice with much skill and enthusiasm. Winter concert parties were organized by Mrs Shirraz of Brandon Parva School and these gave the children a chance to show off their talents. The summer sport for the men of Welborne was “playing quoits in the meadow adjoining the pub where they gathered in the evening to drink and chat with their neighbours.” Cricket matches were also held in “the flat field opposite the church meadows.” Mathew Norton was in 1924 presented with a barometer by the Welborne Cricket Club, for his kindness in allowing his meadow to be used.

“Harvest was “a lovely happy time for children when we would go to the cornfields armed with a big stick, because whilst the binder went round and round cutting the corn, the rabbits hiding there would run out and we would run after them, hopefully and usually unsuccessfully, to catch the next day’s dinner.” “Harvest was very different then . . . the fields had to be cut with a binder, drawn by two horses one of which was ridden by one man. The sheaves of corn were thrown out and tied with twine. These had to be set up into ‘shocks’ to keep dry for a day or two then carted off by waggon and horses to be stacked and thatched in the farm yard.” The threshing machine was driven by a steam engine and “this was the only part of the whole process that was mechanised.” The steam tractors were kept and maintained by the Matthews family who lived at the cottage in Common Road. “During harvest time food was more exciting, at least as children we thought so, because it was cooked and then taken to the men in the cornfield where we would sit down amongst ‘the shoves’ and join them to eat it. The four o’clock sit down was always known as ‘foursies’.

The most well remembered and best loved character in Welborne's recent past is undoubtedly the Reverend Canon William Busby. Canon Busby, who was the last resident priest in the village from 1923–1944, lived at the Rectory with his sister. "I remember the Canon's frequent visits all around the village; we were very much more aware of the presence of clergy then, helping people and visiting the sick." "It was he who christened me and . . . who guided me through to my Confirmation .. I still have, carefully preserved, Canon Busby's letter to me on the occasion of my twenty first birthday." Canon Busby and his sister took a great interest in the village and in the welfare of its inhabitants; pastoral care ranked very high on his agenda. "He regularly visited us all, whether church goers or not and took a great personal interest in the children." "We attended Sunday school, a morning service . . . and evensong each Sunday although by the time evening arrived we would sometimes hide in father's barn and hope to be left undisturbed. But mother always found us and insisted that we attended." "I especially recall the Office hymn for the Sung Eucharist service, number fifty one, Blest Creator of the Light, which I liked best of all." Canon Busby rewarded the children's efforts and gave the choir boys and Sunday school pupils Christmas and birthday presents. One former pupil still has amongst her most treasured possessions "a beautiful china cup and saucer given by the Canon" on her birthday. "I remember mother telling me to sit down immediately and write a thank you note to him." The Canon also gave a wireless set to the Brandon Parva school, "so that the children could hear the radio broadcasts on wet days when they were unable to play outside. "There are one or two other itinerant characters who visited Welborne and have stayed in the memories of 'yesterday's children': Harry Palmer visited the village once a week to hold gospel prayer meetings under the large chestnut tree on the corner opposite the Post Office. His daughter, Miss Palmer played the harmonium for the hymn singing and Harry Palmer preached a sermon to anyone who cared to listen.

A visitor much more popular with the children, was "Harry Skipper; he was known locally as 'the rag and bone man' which meant he collected junk." Harry had a pony and cart and knew all the children in the area. He used to camp out in the lanes to the right of the rectory meadow and "as children, we often visited him and watched fascinated as he cooked his meals over an open fire." His admirers loved his long white beard and shabby clothes and always felt safe in his company. At night he tethered his pony and turned his cart upside down to make a temporary shelter while he slept. He appealed greatly to the children who envied this seemingly carefree existence.

(Doreen Bateman, Ethel Breeze, Joyce Curson, Robert Curson, Fred and Juliet Faircloth, Cecily Savory, Mrs R.J. Shirraz).

The next generation

Living as we do in times when change occurs almost daily, we were surprised to find that when we turn to the memories of the next generation, those born just before the middle of the twentieth century, things had not really changed very much in Welborne. Three people from that generation have contributed the following:

“My earliest memories of growing up in Welborne is going to school in Brandon Parva. There were quite a number of us who lived on this corner and each morning we would walk to school. Come home for dinner, return to school then come home again each evening. Although the school was in Brandon Parva, most of the children came from either Welborne or Runhall. The children from Brandon Parva village going to Barnham Broom. Our teacher was Mrs Shirraz.

