

Barnet & District Local History Society

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by late Anne Griffiths 1990

MEMORIES OF ELM FARM, GALLEY LANE, HIGH BARNET, HERTS. 1909-1966



My parents, John and Sarah Anne Griffiths, took over the dairy business and farm, at Elm Farm, Galley Lane, Barnet, Herts in 1909, from the previous tenant F.J.Bunker.

A herd of about 24 cows together with milk supplied by Sharpe's Farm at the bottom of Barnet Hill and from Manor Farm at the bottom of Manor Road enabled the dairy to keep up the quota needed for the milk rounds when our own cows were 'drying up'. Both Sharpe's farm and Manor Farm are alas no more, replaced by housing estates.

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A large milk churn with brass plates was the centre piece of the horse drawn milk float. Milk was drawn off from the churn into a large milk can holding about two gallons and taken to the customer's back door - the tradesmen's entrance - and the required amount measured out by a special 'dipper' into the housewives jug. The horses knew every stop in the road.

During the 1914-18 war, women did the milk rounds. Fresh eggs from our hens were 1 penny each, and pure butter 1 shilling and 4 pence a pound. I remember mother remarking towards the end of the war that butter had gone up to 5/- a lb. "how could poor people afford it"? I don't think margarine was in general use at this time.

Our horses were shod at the smithy in Union Street. Letters were delivered three times a day. On Monday the 4 o'clock postman brought letters from relations in Wales for 1 penny stamp, written on the previous day. As children we watched for the postman coming down the road and rushed down to the garden gate to take them from him.

Cousins from remote West Wales came to stay during the summer holidays. A tram from Barnet Church or a bus from nearby Arkley Hotel took them all the way to Central London. How they enjoyed that long journey from rural Hertfordshire into the heart of the great metropolis on the open bus or tram top.

As children, until we left Barnet in 1919, we attended Arkley Church, St Peter's, afternoon service for children. The vicar, Mr Wrenford had been a missionary in far away places. We sat as near the pulpit as possible to listen to his exciting stories of his service in those foreign lands. His wife always attended, - the only grown up. They were both much loved by us and there was never any trouble in getting us to attend.

The sturdy Welsh cobs for the milk floats were sent up from Cardiganshire or Carmarthenshire. The cows, bred on the farm, were sold at Barnet Market when they ceased to be profitable to the dairy and were usually bought by local butchers.

One early evening during the War - 1914-1918, possibly 1915, we children - I had four brothers - heard singing and the sound of a band coming from the direction of the Arkley Road. We rushed up to the Arkley Hotel to watch a seemingly endless column of volunteers marching to Barnet singing the popular war time songs to sign on to join Kitchener's Army.

We had two maids, Bronwen and Silby from the Welsh mining valleys, they were cousins, Silby assisted in the house and took over a milk round as the men were called up to serve.

Silby's brother previously a miner now in the army was given short leave from the trenches, not sufficient time to make the long journey to see his parents in Wales so it was arranged that he came to Elm Farm. My brothers and I looked forward with excitement to hear news of his experiences. He arrived at Elm Farm travel-weary, dirty and flea bitten and asked if he could have a bath. While he enjoyed this luxury, my mother, remembering war office advice, baked his uniform in the oven of the kitchen range and washed his clothes. While they dried he went to bed and slept exhausted until it was almost time to return to France. The family were reluctant to rouse him from such a sound sleep.

I cannot remember if he survived that terrible war. We children were disappointed we had to for-go the opportunity of hearing of his experiences in the trenches.

I remember being wakened one night, possibly 1916, and being taken to a front bedroom where from the window seat, the family watched a German Zeppelin drifting slowly down, a mass of flames, the sky lit up with search lights trained on it. It was attacked and shot down by Leif Robinson, British Pilot, who became our hero. It came down by Potters Bar church. A listening post had been set up in our hay rick yard, manned by soldiers who the following day took Silby and myself to see the wreckage. I was given a short length of the Zeppelin girder as a keepsake. A visit to Barnet Fair in September was always a great treat. The pleasure fair was then held immediately below Barnet Hill, on Sharp's farm land called Underhill.

Early in the war, my brother Ivor and myself in the care of Silby having enjoyed this treat and having spent our pocket money on the roundabouts and swings were leaving the fairground to be home in time for tea according to Mother's instructions. Having climbed up the steep slope to Barnet Hill, we were surprised to see a stream of vehicles, mostly horse drawn; cabs, tradesmen's carts and private carriages of all sorts turning into the lower entrance to Barnet Station then running steam trains. We stayed at the top of the hill to watch the first batch of wounded soldiers from the trenches arriving in Barnet, to be loaded on to these make-shift ambulances and driven to Wellhouse Lane - the workhouse - later the hospital - where huts had been built for use as a Military Hospital.

Later we met many of the wounded soldiers, who, when fit enough were allowed out for short periods, wearing their distinctive royal blue suits. They

often walked down Galley Lane and on the way back they found the hill a little tiring and called at the farm to rest.

