

THE Wallop brook meanders through the Wallops and the villages of Broughton and Houghton on its way to join the river Test about Horsebridge. On its way it splashes through water meadows and fords, past disused water mills and ripples through old watercress beds. Either side of its banks you can see rich farmland and rolling Downland.

It was to this peaceful paradise that my mother and father took my brother and I during the early years of the second world war.

For three or four months we lived near the rippling brook in a semi-detached thatched cottage at the foot of the South Downs. It was one of a pair called Broughton Cottages. The cottages have since been destroyed, having stood there, so it was said, for over 400 years. The walls were up to four feet thick whilst all around the building there was dense dark green ivy which afforded cover for a host of living things.

Water was available from a well in the back garden and we had to use a long handled, squeaky wooden pump to get the water. The privy was at the bottom of the garden which proved an inconvenience to townspeople used to having an inside toilet, but at least the weather was fine.

In front of the cottage were fields which, in the evening, heaved and bobbed with feeding brown rabbits. Behind rose the Downs covered with yew trees and mole hills and crowned with a line of glorious beech trees whose dark shadows spread across the short grass when sunset came.

For children who had never been in the country it was like living in heaven. We bathed in the brook, hunted for birds' nests on the river bank and were allowed to go haymaking. Blackberrying was a delight in which we all revelled.

Perhaps best of all we were too far away from a school to have any formal education.

All too soon we had to move and we went to live on the other side of Broughton, in another thatched cottage next to the river. This was to be our home for the following five years. Much to my dismay the school was just up the road, so there I went.

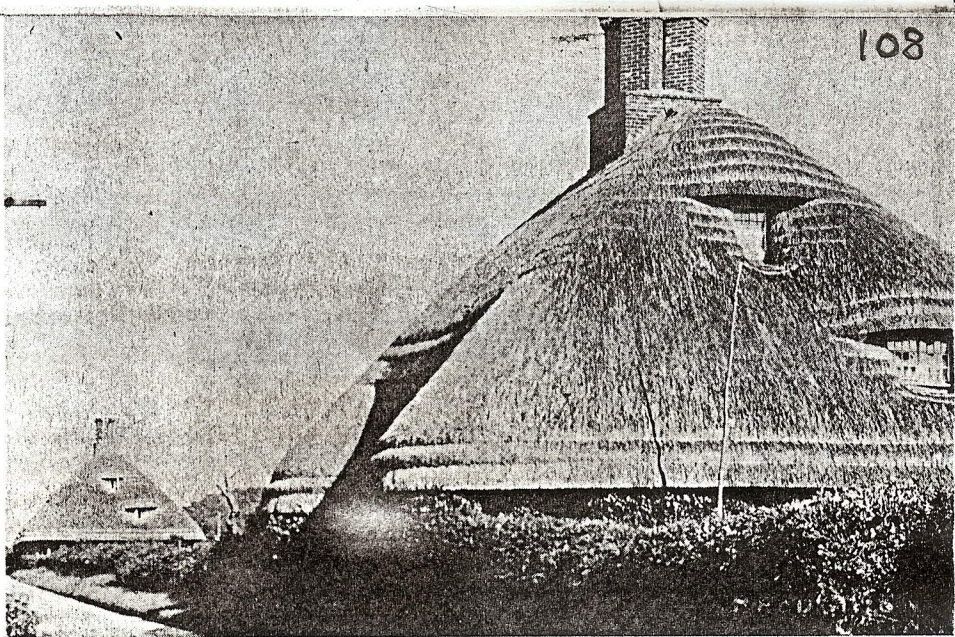
The Headmaster of the school was a Mr Hoare (if memory serves me correctly) but I did not have much to do with him, my teacher was Miss Yarnold. The school was run on good old-fashioned lines. Tables were learnt by rote, reading came every day and we had spelling tests and writing lessons. This was the State school and it is still there.

In the village itself there was a Church school but I did not know much about that place, although my brother went there.

Opposite our cottage there was a water-meadow. Cattle were often put into this field. At first they frightened us town children but we soon got used to their large, staring eyes, their inquisitive ways and their warm, sweet-smelling breath.

In this meadow I found my first Moorhen's nest amongst a group of yellow irises (or flags) by the side of the little river. It was a beautiful sight and it helped to lay the foundations of a life-long hobby — bird watching.

Farmer Ray farmed the land around our



Broughton Cottages, at the foot of the downs

War led to happy days at Broughton

by J. R. SIMMS

cottage. Manor Farm was just along the road, over the bridge, and we often visited the farm. Helping on the farm gave us a healthy life though it was not without the occasional hazard.

Loading the wagons had to be carefully done at haymaking time. I remember once then the trailer was loaded with hay *from the back*. At first all went well, but suddenly there was a swift movement. The back of the trailer went down and the horse at the front up. The poor horse finished with its head high in the air and its feet off the ground. What farmer Ray said of the situation is not recorded — perhaps just as well!