One morning we had gone to school as normal when Mr. Shirraz came to say that Mrs Shirraz was quite poorly so we could all go home. I can still remember being in our back yard when we heard this ‘sound’ which was followed by silence and then one almighty explosion. A V2 flying bomb or ‘doodlebug’ [as they were called] had landed in the fields behind the school, the nearest building to the crater, was extensively damaged. Obviously no one can visualise what would have happened to us had we been in the building. Another memory was the first outing to the seaside, Great Yarmouth, this took place just after the war ended in 1945, and the transportation was in two of A.J. Farrow’s lorries.

When things started to get back to normal, although Welborne was the smallest village, it seemed to become the focal point. Our annual fete was probably the most successful in the area. Whist Drives were also very popular with weekly drives at Barnham Broom, Hockering, Colton and Welborne. The Welborne drives were held on a Wednesday and it was usually a full house. The proceeds from the drives and the fete kept the Church funds in a healthy state and enabled us to have outings and Christmas parties for the children. We were also very lucky having in the rectory the Bishop of Thetford. This enabled us to have three services each Sunday. The Bishop would take the 8. a.m. Holy Communion and the Rector the later Communion, with Evensong alternating 3. p.m. one week, 6.30. the next. Many of us lads were ‘servers’ and when the time was right, not only were we confirmed in our own church by our own Bishop but also we were prepared for Confirmation by him. For a small village we had many facilities comparable to the size. There was the pub, the Horse Shoes, the blacksmith, Mr Doy; the carpenter and wheelwright, Mr Symonds (my grandfather), the butcher, Mr. Savory, the village store and

post office, Mrs Leamon and her daughter, Olive; it seemed whatever you needed, they had!

In those days we took the eleven plus examination and for those who were successful, the girls went to Dereham High School (girls only at that time) and the boys went to Swaffham. For us boys this meant leaving home just after seven, biking to Thuxton and catching the old fashioned (but reliable) steam train to Dereham, changing at Swaffham and then a mile and a half walk to school. We then did the return trip arriving home around 5.30. p.m. When we left school and started work, for four of us National Service called. Up to this time car ownership was very, very scarce, the means of getting to Mattishall was on foot or by bike and catching the bus to Dereham or to Norwich. By the early 1950's cars were getting popular and available and this broadened our scope.

Bingo was becoming popular in places like Norwich and this meant the end of village activities; fortunately the fetes kept their attraction but all the village facilities had, by this time, disappeared. On the other side of the coin the village had started to grow with the construction of new houses and bungalows. I was working away and spending most of my time away from the village but whatever, Welborne was and always will be home."

(David Matthews.)

"I came to live in Welborne in the early 50's at the age of two when my father bought Valley farm. I can recall quite clearly that very first evening. Dad, Mum, Uncle Bob (dad's brother) and Auntie Margaret were downstairs. We children were supposed to be asleep. I wanted to be downstairs so I cried and made a fuss until I got my own way. I suppose in many ways Welborne was an idyllic place to grow up. There was loads of space, a shop run by Miss Olive Leamon up the road; a brother, sister, cousin and friends to play with, although Ros and I were the only girls. We used to play football and cricket in the meadow. I was the youngest but enjoyed all the games. As we got a bit older, Ros used to feel it was a bit below her to join in! I think we used to get a bit bored in the summer holidays; when I was older my friend, Clare, from North Elmham used to come and stay sometimes. I started my school life at Brandon Parva School, this was ended abruptly when the school got burnt down when I was six. A feeling of elation evaporated somewhat when we were transferred to Mattishall, a much larger and less friendly school. I can remember before mains electricity and water came to Welborne, one day the geese chased me and I fell into the ditch dug ready for the water pipes!

Mr Tilney, Mr and Mrs Mudd and Mr and Mrs Barnard lived in the Black Cottages down the road. Every summer, Linda, Mrs Mudd's granddaughter came from London to stay. She was Ros's age and I used to feel a bit left out sometimes. As we got older, it became a bit of a pain living in the middle of nowhere. Dad wasn't always co-operative in running a taxi service. I remember once ringing up from Dereham to say that the bus hadn't turned up that night. I worked in Dereham and used to cycle up Bus Lane to Roy Stones Corner where I left my bike. Sometimes after a night out in Norwich I had to bike that distance home again at 11. o'clock."

(Mary Burton.)

