

NOT CHECKED WITH BROADCAST COPY

'A COUNTRY CALENDAR'

Monday, 14th September, 1942. 4.15 - 4.35 p.m. HOME SERVICE

Speakers: Syd Carter, Mrs. G. Hancock,
J. W. Bennett

Introduced by: H. R. Jukes

ANNOUNCER:

'A Country Calendar'. Here is a programme which brings before you, month by month, news of the countryside. Countrymen and women come to the microphone to speak of their lives and work, all the changing facets of the rural scene, and although representative of the life of country folk, the series should hold much of interest to townspeople too.

The speakers are introduced by H. R. Jukes . . .

JUKES:

Three speakers for you this afternoon - all from the Midlands, a sort of half-way-house for everybody. We may be a little late for some of you but early for others. However, here is Syd Carter to tell you how farming affairs are progressing round what the poetical people call 'the Heart of England'.

CARTER OVERLEAF

Syd Carter

September is a busy month on the farm. With any luck at all, we've finished our haymaking and harvest, although in years gone by I've known haymaking stretch out into September and harvest into October, but those were horrible freak years, and best forgotten.

This year, at any rate, haymaking and harvest are finished and our immediate task is to break up the golden stubble in the wheat-field, turn it over properly and bury it, so that nature can perform her miracle and return the humus to the earth and so get ready for the next crop. There's something very satisfying about ploughing stubble and I'm never tired of watching it. I suppose it's the contrast of the dark brown-black of the soil and the pale yellow of the dried straw that appeals. It's certainly a test for the ploughman, for his handywork shows up in a way that cannot possibly be disguised.

I do wish I could take up a piece of ploughing and hang it up in the middle of your big towns and let you good people have a look at it. It would enable you to get a much better idea of the skill that goes into the job, and what craftsmanship goes to make a perfect furrow. That's just a silly idea of course and so you'll just have to take my word for it that a man who puts his furrows down with micrometer-like precision is just as much a craftsman as the man at the lathe - different job, different tools, but with the same end in view - winning the war.

I've seen great changes in ploughing in my day, short as it's been. One of my earliest recollections is of seeing a team of six oxen, one behind the other, attached to a huge wooden plough,

the ploughman hanging on to the plough for dear life and a small boy running backwards and forwards up the line of patient beasts, wielding a goad and doing his best to increase the pace of those slow but sure moving animals. That's all gone; these days it's two and three or four furrows behind a tractor that does the work. And what a change there's been in tractors recently - self-starters, comfortably padded seats, even enclosed cabs to keep out the weather, all making for greater efficiency and greater speed.

Another job we've had is threshing. Of course, we've not been able to finish it all in one go; that would take too long and other farmers want the threshing machine - or drum, as we call it - so it has to go round doing a bit here and a bit there, and will come back to us later on. Frankly I'm not sorry, for a day's threshing is enough for anybody in one dose.

It's a hectic time whilst it lasts. The huge threshing machine, with straw bailer hitched on behind, and a trailer containing oil and spares, arrived late the other evening. The man in charge drew his machine alongside our ricks with a precision worthy of the captain of a destroyer, set his straw bailer in position behind the drum, pulled a huge roll of wire netting out and pegged it round the rick we were going to thresh in the morning (that, by the way was to prevent any rats from escaping when we got down to the bottom of the rick) and left everything ship-shape before going along to the 'local' to have a gossip with his friends whom he hadn't seen for a twelve-month.

As soon as it was light, we got the thatch off the rick, for although it's only been up a week or so, we thatched it as a precaution to keep the rain out, and then, at seven o'clock, we started. The man in charge of the tractor was general supervisor,

two of our men on the rick, one throwing sheaves from the back of the rick to the front and the other down on to the threshing machine, for at the beginning the rick of course towers above the threshing drum. It's later on in the day, when the rick becomes lower than the drum, that the really hard work begins and you have to pitch the sheaves 'uphill' as we call it.

On the drum itself there is a highly skilled girl who feeds the corn into ~~the drum or~~ beaters which hammer out the corn and standing beside her is a girl with a sharp knife who, with one sweep, cuts the spring band, deftly saves it, and passes the loose sheaf, the right way and at the right speed, to the drum feeder. To watch those two girls at work is an education and certainly makes some of the old men open their eyes, for until the last war this was always regarded as a man's job and highly skilled at that.

Down on the ground there was one fellow awaiting the sacks as they quickly filled, two sacks at a time, with the first quality grain and two sacks with the tailings as we call them - that's the broken and light-weight grains and other seeds which have got mixed up with them. With the drums running to capacity and the corn threshing out well, these chaps are busy and when you've filled and tied and wheeled away the corn from the drum to the barn for eight or ten hours you don't need any rocking when it comes to bed time.

