

Childhood Reminiscences of Annie Allen née Clark 1910- 1992 Born and Bred in Flackwell Heath

This is a transcription of hand written notes found by Mrs Christine Hobbs and her family when their mother died on 10 August 1992.

I was born 6th in a family of nine in a cottage on the farm where my father worked (Greycote Farm) in Green Dragon Lane.

I had 5 brothers and 4 sisters, although the eldest sister died before I was born.

One of my earliest recollections was seeing the search lights scanning the sky at the beginning of the 1914-18 War. I was then 4 years old. The war did not affect us much. We always looked forward to our favourite uncle coming home on leave in his smart khaki uniform with putties wound up round his knees, he was very impressive with his (Kitchener) moustache.

My eldest brother later joined the R.F.C. (Royal Flying Corps) and went to Egypt. When he came home on leave he brought the 3 girls a rosary and if we looked through the centre of the cross we would see a picture of the Sphinx or the pyramids.

We had plenty to occupy us during our days, after we had each done the jobs allotted to us we could go into the fields and woods to play. There were 6 fields belonging to the farm, all were named i.e. Home Meadow, Half Yards, Long Close, Pond Field, Six Acres and Leg of Mutton Field, each describing the shape, size or situation.

We went into Gilbys Wood to collect firewood, when we heard bells and hooters. We were very frightened and I said perhaps it was a warning of a Zeppelin, so we ran home to be told that the war had ended.

When I was 8 years old I moved to the Church of England School at Wooburn. We had to walk 2 ½ miles over fields and woods or 3 miles if we went by road. One Winter when heavy snow had fallen we didn't think we would get to school as the snow had drifted from the fields into the lane and was piled up the height of the hedges but not to be out done we climbed over the 5 barred gate into the field and walked down the hill inside the hedgerow.

Our sandwiches which had been packed for us were often eaten before we arrived at school. During the war and for a while after we could, at mid-day go across to the Welcome Hotel just opposite and for a halfpenny be given a bowl of lentil soup and a piece of bread. I loved that lentil soup.

In 1918 we moved from the farm to a smallholding which my father had bought from the then Lord Carrington.

My eldest brother died when he was 19 years old. I remember my father saying "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away".

There always seemed to be more flowers, birds and bees when we were young. We often picked Bee Orchids on the Golf Links and Scabious, Chicory and Knapweed in the fields.

Christmas time we got very excited waiting for the day to arrive. On Christmas morning there would be our black stockings hung on the bed rail and always an new penny, an orange, a piece of coal and a white pinafore threaded with blue or pink ribbon. In the evening we would all sit round the table and sing hymns and carols.

Father kept pigs, chickens and ducks and what a sight to see day old chicks and ducklings and they took a lot of feeding.

We children used to go out and pick up acorns and for every pottle* we collected a farthing.

The Sunday School outing was always looked forward to with great excitement. We girls always had a new dress, made by a local dressmaker. It always had a yoke, full skirt and puffed sleeves and a full yoke round the neck and always a drawstring bag hanging from the yoke. The dress I liked best was pink flowered.

We used to travel to Burnham Beeches in the coal cart which had been cleaned thoroughly. When we arrived we would have races and games and tea and after tea we would go in the field to have a scramble. The teachers would throw sweets down for us to pick up.

I enjoyed my time growing up in Flackwell Heath and am pleased that my middle daughter, Christine Hobbs moved to live in the village in 1960.

* A pottle is half a gallon. It was also a wicker basket, often conical, used for strawberries.