"How life has changed from the old farmhouse in Welborne where I used to live fifty years ago. I remember being told when I was about eight years old, 'you don't have to go to school today, it burnt down last night.' I couldn't believe my luck; I didn't enjoy school. If you didn't feel well the teacher would let you sit in front of the huge open fire, the only means of heating. A large curtain divided the only two classrooms at Brandon Parva School. We would bike or walk to school in all weather even when we went to Mattishall School some two miles, as there was no other transport. I remember the huge change from the old Tilly lamps hissing away to light the house, to electricity. The smell of paraffin was a good miss. Also mains water was unbelievable at the time, just turning a tap on instead of cranking the chain to lower the bucket into the well in the garden several times a day. The embarrassment of having a bath in the old tin bath in front of the fire in the kitchen and an 'outside loo'. Gone at last were the trips to the shed at the bottom of the garden that was always spooky and full of spiders. The old copper boiling in the corner of the kitchen on Mondays, washday, steaming up the windows, heated again by a coal fire underneath it. What hard work the simplest chores were then. All those things we soon forgot and now take for granted all the mod cons of today."

(Rose Barrett.)

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

WELBORNE FLORA and FAUNA

A walk round the lanes of Welborne

Over the last 10 years there has been work done by a group of plant lovers on all the flowering plants of Norfolk. This has been published for all to buy and read. Welborne has been studied in the lanes and once or twice larger areas in gardens have been chosen. We have looked at two in detail increasing the number of species seen to 260.

Let's take a walk down Church Road and see what grows on the grass verges, in the hedges, on the banks, and name the trees we pass. In the Spring the primroses make a lovely background to the grassy banks mixing with the daisies and speedwells with their strong blue colour or a paler shade according to the variety. In one garden, which is in Church Road, we have the slender speedwell, which forms a mat by creeping. On the wall of the farm buildings, wall speedwell with deep blue flowers grows – it has small flowers but is quite pretty. The green field speedwell has pale blue flowers with a white lower lip – these need looking at carefully to make sure it is not confused with the grey field speedwell, which is uncommon. Another uncommon plant 'stone parsley' is found in many gardens and has also spread to the roadside, it likes the clay soil of Welborne I think. The lovely yellow arch angel *Galeobdolon luteum* covers the bank at the end of the road, after flowering the leaves make a pretty ground cover.

The hawthorn is plentiful some with white flowers others with pink flowers, the latter are close to 'the old school room'. A horse chestnut tree grows close by with its beautiful candelabrum of flowers. Walking through the village ash has its place in the numbers of trees with attractive black tips to the buds.

Holly has red and yellow berries on different trees in the neighbourhood. Walnut is grown in one or two gardens – the grey squirrels know which ones sure. Mistletoe grows in an apple tree, unusual but very useful at Christmas. The fragrant flowers on the lime trees, which grow near the church, attract aphids, which leave a sticky, sugary secretion.

In the cemetery adjoining the churchyard we see carpets of winter aconites in early spring, it is a joy to behold them with their deep yellow flowers and

dark green leaves, they were probably planted when the Rectory was used, lots of lovely trees were planted in the grounds sadly lots have fallen in gales or have died of old age.

Going down Hill Road, is a magnificent Hornbeam tree the only one in Welborne I believe. You can tell the difference in the leaves of the Hornbeam from the Beech by the number of veins and a smaller compact leaf, in the Hornbeam.

Turning into Pound Lane, which is very narrow, there are high banks on each side of the road at this time of year (Spring). Soldiers buttons – *Steffaria holostea* which are white, contrast with the dandelions and celandines with their pretty yellow. My favourites are the wild roses and honeysuckle, which adorn the hedges in early June, making everywhere look so beautiful, and the smell of the Sweet Briar makes a walk down Horseshoe Road a pleasure not to be missed. In the ditches we can get a glimpse of the Polypody fern.

I would like to mention the presence of the Bee orchid in one area of Welborne and going up Church Lane, yellow toad-flax, musk mallow, Red Campion and several oak trees can be seen. Walks in autumn give us a different view of plant life and fungi with names such as Poison pie, Parasol, Shaggy and Smooth Ink Caps can be found. The field mushroom enjoyed by some of the locals, and the wood blewitts which have a purple tinge to the cap and stipe make a walk a profitable adventure if the gatherers dare eat their finds! It is hoped the residents who have perused these notes will find new pleasure in taking a walk; around the lanes.

(Lil Evans.)

For reasons of space it is not possible to list all 260 species of wildflower found in Welborne in this book, however, the following are amongst the least common and therefore worthy of some note: Woodruff, Small teasel, Ploughman's spikenard, Winter heliotrope, Wall lettuce, Bee orchid, Dwarf mallow, Shining cranesbill, Sweet briar, Mistletoe, Corn buttercup, Annual wall rocket, Tale cress, Corn spurrey, Round leaved fluellen, Wild basil, Lungwort, Broomrape.