Mother always had a welcome and a cup of tea for them. They enjoyed the homely atmosphere of the farm kitchen.

Sadly my father developed an incipient tuberculosis some years before his early death in November 1915. A farm manager was appointed and took over the management of the farm and dairy business. Tuberculosis was considered to be highly infectious and the drawing room was used as a sick room. As was customary at that time plenty of fresh air was part of the treatment. The two large windows were always wide open, wire netting stretched across to prevent birds and us children from getting in. Dr. Hardy insisted on the rare occasions when a visit was permitted that we stood just inside the door and did not approach the bed; we were to be kept out of doors as much as possible.

One of the last London horse drawn trams was placed in the rick-yard paddock and we spent many happy hours playing as the ticket collector, as passengers or climbing up to the driver's seat to drive an imaginary pair of horses. I can't remember the route and destination on the large board at the front. Later, the tram served as an extra chicken house for many years.

Following my father's death my mother, with the farm manager carried on during the very difficult war years. My mother's health suffered and she decided to return with her children to live amongst her own family in Cardiganshire. She had spent all but the first 8 years of her married life at Elm Farm and it was heartbreaking to leave the home of so many memories.

David James Davies, my Mother's brother and his first wife Auntie Liza took over the farm and dairy business. It was inevitable there were many changes. So many men had volunteered or been conscripted for service during the war, many did not return alas. Milk rounds were reduced to a morning round only. The Government decided there should be no overlap of milk rounds; each dairy was allocated certain roads or districts. The small dairy man was forced out of business; their milk rounds were bought by Express Dairy; the Co-op; Unigate and the large combines. My Uncle D.J. Davies sold the dairy business in the early pre-war days. The milk from the cows was sold in bulk, collected by lorry or tanker at the farm gate. Milking was no longer done by hand but by machines and milk delivered to the customer in bottles. For the first time in memory rich grazing land had been ploughed during the war for food, the pattern of long established farming was changing, mechanised when possible owing to shortage of labour.

During the early 1920's the owners of Elm Farm - the Jennings family - had sold land on each side of Galley Lane. Many houses were built, the rural character of the ancient road was lost, where once we had looked from the front windows to the 'COMMON' opposite and the herd of cows grazing there, we now saw large detached houses each with half to three quarters acre of garden.

Aunt Liza died in 1921 and Uncle David James Davies married September 22 1927 Hazel Morley of Gallants Farm.

My brother Hywel Griffiths assisted in running the farm. and following his marriage September 10 1929 to Mary, lived at 1 Oaklands Lane, Arkley, one of the two houses belonging to Elm Farm, built earlier this century.

David James Davies died November 23 1943. His widow - Aunt Hazel remained at the farm house, my brother Hywel took over the management of the farm. My Aunt was at long last able to buy the property from the Jennings family for £37,500 but with considerably reduced acreage of farm land owing to the earlier sale of land on the road frontage of Galley Lane for houses. An additional 21 acres of land had been rented from London Borough of Barnet.

Dr. Hardy was a General Practitioner in Barnet for many years. He lived with his wife near Barnet Police Station. He was a friend as well as our family doctor. Babies were born at home at that time and he assisted at the birth of my youngest brothers. The family remembers him with affection and gratitude for his care and support especially during my father's long terminal illness.

If time permitted after completing his professional duties he liked to walk round the stockyard. Back in the farmhouse he invariably descended to the dairy built several feet below ground for coolness, stone steps, and stone flagged floor. Wide slate slabs served as shelves round the walls at waist height to hold the large brass pans, some several feet across to hold the fresh milk waiting for the cream to rise to be skimmed off for making butter. A small window gave a dim light. A large bird cage type of safe with perforated zinc sides hung from the ceiling.

Later, when refrigerators became popular my Aunt Hazel mentioned to Dr. Hardy she was thinking of buying one, he discouraged her saying the safe was the best possible place to store food as air circulated round the contents.

Aunt Hazel married on April 15 1966 Richard Woolner a widower, he and his late wife had been friends of Aunt and Uncle for many years.

They lived at "Ridgeway", a large house in a beautiful garden of $\frac{3}{4}$ acres opposite Elm Farm, built on the 'Common' in 1926.

Prior to her marriage, Aunt Hazel decided to sell Elm Farm. J. Maunder-Taylor and Son of Whetstone were the appointed agents. The public auction was to take place at the Red Lion, High Street, Barnet on February 24 1966.

My brother Hywel bought the farm cottage, 1 Oaklands Lane, where he had lived since 1929.

There was much local interest in the sale. Barnet Council had rented out 21 acres of land to Elm Farm for many years and wished to buy the property.

Shortly before the sale Aunt Hazel sustained a fractured leg and was in a plaster caste. She asked me if I would take one of the viewers round. The gentleman came from Eastbourne. I took him round the house and told him as much as was known of the history of the old house, but he was not interested and did not go round the farm buildings; when I expressed surprise that he should have come from such a distance to 'view', he said he was only interested in the land and produced a large scale map.

