

## T.A.M.'s 1946 MEMORIES OF FRANK CLARKE

*The following edited account by T.A.M. is in Steep church archives. It might have taken place on the road leading from the Harrow Inn to Church Road, Steep.*

It was January 1946. I had just dismounted to walk the bicycle up the incline when I met a tired looking old man leaning on a hedge wiping mud from his boots. It was Frank Clarke, the farmer, he resumed his uphill dawdle. "Gracious," said he, "I've come up and down here nearly every day since I started work seventy years ago. I was only nine then."

"What," said I, "had you left school at that age?"

"Yes, but there were no schools here in those days. I worked at Island Farm. I used to come from Sheet. My job was to look after the horses for two shillings and six pence per week."

"You see that field," pointing to land near Island farmhouse, "There used to be a hedge running right across it and my father dug it out and replanted this one - all down that road and up here. We used to get four and sixpence for scything an acre of grass and the same in the hop fields for digging and heaping up a hundred hillocks. You see that cottage, I applied for a job to look after the owner's horses and was told the wage would be four and sixpence a week. My father wouldn't let me go for less than five shillings so I refused."

We were passing a long neglected copse to which the new owner was devoting some of his leisure. Old Frank knew the copse well – "I don't think it's been cut or looked after these fifty years past, not since I cut it myself. We cut the sticks and bundled them. Look at those oaks – no chance of growing into good timber – only useful for firewood. In 1893 it had a fine lot of oak. This was part of old Frank Duddy's estate; Beddales bought the other part where the school is now, but they didn't buy this. Later Mr Powell bought some of it and built Little Hawstead. That was about 1893 and before 'Hither Northfield' and 'Merries' were built. You know 'The Camp'? Before it was built, there was a pond there. I dug it out several times and later they got me to fill it in. The bungalow called 'The Camp' was erected on the site of the pond."

"In my young days; there was only a single line of railway; I remember when they doubled the line about 70 years ago. In those days, banks used to send their money in bags, by cart. My wife told me that once, they didn't tie up a bag properly. On the way from Froxfield to Petersfield, the sovereigns were trickling out. That cottage – pointing to the one already mentioned – was built with sovereigns picked up by the man who followed the cart down the hill." We both laughed heartily. "Mind you," he added, "I can only say that is what my wife used to tell me." Alas Frank Clarke has now left us. Steep will miss his friendly greeting, the twinkling eye and the happy, smiling, kindly face.

*Notes* Steep Parish registers record Frank Clarke baptised on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1867 and buried 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1949, aged 81 years. Four shillings and sixpence = 22½ p today. Hither Northfield – a house now named Pennyfold. The bungalow named 'The Camp' – Steep vicarage and Vicarage Cottage now stand on this site.

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