

The following was written by Mrs. Jessie Tagg in 1961. She was born in November 1876, the eldest child of Robert and Jessie Boby of Stowupland Suffolk.

Jessie was married twice, her first husband being a Mr. Sydney Jones and her second Mr. Aubrey Tagg. She lived for over 40 years in Headington, Oxford where she died in 1969 aged 93.

From 1940 to 1947 she cared for her two unmarried aunts, Emily and Elizabeth Boby but due to her own advancing years she was forced to find alternative accommodation for them and in April 1947 they moved into No 11 Southfield Road Oxford, where they spent their remaining years, both being in their 90s when they died.

In this letter Jessie looks back to her happy childhood spent in the Suffolk countryside.

I am 85 years of age and my life is slowly drawing to its close. I see all the beauty around me that I am hoping and praying I shall be permitted to see in the second world I shall shortly enter. I trust to be allowed into eternity to see the trees and grass that I love so much - they are my first loves - +I also trust to be not too far from a rocky coastline, to sit by the sea in the sunshine and to enjoy all this beauty in my own company. Beauty overwhelms me and enters deeply into me. How displeased the Almighty must be to see the calousness of man towards His great and beautiful gifts.

How I long for the peaceful times that I enjoyed in my childhood. In those days instead of the rush and tear of life, we had peaceful, happy and merry times with each other, giving help with our needle and knitting - work to help those who were our near neighbours.

The head horseman's wife with newly arrived twins needed help with the other children; lambs brought in by the shepherd to the back kitchen to be kept warm and fed from the baby's bottle; Jim, the gardener who had cut himself needed to have the wound dressed and bandaged every morning; Old Dolby, who was not very wise, used to clean the pots and pans every morning and had to have a beaten up egg with a tot of whisky in it, which brought a gleam of joy into his eye and life. There was old Mrs. Payne who lived in a cottage just beyond the park gates who came for our spent tea leaves. I may mention here about tea leaves that when my grandmother was young tea was three guineas a pound and every time tea was made the parlour maid brought the silver tea pot (which had been warmed) caddy and bicarbonate of soda on a tray to my grandmother who carefully put the tea in the pot with a small wooden spoon and then a pinch of bicarb. The maid then poured the boiling water into the pot.



This was a ritual, and at teatime I was seated between my grandfather and grandmother until my big and most handsome grandfather teased me so much that my very dear grandmother used to move me to her other side saying 'Robert, don't tease the child'. My grandfather could never resist putting his silver tea-spoon into his hot tea (he had neither milk or sugar in it) and then dabbing the hot spoon on my small hand, and he laughed to see me jump. My grandmother would then be angry with him. The big, old gentleman adored my grandmother and was very proud of me. He really was a very handsome, fine man, 6'2" and erect. His hands, of which he was very proud, were beautiful enough to be the envy of any artist. He never went outside the house without his gloves on and he hardly ever walked, but rode his mare everywhere round his farms - there was the 'home' farm and three so-called 'off hand' farms, all of which lost money during the bad period for farmers in the 1870's.

As my grandparents (Robert and Elizabeth Boby) had nine children my grandmother had a busy time. An old nanny and young nursemaid looked after the children and my grandmother supervised everything in the household, plus the dairy.

There were churning days when the butter was made, the wooden churn being turned by Dolby. The butter must never be overchurned - just the right length of time, after which the churn was opened and the butter removed by hand. In the summer, which certainly seemed warmer in those days, the dairymaid and Dolby used to start churning at 4.00 a.m. but as they could go to bed as early as they wished this didn't seem to trouble them. Twice a day the cows were milked and the milk put into large, shallow pans arranged around a low shelf in the dairy. Gradually the milk would cool and the cream arise. At about 4.00 p.m. this milk would have the cream skimmed off with a skimmer which was a piece of material made flat with holes all over with a small

handle which allowed the milk to drain through. The cream which remained on the skimmer was put into large earthenware pots and churned every day until a churning day (usually once a week) then made into butter. After taking the butter from the churn it was put into a large wooden receptacle that had a hole in it with a plug. Fresh cold water was poured over the butter which was kneaded with the hand and turned and kneaded again. Then the plug was pulled out and the water drained into a pail beneath. This performance was repeated to get all the buttermilk away from the butter and the butter was then made into pots of different shapes, wooden moulds of swans, flowers and birds, which had been scalded with boiling water to prevent the butter sticking to the moulds. These shapes would then appear on our tables at mealtimes - the swans would stand up, neck and all, the horses would be prancing with a sprig of parsley beside them, the green and the yellow so attractive to a small girls attentive eye.

After our tea my grandmother and aunt would play the piano - my grandmother was a brilliant pianist. The ducks and geese would assemble on the moat, which in those days came under the parlour window, with their heads on one side to listen to the music. Sometimes one of my aunts who was choir trained and played the harmonium in church would sing and play to us while my grandmother played word games and cribbage with me. Then there was chatting about the parish and all its doings, consultations about the garden and about another of my aunts who was married and discussions as to when we should visit her and her little family who were my loved companions. How I enjoyed the drive there (to Rattlesden) in the low pony carriage driven by my aunt and by myself when older. How pure and clean the sweet scented air was. The peace then is unimaginable to the present day population who seem, to an old woman like myself, to be rushing to as mad a suicide



as the Gadarene swine. Where are the morning and evening family prayers read by the head of the family which united master and servants and brought peace?

Jessie Tagg 1961

The above mentioned farm was 'Columbyne Hall' Stowupland.