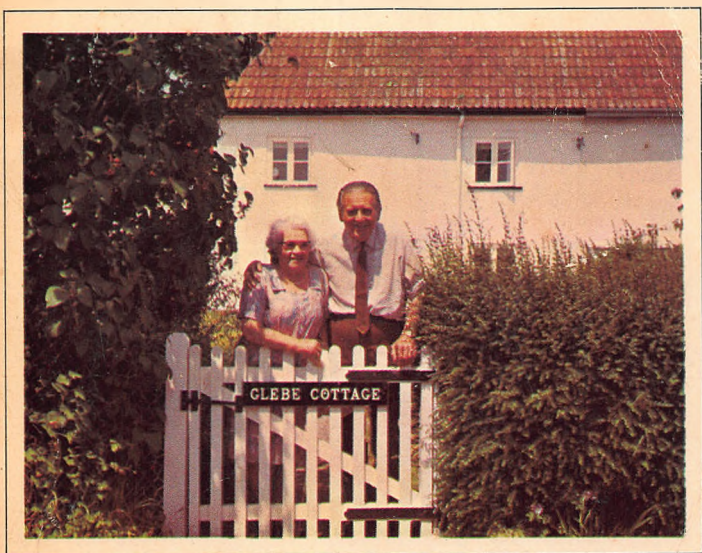


Doris Archer's Diary selections from 21 years of The Archers



BBC Radio



Doris Archer's Diary

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21 years of The Archers

British Broadcasting Corporation

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Introduction

Over the years, the *Borchester Echo* has chronicled the lives and times of generations of countryfolk. Each week we have tried faithfully to reflect the day-to-day happenings in this little corner of England. Each week we have filled our pages with stories of the interesting, the exciting, the happy and the tragic things that have been happening to our readers. In essence we have recorded the continuing and everyday story of countryfolk.

By the very nature of a newspaper, however, the story has been told piecemeal, like a jigsaw puzzle – a piece here, another there. Now we have decided to attempt to put the bits together, to create a more complete picture of life in the countryside. This is not an easy task. There are so many pieces, and people tend to see each one differently. Then there is the question of where to start and what time-span to cover. Eventually we settled on the magic figure of twenty-one. We would look back over the past twenty-one years during which so much change has taken place; and we would look through the eyes of just one person.

The result is a highly personalised story with which some might disagree but which we believe does typify life in the rural areas of England. The one pair of eyes we chose? Those of Mrs Doris Archer, a farmer's wife, who has lived all her life in the village of Ambridge.

Ambridge itself is fairly typical of the charming little country community that townspeople find so appealing. It's just five miles from Borchester, along a delightful winding lane that affords a splendid view of Lakey Hill. Like so many villages, the twin focal points are the parish church and the pub. The church is St Peter's,

built mainly in the Perpendicular style of architecture, but with its foundations going back to Norman times. The Bull is a fifteenth-century timbered building that has been considerably modernised in recent years to cater for the growing number of visitors.

Straggling along the one main street, there is a jumble of different-style houses – from tiny Elizabethan cottages through some brick-built Victoriana to the all mod. cons. of today. Such a mixture sounds incongruous, but somehow it isn't like that in Ambridge and the general air of the village is rather one of comfortable untidiness.

Around the village there are farms of varying sizes covering almost the complete range of agriculture from the smallholder with a few chickens and pigs right through to the big estate-owner with forestry and game parks.

It's farming that plays the dominant part in the community's life and as a farmer's wife, Mrs Archer has obviously been at the centre of village affairs for many years. She is now seventy-one and was born and bred in Ambridge, going to the local school and then into service with the Squire, first as a kitchen maid and later as lady's maid. She had known Dan Archer all her life and they were married when she was just twenty and he twenty-four.