Then there's the poor unfortunate whose job it is to keep the cavings or husks clear of the machine. These are blown out by a fan and soon become an immense pile and a potential source of danger because they are generally very dry and should they catch fire, the whole place would be ablaze in next to no time. That's one reason why there's positively no smoking when you're threshing. I can assure you that moving the cavings into the open

is no job for a fellow with hay fever. He quickly becomes grey as a ghost and develops a thirst which is something to write home about.

The rest of us concentrate on stacking the bales of straw as they come out of the bailer.

With very brief pauses for food, the work goes on until the rick is finished, then the whole apparatus moves twenty or thirty yards to the next rick, for naturally we don't build them too close together - there's too much risk of fire and enemy action in war-time and in any case, nowadays it's a government order. Then we repeat the dose all over again.

Sometimes we get a bit of excitement as the last layer or two of sheaves come off, for then there's a bit of ratting. The dogs go mad and we all become young again as we attack and utterly vanquish our hereditary enemy, the rat.

Before we get to know how really tired we are time's up, that lot of threshing is finished and the man with his tractor, his threshing drum and his girls moves off to the next farm, promising to come back on such and such a date to complete the tale of our threshing. And we ourselves are left with a bare space on the ground where the ricks stood, a huge pile of baled straw which will have to be put into shape and thatched as quickly as possible, a pile of cavings which must be burnt as soon as the wind's in the right direction - so that there's no risk of setting fire to anything else - and in the barn, fat sack after fat sack of wheat; potential bread for you and hundreds like you, who depend on us of the countryside for your staff of life.

(After Carter)

JUKES:

And a pretty substantial staff you've made of it this harvest too, Syd. You chaps have won a major victory all right this time. All the same we want something to go with the bread, and the other day I came across a lady who's helping us to find it. But I'm going to let her talk for herself - all I'm going to do is to introduce you to Mrs. George Hancock, of Pitcher's Hill, Wickhamford, a little place in Worcestershire. Mrs. Hancock . . .

MRS. HANCOCK:

I'm the wife of a market gardener in the Vale of Evesham. You may not think that very exciting, but it's certainly entertaining when you live my sort of life.

There are four of us in my family, George, my husband, Betty, my daughter aged eight and Geoff., my son aged thirteen. I'm but there, I don't think I'll tell you how old I am. My husband works for one of the big growers in the Evesham Vale, and years ago when we were married there wasn't much money, so I went to work on the land as well, to help out. Land-work wasn't a new thing for me, because from the time when I was a little girl I'd helped my father with his smallholding and could do most jobs as well as a boy.

It wasn't easy at first to run our little home and do a day's work, but I found that by careful organisation I could do it and I have been able to carry on ever since. Of course, when the kiddies came I had a short break, but with the extra responsibility and expense I soon found myself back at work again.

In those days I worked from 9.30 till 5 for about twenty shillings a week. It doesn't sound much does it? But I can tell you that bit of extra money made all the difference to our comfort. Things have changed since then, and to give you an idea of just how much they have changed, one week this summer I earned £8.6s.4d. Of course, this was an extra special week, with lots of overtime, but how I should have liked even half of it in those early days. (1942)

I expect you are wondering how I spend my day - well, I get up at 6.30, get the breakfast for the family, make the beds, dust and generally clear up. The kiddies have always done the washing-up ever since they could manage it. My husband leaves home at seven, and the children go off to school about a quarter to nine. I lock up the house and go off at nine o'clock. I am often working on the land some way from home, so I have to take my dinner, and George has to come home and get his own. But of course I put it ready for him before I go. Betty always takes hers, and Geoff gets a nice cooked meal at the school. This is a real Godsend. I work on until about six or seven and then cycle home. George often gets home before me and gets the tea - or at any rate puts the kettle on. After tea, sometimes I have to work overtime, and I go back for another hour or so, or visit one or two friends whose gardens I keep in order for them.

If there's no outside work there's always plenty to do in the house. I always try and cook a nice hot supper, for I do try to feed my family as well as I can. We get to bed about 10.30 and don't need much rocking to go to sleep.

What sort of work do I do? Well, in the spring I pull onions and get up leeks, and then there's raddish and wallflower tying. After that, rhubarb pulling and tying and onion hoeing and lots of other hoeing, or 'hooving-jobs' as we call them,

^{these} and there's the strawberry crop, pea picking, ^{bean} and plump ~~and~~ ^{picking} ~~beans~~. These jobs sometimes come together and then it's an awful rush.

Then there's ~~the~~ getting up the summer onions and hoeing the onions we've planted ready for the spring. Potato lifting and more hoeing carries me right on until November if the weather's good, and of course in the odd times - well, there's always digging and hoeing.