The Fauna

MOLE-hills are quite common in this area, but these products are the only evidence of their abundance. The little gentleman in velvet is hounded by some people, even in the sanctuary of God's acre.

We have been delighted last year by nightly visits of HEDGEHOGS encouraged by our offering supper in the evening. Occasionally as many as

three are scrambling to get at the food. They are used to us putting the light on and are not disturbed by it or us watching them. They are such attractive animals with noisy snuffling and snorting over the dish.

FIELD MICE make their presence felt by eating the newly sown sweet pea seeds. We have on one occasion seen them eating French marigold seeds plucked from the heads of the plant. They seem quite fearless and it is easy to forgive the transgression of these charming little rodents even when the birdseed bag is torn open. They seem to prefer sunflower seeds.

The GREY SQUIRRELS are infrequent visitors to the garden preferring the area near the church where they can take refuge among the trees. I was surprised one day to see a grey squirrel walking along a telegraph wire, and fell or jumped down on to the hard road surface. It ran away unhurt.

We are fortunate to have a colony of PIPISTRELLE BATS just above the garage door. They have returned regularly to these quarters every year for at least the last seven years. We see little of them except their droppings, signalling their presence again. Much further up the lane a dead long-eared bat was found hanging in a tree.

RABBITS have not been seen in the garden and few are road casualties. A white rabbit used to appear in the early morning in the next field, but doubtless its obvious presence has attracted a predator, a weasel has been seen once.

RATS in some years have been a nuisance, but are not often seen. The nightly calls of Barn Owls must help to keep this pest from increasing, a FOX has been reported in the area. HARES are seldom seen by us. There are reports of DEER (not named) and Muntjac. We have not been fortunate enough to have seen them.

The COMMON SHREW is quick moving and not easily seen but an old bottle among rubbish contained over 10 bodies. They entered and were unable to escape – a not uncommon occurrence. We have not seen a HOUSE MOUSE in the year's (25) we have been here – their absence is not regretted.

(Reg Evans.)

Those residents who have large gardens especially those with ponds may have a more varied and regular group of visitors. Similarly, those with cats often have proof, dead or alive, of VOLES, FIELD MICE and SHREWS in fairly large numbers as well as the occasional house mouse. One resident had recent evidence of the endangered harvest mouse, a very welcome addition to the Welborne fauna. On early morning walks, and occasionally in the late afternoon, it is possible to see roe DEER, and muntjacs. One resident found Chinese water deer in the garden and they obligingly left their footprints to be

checked in the mud around the pond. FOXES are regular visitors especially in late spring and early summer when they have been observed either singularly or sometimes in family groups. During the winter they can occasionally be seen in the lanes in late afternoons. Both WEASEL and STOAT are present and have been observed in gardens in the village as well as crossing the lanes. RABBITS are always much in evidence and are quite destructive as they attack young trees and plants during the winter. Practically every garden in the village has had MOLES at one time or another, they are probably among Welborne's oldest residents. After persistent watching, it is occasionally possible to see a snout poking up above the soil. They have been caught by local cats but allowed to go unharmed as even feline teeth find it impossible to penetrate moleskin. Sometimes after disturbing a log pile, the young moles rush from the nest and quickly bury themselves in an effort to escape human contact. HEDGEHOGS are regulars too and some years, depending upon the weather, gardens can be overrun with babies far too young to be away from parental supervision. Many have been rescued from garden ponds and fruit cage netting.

(B.B.)

Insects

In the village we find so many insects that it is only possible to deal with those of special interest. Among those belonging to the hymenoptera are wasps. We recall one of our neighbours going around the area asking residents if they had WASPS nests to be destroyed. He had a spoon attached to a long handle, and he would put the poison in the entrance to the nest. He did not realise that the number of nests did not decline as queens arrived next year to fill the gap caused by his depredations. If they did not bother us we were content to let well alone. After all in summer they collect insects to feed their young and in the autumn help themselves to ripening fruit.

We have yet to see a HORNET in Welborne, but our wasp destroying neighbour brought us "a hornet" he had caught and by the time it reached us it was, as the police might say, suffering GBH (grievous bodily harm). It was a harmless yellow and black wood wasp known as the greater horn-tail. The "sting" which looks formidable is only an ovipositor (egg laying apparatus). This insect lay her eggs in wood and this and other species can cause much damage by tunnels made by their larvae.