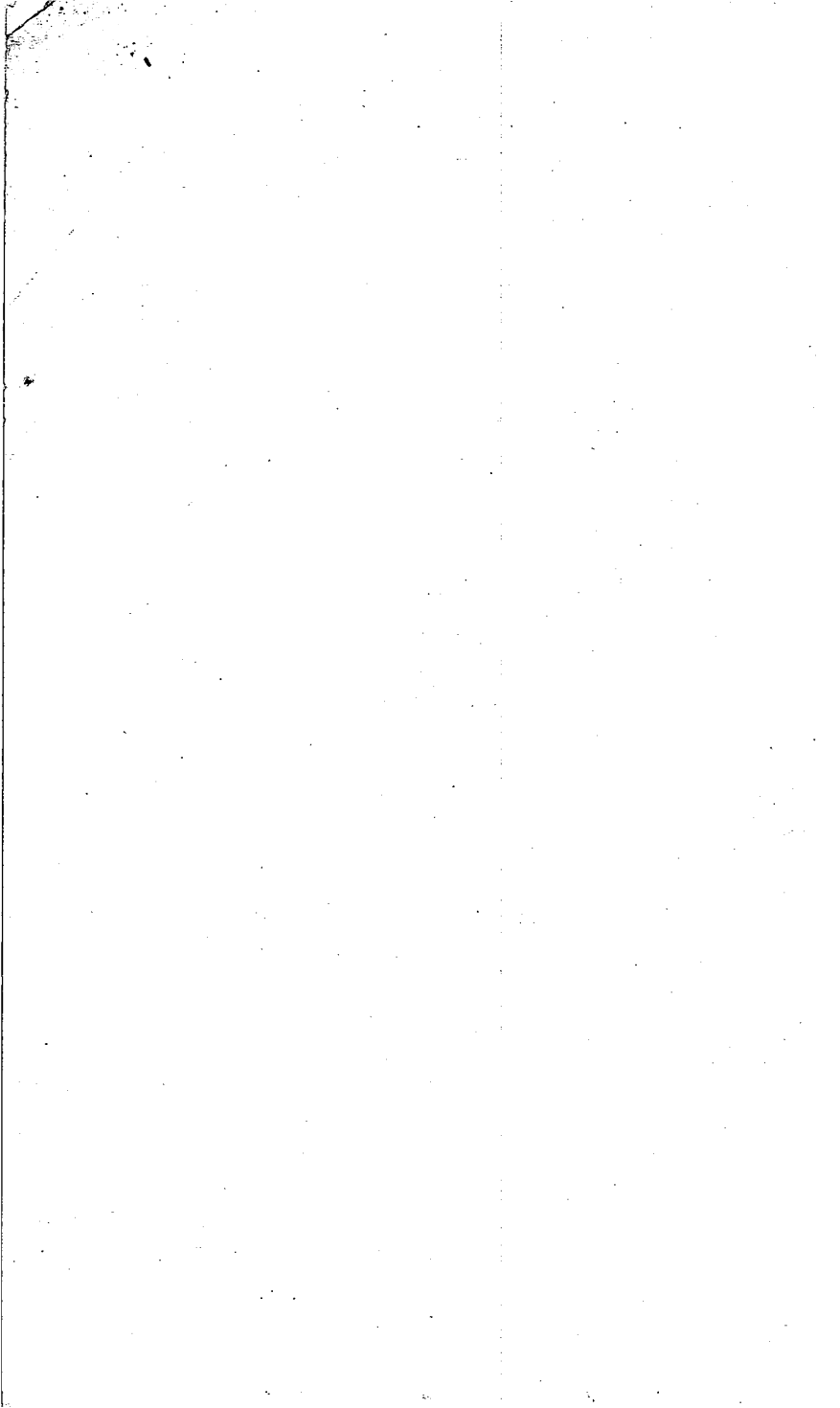
Dan Archer had taken over his father's farm, Brookfield, three years earlier, and that was to be their home for around fifty years. Recently they went into semi-retirement and they now live in nearby Glebe Cottage, which was left to Mrs Archer by the Squire's wife for whom she once worked.

Today there are four generations of Archers in Ambridge. And, as she has seen the family grow, so has Mrs Archer watched the growth and development of the village. Like so many of her generation, brought up in an era before cameras and tape-recorders were

readily available to ordinary people, she recorded the passing events in a series of scrapbooks. In those books she recorded her feelings and thoughts about what was going on around her. In words and pictures she has captured life as it was happening.

Now, to help us present that slice of life in the country we mentioned earlier, Mrs Archer has loaned us her scrapbooks. From them we have extracted just some of the events of the past twenty-one years. We have filled in one or two gaps – when modesty didn't allow her to record her own part in certain events, when fair play demands another viewpoint, and on the occasion she was overcome with grief at the tragic death of her daughter-in-law. But essentially, this is Doris Archer's story of Ambridge.

Harman Hapgood
Editor, Borchester Echo



1951

1 January

It was grand having all the family under the one roof for our New Year's Eve celebrations. We didn't stay up too late, though, because our Christine had to get off to work by five-thirty this morning. And Jack's Peggy was none too bright what with being pregnant for the third time and the new baby only a few weeks away. But it was a lovely party and they all seemed to have a nice time and I don't think anyone minded when Dad got a bit soppy when it came to wishing everybody a Happy New Year.

I was glad Philip had brought young Grace Fairbrother. She fits in very well and you'd hardly guess she was from the town. Her dad was away on business so she'd have been on her own if Philip hadn't asked her to Brookfield. They've been seeing a lot of each other lately and I think Philip's very fond of her.

It would be nice if he could get the job he's after with the Agricultural Advisory Service, though the state he left for the interview in this morning wouldn't help much. It was our Jack's fault really. He had borrowed Dad's car to take Peggy home and promised to have it back at Brookfield by nine o'clock and it was just like him to forget. Poor Philip was fair flummoxed when he dashed off to fetch it himself.

Still he is a bright lad and this is New Year's Day so that should be lucky for him. I hope so. I'd like to see him settle into a job after working so hard to get qualifications at the Farming Institute.