When I said the land was within the Greenbelt - this he already knew - it did not deter him. He would let the land until such a time the Government would be compelled to release from restrictions more Greenbelt land to build houses. "The land will then be worth a million, it's a potential gold mine".

I accompanied Aunt Hazel to the sale on February 24 1966 at 6pm. The large Banqueting Room on the first floor of the Red Lion was crowded. Mr J. Maunder Taylor conducted the auction. Bidding was brisk. Barnet Council was anxious to buy but could not match the price offered by a partner in a firm of Eastbourne auctioneers and surveyors acting for a client who later proved to be the 'developer' my aunt and I met at Elm Farm and had shown so little interest in the old house and farm buildings. It was sold for £37,500. And so ended the family association with Elm Farm 1919-1966; Aunt Hazel Davies for 30 years and my brother Hywel Griffiths for 57 years.

The new owner rented the land out and the house and buildings remained empty for three years. Squatters took possession of the farmhouse and on two occasions the fire brigade had to be called to put out fires.

Sadly my Aunt watched the deliberate neglect and deterioration of her much loved home of so many years from "Ridgeway" the other side of the road.

Miss Gwyneth Cowing, granddaughter of the founder of the "Barnet Press", had lived within sight of Elm Farm all her life, (now at the "Whalebones") took a great interest in saving the 15th century barn and 1625 farmhouse from total destruction, as did The Barnet Society of which Miss

Cowing was President, and the Barnet & District Local History Society also voiced concern.

Fortunately the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1968, was passed before the building finally deteriorated beyond repair. The Act required the owner to keep a listed building in repair. No doubt the 'developer' realised this would cost a great deal of money, also that he had antagonised the local people by his deliberate neglect of the old farm house, barn and outbuildings.

June 26 1969 - The Barnet Press reported that 'Mr H.R. Neil, Arkley, had bought the farmhouse, barn and farm buildings; immediate grounds, and some paddock land and is restoring the farmhouse and ancient barn.'

Mr Neil lived in a house just across the old glebe lane by the farmhouse. The 'developer' retained the valuable land now rented out. No doubt still hoping for some relaxation of the Town and Country Planning Act.

Later Information. The property as reported by the Barnet Press on June 26 1969 was actually bought by Mr Neil on April 14 1969 for £12,000, with garden and paddock just under 2 acres.

Mr Neil had the farmhouse made habitable again. Partly built in Jacobean times, many of its ancient features were retained; others discovered in the modernisation that took place. The old farmhouse kitchen was transformed and streamlined - kitchen equipment replaced the very large old dresser; the range replaced by an electric cooker; strip lighting, pine panelling and modern furniture installed - 'more in keeping with the times' - my aunt was told! The character of the old house was completely changed. The roof of the ancient barn was in a bad state; it was re-tiled with old tiles, from a derelict barn in the area.

Mr Neil was given permission to convert part of the barn for residential use. The stables, loose boxes and other farm buildings were altered to accommodate 30 horses and to be used as livery stables.

June 17 1976. Notices of sale on this date by public auction at The Salisbury, Barnet High Street, 3pm, by Hampton & Sons and Blade & Co. jointly. It was sold by Mr Neil previously.

The new owner divided the farmhouse into two separate establishments. Much of one house extended into the barn.

The ancient dairy floor was raised to ground level; the slate shelves removed; the birdcage food safe was thrown out and the window enlarged. All trace of this original unique farm dairy was lost and it became a 'study'.

The ancient sunken croquet lawn in front of the house was filled in and replaced by an asphalt drive.

One house was named Elm Farm House, the other Elm Farm Stables.

1984 June. Harland and Sons, High Street, Barnet, advertised Elm Farm Stables for sale. Accommodation:- Hall, lounge, study, utility room, kitchen, 4 bedrooms. Outbuildings :- 10 loose boxes, kennels, etc. Price £199,500 freehold.

1990 June. Two detached houses built by the farm gate in the paddock on the site of the original five elm trees that gave the farm its name.

The farm has through the years changed its title from Five Elms Farm; Three Elms Farm and Elm Farm.

The character of this ancient farmhouse and farm buildings is lost, completely changed, also the immediate area. Where once we looked from the front windows to the Common opposite and the herd of cows grazing there - about 1925 - we now saw large detached houses, each with $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ acres of garden.

Two houses immediately opposite the farmhouse have in recent years been demolished and replaced by several small houses crowded together on the site.

I look back with gratitude that I spent so much of my childhood at Elm Farm. The old house had so much character and endeared itself to us all.

It is thought that at one time the farmhouse was an inn. There was a large cellar under the room to the left (facing) the porch with access from the garden.

A large well outside the kitchen window facing the yard - with pump supplied the needs of the cattle. A pump in the scullery supplied the needs of the house until mains supply was installed (still there in my childhood).

My aunt, Mrs. Davies had the well and cellar filled in about 1950, with disastrous results - wet rot - dry rot.