BEES in some years they have been abundant on the heather and other flowers. Honey bees, and mining bees which excavate tunnels in sandy soil, where they place provisions for the larvae hatching from their eggs, and leaf

cutting bees which cut circles out of leaves of garden roses and cause some disfigurement. They use these pieces in hollow stems or wood to make cells each containing honey and pollen and an egg in each. There are usually several of these cells in a line in the stem, they are fairly common and betray their presence in the cut leaves.

ANTS seem to be under every paving stone you lift – disturbed they swarm around looking for the causer. Amongst them may be seen little white wood-lice, which live in harmony with their fiercer companions. In April or May a disturbed nest may have one or two tiny flies, little more than pinhead size, flying over and diving upon unwary ants. They will lay an egg in the abdomen of the ant and the emerging larva will enter the abdomen feed and kill it. This type of parasitism and modifications of it are common in the insect world. Aphids GREEN FLY have many predators, some lay an egg in the abdomen and the parasite emerges by cutting a round hole in the upper surface of its host. Another emerges below the dead aphid and weaves a cocoon under its body where it is concealed from enemies. These are gardener's friends and helped by ladybirds and others do much to control green fly plagues.

BUTTERFLIES are attracted to the flowers of our Buddleia. If you wish to see them grow these shrubs. We have small tortoiseshells, Red Admirals, Cabbage whites, Peacocks, Orange tip and the occasional Comma and Painted Lady to name a few. Holly blues are present annually in small numbers, and Brimstone butterflies are seen but the most outstanding species was a Camberwell Beauty, which paused for a moment on the kitchen windowsill basking in the sun. It was also reported from Mattishall – perhaps it was the same one? We leave certain plants in the garden to provide food for some species such as Garlic mustard or Jack by the hedge as it is sometimes called, gives the Orange Tip larvae a feeding place. Ivy is controlled but some is left for Holly blue larvae and to provide shelter for birds etc. Other less common butterflies in the garden are Ringlets, Meadow Brown and the rare Speckled Wood.

MOTHS have not been murdered by use of a mercury vapour lamp to attract them. We have noted the presence of them by the caterpillars in the garden and on the roadside. Privet Hawk larvae are seen some years on the lilac, Puss moth on the willow. We take a few indoors rear them and release the moths when they emerge. At least this saves a few that would have been lost to predators. One small Oak tree has clusters of the Buff lip larvae, and rarely we find the stick like larvae of the Peppered moth eating rose leaves. Silver Y moths appear in abundance some years feeding on the flowers in the

garden. A villager reported one year seeing a Humming bird Hawk moth. The description was so accurate that we (doubting Thomas's always) find it acceptable.

Grow Mullein plants and sooner or later the Mullein Moth caterpillars will appear feeding on the leaves (a similar looking larva appears later but this is Mullein Sawfly). We seldom see the Swift moth but its creamy yellow larvae are with us in the grass and roots where they feed. Some of these larvae are dead, and have turned reddish and hard. They have been attacked by a fungus which creates a reddish match like growth above the soil. We expect that it is not confined to our garden but is common in the area but unnoticed. The match like growth distributes spores to infect future larvae.

BEETLES do not seem to be as abundant today as they were when I was a child. Ladybird beetles vary in number according to the scarcity or abundance of food (largely aphids). This year 1999, aphids were far less common and so were the ladybirds.

Devils Coach horses a fierce looking black beetle, opens its jaws and raises its tail when threatened. It lives upon small insects et cetera as does the violet ground beetle. Once we found these two locked in combat. They were separated and sent off in different directions – both are gardener's friends.

Leave a dead bird or animal about and the burying beetles are attracted to it. Evidently they can detect its presence by the smell of decay – as the name suggests they bury the corpse by excavating the soil beneath until it is concealed. This totally unattractive food in a state of corruption seems to be very nourishing to the larvae of the beetles. They grow rapidly.

Our garden has a special place for the SNAIL (*Helix aspersa*). They seem to do little damage in the wild area in the small number allowed to live there. Certain parasitic flies help to keep control – plus the help of thrushes. The strawberry snail (*Trichia striolata*) was very abundant one year and a check revealed that a large percentage had been fly attacked. They have not reached such numbers again. Thus does nature control excesses.