Corn was stooked (stacked) in those days and laid in rows of "wigwams" neatly across the field. As the reaping machines circled the field a diminishing area of corn was left. When a critical area was approached small animals broke cover and made a dash for the boundary hedge, hotly pursued by all the farm hands, after a rabbit to supplement their "rations".

Haymaking was carried out by reapers and binders, usually drawn by tractors, but occasionally by horses. Such things as combine harvesters came along a few years later.

In the war time situation village life was a closed community. Due to petrol rationing there were few cars and buses on the road. This had the result that my friends and I

could cycle around the roads in relative safety. Nether Wallop, Bossington, Houghton, Horsebridge and King's Somborne were all visited.

Many memories crowd back, though in no logical order. I can remember rare visits by bus to Andover and, even rarer, to Salisbury. Once or twice we even went to Winchester though one of these visits was an enforced one when I broke my arm and had to go to hospital — a result of bird's nesting.

My father, who was a Church of England Lay reader, became attached to the Parish Church of St. Mary's in Broughton. He often took the church services at Broughton or at Bossington. So the family became associated with church activities.

After a period of sitting with the organist at the back of the church during the services I was promoted to the choir.

Mr. Padwick was the organist. His skill at accompanying the hymns and psalms never ceased to amaze my youthful eyes and ears. *Both his hands and his feet* — wow! I was still struggling with one hand at a time on the piano. Behind us, in the vestry, was the most important member of the musical team, the organ blower. If he forgot to pump then everything wheezed to an ignominious stop.

The rector of Broughton, the reverend Daubeney, was very kind to us. Every year,

at the right season, he would invite my father to take my brother and I to his big rectory garden. There, beneath a large, noisy rookery, we were let loose in his soft fruit garden which had been enclosed, top and sides, with wire netting.

We would duck through a little gate to find ourselves in wonderland. Raspberries, strawberries and blackberries in their turn all surrounded us. We could eat what we liked as long as we both took some baskets of fruit back home to mother.

In the village there were two grocers. Not that two shops were of much help to one family. During the war you had to register with one shop only for your goods. However my mother and another lady put their heads together and registered with two different shops so that if one shop ran out of a certain food then it might be obtained from the other shop.

This worked very well except that "our" shop was at the other end of the village from our cottage, rather a long way to walk until I acquired a bicycle.

The shop which we registered with was called Bird and Goodwins. I used to love the smell of the shop as I entered the door with its little ringing bell and the friendly country welcome.

One of the favourite playgrounds for us children was in the area halfway along the village street, up behind a covered well. This grassy patch contained swings and was

somewhere safe in which to play. I even found a skylark's nest and eggs there. I see that the area is now covered with houses.

After a year or so I was sent away to a boarding school in Somerset. This entailed a train journey each term and it first involved reaching Horsebridge station on the old "Sprat and Winkle" line. Luggage had to be conveyed to the station by Mr Gough, the local carrier, some few days before I was due to go. Then, on the day, I cycled to the station, leaving the bicycle to be collected later on.

Sometimes we would cycle as far as Bosington and then walk across the fields to Horsebridge. I enjoyed these early morning walks. We would put up snipe and look at the fish in the river Test until, eventually, we arrived at the small station where, in due course, a fussy little steam engine would come along from Stockbridge to take me to the main line at Romsey.

The only thing to spoil this idyllic existence was the sight of an angry red glow in the night sky from the direction of Southampton. It was the blitz.

Occasionally the village was reminded of the war when enemy bombers passed over on their way to attack the nearby aerodrome at Middle Wallop. We became very good at distinguishing the vibrant hum of the enemy bombers from the whining notes of our planes.

Only once do I remember a bomb being

dropped in the parish. It fell about 400 yards away from our cottage, fortunately in the water meadows. No one was hurt, though it shook everybody up.

On the odd occasions when there was an air raid many people made for the big basement in the rectory. We did have an air raid shelter in our garden but that caved in and we boys were forbidden to play in it.

Washing and other ablutions were a little difficult to get used to. No hot water and the cold water came from a pump in the porcelain pot sink in the kitchen.

As you can imagine having a bath caused problems. We used a zinc bath put in the dining room in front of the black oven range. Many kettles of water were boiled on a primus stove. Other kettles were heated on the oven range and the bath laboriously filled.

So, in the evening, by the light of an old oil lamp (for we had no electricity) we had our baths.

I see that the cottage has now got modern amenities but for many years one reminder of our war-time occupation still remained. The front door of the cottage had a knocker in the shape of Bury St Edmunds Cathedral. It was put there by my father when we first went to the cottage in 1940. The brassknocker has now been removed but my memories of the cottage still remain. Whenever I pass that way I am pleasantly reminded of the refuge given us by the cottage during the upheavals of the war years.