

given harvest beer the same as the rest of the workers. I don't think we were given much more than a taster of her spirits when we were that young, though.

One summer hols when I was nine years old and the harvest was in full swing, Ciss and I were with Dad helping at Uncle Charlie's Manifold Wick Farm at Tolleshunt Knights. When you were at someone else's place you were under their rules, by the way. You followed whatever their habits were and what they did, not what your parents did or said, even if they were right there beside you. Uncle Charlie had married Dad's sister Ethel, who never seemed to feed us enough. On our first day there she dished up very small portions, and when I finished my tiny pudding I saw there was another one near me, so I grabbed that and ate it. It turned out to be my aunt's and she didn't think much of that. The incident certainly amused my sister and for years afterwards that was a standing joke between us: "Pete, do you need another pudding?"

In Uncle's barn there were three or four barrels of harvest beer with a big trough underneath to catch the spillage. It was a very hot day so I ducked into the barn. I was very thirsty so I turned on one of the taps a little bit and got my mouth under it, as there were no cups about that I could see. I kept drinking from the trickle to sate my thirst and, before I knew it, I was too drunk to turn it off! Cissie found me and carted me away but she didn't realise the tap was still on. The barrel emptied itself and the trough overflowed, and my uncle thought it must have been one of the workers. Neither of us told him any different! That was the only time in my life I became truly drunk and incapable. At least, that is, so far!

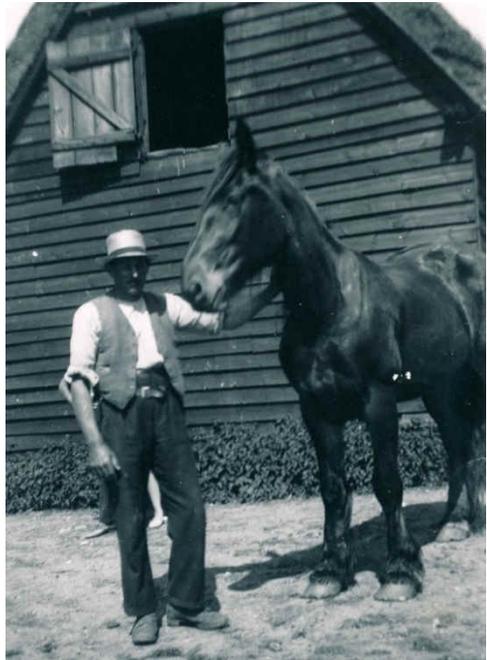
The harvest beer was not usually very strong, maybe 2.5%, but with a very good taste. We never made enough of our own beer to last through harvest so we had to buy a couple of barrels, either the local Daniell's or Ind Coope, and we bought Fuller's in bottles from Lay & Wheeler.

Drinking and working was never a problem. I don't remember any accidents at all in harvest, the beer simply helped the men keep going through long days of hard work. We would work dawn until dusk and on a lovely, dry moonlit night we might still carry on with the binders, cutting the corn and tying it in sheaves.

Dad booked up the threshing machine as soon as we had finished harvesting. Sometimes of course it rained on your day, and that would be a major set-back, so Dad came up with an idea for a wet weather cover for the threshing tackle and the top of the stack. This stack sheet went over steel supports which were L-shaped, so you could push the leg of the L into the stack, about six sheaves down, then every so often the men had to drop it down a bit further. We only needed to use it once that I recall, when one of the men let the pile get too low on his side and accidentally knocked one of the legs out. That corner collapsed, causing no injury, but the culprit ended up with the stack sheet on his head. He didn't think much of that, especially when we laughed at his predicament. We took all that equipment with us when we moved to our next farm but I don't remember it being used again as we always seemed to have good weather when we most needed it.



*Two sisters on a stack.
Dad with Captain, one of our
huge horses*



At harvest time on our farm young Jean would load up poor old Prince, our crippled up ex-polo pony, with crates of beer and take them to the workers. She got halfway along, then she'd stop and hide one in the hedge. When she arrived, Dad asked "You haven't been drinking it have you?"