Crested NEWTS used to be present in a pond some years ago but that has been filled in. Common newts have taken over the garden pond for many years. FROGS are occasional visitors, but no spawn has been seen, and when introduced the emerging tadpoles soon disappear, probably due to the presence of newts. TOADS are common many of them killed by traffic in the lane. Examination of roof space often reveals the presence of cluster flies. These look like bluebottles but they have not the colour and have golden hairs on the thorax. In the spring they emerge to lay their eggs in earthworms – yet another parasitic fly this time killing the worm.

Sometimes swarms of yellow and black hoverflies appear especially if greenfly are abundant – their larvae eat them but the flies feed in nectar. Vaguely wasp like but harmless. In spring the BEE-FLY (*Bombylios major*) may be seen hovering near primrose flowers – like a tiny humming bird with its long proboscis probing for nectar. It lays its eggs in or near the nests of mining bees. The larvae on hatching parasites the bees larvae. This is the briefest survey of the invertebrates of the village – much has been omitted and far more awaits discovery.

(Reg Evans.)

Other Butterflies seen in larger gardens in Welborne include Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper, Small Copper, Small White.

People with ponds will also be familiar with the following DRAGON and DAMSELFLIES: Ruddy Darter, Common Darter, Southern Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser, Azure Damsel and Blue tailed Damsel.

(B.B.)

Birds

Watching wildlife in Welborne can be a very pleasant and rewarding pastime, particularly for those people who are fortunate enough to have both the time and a naturally lazy disposition. To sit in a garden on a warm day and just observe in casual and seemingly disinterested manner, can provide the watcher with a rich source of information about the garden's inhabitants, especially birds. While robins, blackbirds and blue tits are possibly the best known of the small garden birds, perhaps the most commonly and regularly seen bird in Welborne is the pheasant. Many are fed in gardens along with the smaller birds and on winter afternoons a number of them congregate in the garden of the Old Schoolroom to wait for the residents of Church View to bring them a supply of corn. Male pheasants strut across the roads and lanes with an air of detached nonchalance as they play a dangerous game of traffic dodging, which probably alarms the human population much more than the pheasants themselves. Partridges too are often seen flying across the fields in pairs although their numbers have decreased somewhat in the last twenty years. However, in the summer months a whole family can sometimes be seen wandering through large gardens and orchards or just resting in the covers. Moorhens are numerous but so far have not reached the pest proportions of the wood pigeons that vie with the gardeners to be first to the crops of young vegetables. They seem to be on the increase in spite of efforts to cull them. The prey in Welborne, it seems, far outstrips the number of predators; while

sparrow-hawk and kestrel are still residents, they too are not so numerous, sparrow-hawks can often be observed perched close to garden bird feeders, ready to snatch an unsuspecting blue-tit or robin just before dusk. Tawny owls have over the last 25 years been very visible and vocal, though they obviously miss the large yew tree at the crossroads which was felled about 13 years ago; they often roosted here during daylight hours. Their excited hunting calls can be heard nightly as they quarter the fields and large gardens in pursuit of prey. Barn owls are not so plentiful although a few years ago two were seen regularly in the vicinity and caused some local interest. One perched on a garden fence only five yards from the house and stayed for some hours one afternoon. The little owl is a regular visitor and is known to nest in one of the larger gardens in the village. Both jays and magpies come to bird tables during winter months and the latter are certainly increasing in number. The cuckoo is also a Welborne regular and both sound and sight of this bird is frequent during late spring and earl summer.

Those villagers who have garden ponds are very familiar with the Grey heron who often visits to take any available fish and frogs. A number of local ponds have been completely denuded of fish stocks over the years. A number of larger birds pay only a flying visit to Welborne, literally, flocks of mute and whooper swans have been seen passing overhead and Canada geese and Grey-lag geese also. Swifts, swallows and house martins all nest here and even the skylark can still be seen occasionally in the Pound Lane area. Mistle thrush, song thrush and flycatchers are known to nest in the same gardens each year although they are in smaller numbers now. Finches are common, green, gold, bull and chaffinch all seem to have made a come back and while good gardeners abhor such practices, to leave the weeds to flower and seed certainly attracts flocks of them into the garden. Yellow hammers are usually seen in the lanes and gardens and a red poll was recorded in recent years and similarly a tree creeper. A stone chat on Autumn migration was sighted and usual visitors such as woodcock and snipe have been seen in large gardens. The vast flocks of lap-wings visible years ago, have sadly depleted but are still seen in lesser numbers. The recent mild winters have given the wren population a boost and hopefully will continue to be much more plentiful.

In the last twenty years over 74 species have been recorded possibly the rarest being the nightingale, seen by a former resident Tony Lyons in the early sixties.

(B.B.)