I try and shop ~~one evening~~ ^{once} a week, and get all my supplies in in one go. My bit of war work consists of four hours' nursing a week at the local hospital, and I do try and keep up my first-aid practice by going to as many lectures as I can. What do I do for amusement? Well-there isn't much time, but when there's a really good film on at the local cinema in the winter I try and squeeze out an hour and go to ^{see} it, and in the summer if I'm very lucky I get a bit of swimming. Oh, I forgot to say I sing in the local choir. I'm ~~very~~ fond of music.

I expect all this sounds rather dull to you, but I don't feel dull. I enjoy every minute of my life, and I often laugh at some of my town friends when they say to me "Whatever do you find to do with yourself in the country?"

JUKES:

Yes - we all know the answer to that one, don't we? None better, I guess, than our third speaker here - Mr. J. W. Bennett, of Elmley Castle, just a bit south by west of Evesham, getting over towards Cheltenham. He's a gardener, too. Let's hear how he fills in his time, should we? Mr. Bennett . . .

J. W. BENNETT:

I'm a gardener, off and on I've been a gardener since I was nine. Perhaps it was a little bit early to make a start, but in those days there weren't many pennies about and I, being the eldest of a family of ten, and my father a stock-man on a farm, I had to turn out and do my bit, and by working from 6 in the morning till about half past five at night, six days a week, I was able to bring home 3/- a week and my mother found this money a very welcome addition to the family budget. In a good week I sometimes got a copper for myself to buy sweets, for you see there was no fag-smoking for boys in those days.

By keeping my eyes open and my mouth shut I managed to become a real gardener when I was twenty. And that's 42 years ago, although it doesn't seem so long as that. When you're busy time passes quickly. I worked in the gardens of the big house in our village.

You'd like our village. It's one of those little Worcestershire places of black and white and Cotswold stone houses tucked away in the folds of ^{the} Bredon Hill. It's a nice place. Of course, nothing very much happens there. Our last really important visitor was Queen Elizabeth, who liked the place so much she stayed the night. That was in 1530 so I'm told. Of course, I wasn't there, but I shouldn't be surprised if one of my ancestors didn't raise the potatoes for her dinner (that is if they had 'em in those days).

But I was talking of my times. A good many of the village folk worked at the big house in those days and if anything went wrong in the village, well the big house looked after us. I don't think we gardeners do things very much better today than we did those long years ago. Of course, there's new kinds of 'taters and peas and lots of roses and bulbs we never heard of then; but even so, if you could put the flower show we used to

hold in the village 30 or 40 years ago alongside some of the shows we held just before the war, I don't think it would be very far behind. We hadn't got so many patent manures to help us, but we did understand that to become a good gardener you've got to cultivate the land.

I wish some of you allotment holders could have dropped in on one of our flower shows years ago. You'd have seen a dish of 'taters and some vegetable marrows that would make you open your eyes. I can tell you that when I managed to take a prize or two I was as proud a man almost as I was in the days when I played cricket for the village and took nine wickets without a run being scored off me. As we used to say "I wouldn't have called the Queen my aunt" when that happened.

Cricket was our great game in the summer. Of course we played a bit of football in the winter, but it wasn't anything like so popular. If you came to my little house I could show you some photographs of our cricket team going back to when my father was a young man, and although they wore bowler hats to play in I never heard anybody say that it made them play cricket any the worse.

In the winter time, besides the football, we had our Working Men's Club, where we could go and read the papers and have a game of bagatelle and talk things over. We were always great talkers in our village.

And so life went on year in and year out for me, nothing very exciting happening. I don't remember much about the Boer War, but about 1912 I began to think there was a bit of trouble brewing and that I'd better get myself ready for it. So I joined the Territorials. We were in camp when they called us out on the 4th August, and from then until the end of the war I did a lot of digging, but it wasn't exactly gardening.

Well, I came through all right, with nothing worse than a whiff of gas for a souvenir and of course, when it was over, back I came to the village and went on with my gardening again. Life settled down to the old pleasant way; not so much cricket, a bit more football, but I didn't see very many changes except that the Women's Institute started and gave the women something to do and think about, and they roped me in to our village Dramatic Society to do a bit of acting. Fancy me an actor! They say being a gardener I make a very good butler, but anyway I enjoyed it and the audience haven't thrown anything at me yet. And so time went on till this war started. They said I was a bit too old in the tooth to have another cut at Jerry, so I worked a bit harder in my garden and tried to make three potatoes grow where I'd only got two before. I saw the young men go off the farms and the girls take their places - and a right good job they're making of it too. I've seen the Home Guard grow up and I've seen the plough tear up our grass-fields and the corn growing there. But with all these happenings it hasn't really changed, our village; and when this bit of bother's over the young fellows will come back like I came back and carry on with their jobs just as their fathers did before them.

Well, time's up. I suppose I ought to give you a bit of garden advice before I go. So, here it is: buy yourself a good spade and fork and learn to use them properly. Sweat over your bit of land, treat it fair, and it'll never let you down.