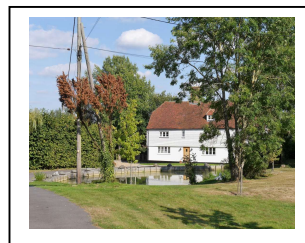


MEMORIES OF HOPPING AT SCHOOL HOUSE FARM DOWN IN HORSMONDEN



Eddie Slough
1936 - 2023



Photos of School House Farm, Horsmonden.

The following is in memory of Eddie Slough, who died recently. He loved his hop-picking days in Horsmonden and his family have given their blessing to share his early memories as a lad at School House Farm.

"I was just a schoolboy of 9 years of age living in South East London and the first thing that I can remember about the hop season is the joy my sister and me felt when Mum and grandma said we are off to take a holiday in September, a sort of working holiday. Dad was still in the army at this time 1945.

Not being able to travel in the past made the idea of getting on a train even more exciting, so the build up to the day was incredible. The day came and suitcases were packed and off we set to catch the steam train from London to Tunbridge Wells. then change onto the small train to HORSMONDEN. Being young and not knowing much we used to put our heads out of the window, wow, the smell of steam, eyes filled with coal or coke dusk did not bother us, on arrival at the little station "HORSEMONDN" was to us kids like being abroad.

The whole family at that time would be Mum, Nan, Grandad and Aunt Care.

Walking down the slope of the station with our possessions and waiting was the farmer or the manager of School House Farm with his 2 lovely big shire horses pulling the huge cart where all the hop pickers would scramble in for the journey to the farm.

On arrival we would make our way to the huts which would be our accommodation for the next three to four weeks. The farmer would have supplied bales of dried straw which would be to make our beds, not bad but there were many earwigs and creepy crawlies. The huts were painted black on the outside and white inside, of course NO electricity. We used paraffin to fuel the lamps for lighting and if you could afford one, you had a Primus stove for boiling the kettle and cooking on.

The farmer would supply you on a daily basis with twig wood faggots, normally two of these you could make a fire and do the cooking on the open fire, ok in good weather, not nice when raining, hence the Primus stove.

Some areas had cook houses, metal enclosures with two or four open fires which you could share, ok in bad weather and a place to meet other pickers.

Then came the first morning to start hop picking. The farmer would organise the FORDSON tractor to escort you to the first hop field. In School House Farm they had six separate fields which had to be picked. When in the hop garden you would be allocated a bin and a section (row) of hop bines (usually 4 bines) either side of the row whereby, all of you would sit on the edge of the bin and pick off the hops (no leaves) into the bin.

When possible us kids would bunk off and go down to the river Teise and play in the river for minnows.

Sadly, I have no photos of the hop fields, plenty of gran and mum, sadly all have now passed away, I am now 83 and last of our hop pickers.

I am glad I have a copy of Ern Woods book, 'Horsmonden Village Memories'.

Mrs Fleming, my grandmother, also picked hops on other farms, we believe in Brenchley but we can only remember School House Farm. We believe the Fleming and Sloughs plus the Webb's and finally the Codling families worked on School House Farm since 1930, the Larkin Brothers we think were the owners. Later we think a farmer name Brett, then a farmer named Barr. We are not sure about all these names but from what we remember hearing.

I have been trying to find the history of the farm on Kent Council web site, archives, to no avail.

My personal memories of Horsmonden were always the Heath or village green, normally Saturday evenings dad and grandad would enjoy having a beer with our family sitting on the green among loads of people.

Mum would visit the little butcher's shop on the little path at the top of the green, opposite the little milliner's shop. The other butchers were down the ramp further down from Happy Lambert's shop on the Brenchley road. Nan always wanted new cooking pot, so a visit to a shop the Heath Stores near the cross roads, I think it was next to a P.O.

A visit to Crowhursts was my prize! Fish hooks and tackle, to fish the big pond on the Grovehurst and Haymans Hill road, great memories.

I am still trying to find who the owners of School House Farm were from 1945 to 1951 - those were the years our family went HOP PICKING, great days and lots of happy memories of that wonderful time."

Eddie Slough