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Robert Dimsdale III

Further memories of life in Barkway House from Robert Dimsdale's oral history

Another feature of living in Barkway House is that it backs onto Church lane or it sides onto Church Lane and Manor Farm, which is at the end of it, the only other thing up there apart from the Vicarage and bred its own life. As a young boy I particularly remember Albert Sharp who had the blacksmith's place, The Forge, immediately opposite our back gate who had a wonderful manner. He was always doing battle with great trampling cart horses in the tiny forge. There were harrows and other strange agricultural implements lying about and I think he had Shires, I don't think there were Suffolks, I may have seen a Percheron there once or twice and I can remember it was the time when the cart horses were finally disappearing and he carried on with the harrows and so on. He had a wonderful Hertfordshire accent which it seems presumptuous to try and imitate it, but he would say 'Morn Massa Robert' and very easy to understand. Sid I Brown was another person who was always in Church Lane, and he spoke exactly like Albert Sharp. He always said yes three times, 'yes, yes, yes'. And still does.

Will Barker did an amazing cycling act with buckets of eggs. I've never seen anyone cycling slower than him. He never seemed to fall off and he never broke the eggs. In Manor Farm, or it was then known as Barkway Manor, lived Mrs Sworder, the widow of the formidable former farmer, Mr Sworder. I can remember being taken to tea with her. They had two boys, the Sworders, and they were both killed in World War I. Their swords used to be over their church memorial, but someone stole them about twenty years ago and the swords aren't there anymore. Sometime after the War a lady came to see the Sworders, this is after World War I, and said 'I had been the friend of and was going to marry one of the boys'. They didn't know about this, but they simply took her in, and she was often there and she would be in church with Mrs Sworder on a Sunday and I think it was of some consolation to her. Mrs Sworder had an ear trumpet which, at age three or four, frightened me out of my wits and I was sort of unmanned and had to be taken away as I feared she would blow it.