Dad would like him to join him working at Brookfield, but I'm not sure that's a good idea. I heard them arguing the other day about some newfangled ideas

Philip picked up from the folks that teach at the Institute. Anyway, Philip says he won't work for the £5 a week that's all Dad could offer him, so that seems to be that. But I hope Philip gets something soon. At twenty-two he really should be earning a living and thinking about getting wed and having his own family.

Our Jack's a bit of a worry, too, at the moment. That business about forgetting to bring the car back is just typical of him. He doesn't seem able to get on with the work at the smallholding and Peggy's already got her hands full with the two girls. Perhaps he'll pull himself together when the new baby arrives.

At least Christine is happy enough. She doesn't mind getting off at half-five in the morning to go round the farms testing the milk. It was very funny when Philip suggested she persuaded somebody to nationalise the cows into being milked at a more human hour!

6 March 1951

Dan finally tackled old Simon about being so miserable of late. It seems it was all our fault in the first place for not explaining about Bill Slater. Bill is our Peg's cousin and he came up from London to see Peg when young Anthony was born. He suffers from asthma and found the fresh air helped him so much that he decided to stay and look for a job. Well, it was just when Phil left Brookfield to work for Grace's father and Bill was a big help in mending the new tractor, so Dan took him on.

Poor old Simon thought that was the end for him especially as he found the tractor too newfangled for him as well. We should have realised how awkward it was for Simon but it wasn't until he muttered about being too old a dog to learn new tricks that Dan cottoned on to how insecure he was feeling. Anyway he's all right now and everything seems to have turned out for the best.



1 February 1951

Getting up at 5.30 every morning isn't everyone's idea of a good job but it seems to suit our Christine. She loves working for the Milk Testing people and I've never heard her complain about the long hours. It's a pity Jack doesn't take a leaf out of her book. If he put the same effort into his smallholding he really could make a success of it.

3 July 1951

I love this picture of Lilian. She's only four and absolutely gorgeous. She never leaves her doll anywhere for even a second.



Our Phil, of all people, says Bill's a bit too cocky – but he's a nice young lad and Peg enjoys having someone from her family around just now. It's funny to hear them talking about London and all those places that are just names to the rest of us.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to live in a big place like London, then I think of all the smoke and noise and I'm glad to be here in Ambridge. It's beautiful here when you stop taking it for granted. How many folk can step out from their back door and wander up Lakey Hill for a marvellous view? How many folk can take a walk in the clean, fresh air and be sure of a cheery greeting from everybody they meet? No, I'm glad to live in the country. Ambridge will do me fine. And I know it's the same for Dan. He's more of an old stick-in-the-mud even than me! I think he's secretly glad to have Bill Slater working for him rather than Phil. Phil had too many highfaluting ideas about new methods for Dan's liking. With Bill being new to farming, Dan can mould him into somebody who'll do things the way he likes them done. At our time of life it's maybe better that way.

23 November 1951

Borchester Dairies have got Dan in a fair tizz about the fat content of our milk. They've threatened to send it back to us because it's got less than three per cent or something of fat in it. Walter Gabriel suggested we just send it to another dairy but Dan says no dairy will take it if it's less than that three per cent.

Walter made us laugh about it when he asked what we're supposed to do about it: mention it to the cows, he said! Then he got all uppity about the men who make us fill up so many forms. 'Just go along to one of those fellers that sit all day behind a desk,' he told Dan. 'Get him to help you fill in a batch of cow forms and do

it all tidy like. Before you know where you are the cows'll be giving four per cent fat content let alone three!'

At least Walter's banter took Dan's mind off the trouble for a little while. But he really is worried, mainly because he doesn't know what's causing the bother. Some of the lads say it could be something to do with feeding the cows on sugar-beet tops, but I know Dan doesn't think it's as easy as that.

We'll have to change the diet for a start, but if that doesn't sort it out it means the poor cows are doing their best but that best isn't good enough. Then I suppose Dan'll have to sort them out. Weed out the worst offenders and replace them. It could cost an awful lot of money but it's inevitable in the long run. Christine's boss at the testing station says the system of paying farmers for quantity of milk is bound to be changed to take quality into account. Oh gosh! No wonder Dan's in a panic about it all!

3 December 1951

Mr Fairbrother's causing an awful lot of fuss and bother in the village just because his plan to mine the ironstone on the Squire's land has been stopped. I mean, fancy turning down an invitation to the induction of the new Vicar just because you can't have your own way. It had nothing to do with the poor Vicar that he can't go digging that iron stuff up. Perhaps it would have been better if it hadn't been the Squire who sent out the invitations, after all it was him that did his best to stop the village from being ruined by mines everywhere. Young Grace was very upset about it all and she told me her father actually tore up the card when it arrived. She tried to reason with him that it wasn't the Vicar's fault but all he could see was that Mr Lawson-Hope's name was on it and that was enough for him. He sees

the Squire as the victor in a dirty fight and he obviously isn't prepared to accept anything that looks like a gesture. In fact I've got a feeling he isn't really finished fighting himself yet and I overheard Grace tell our Phil something about getting a compulsory purchase order. But surely Mr Fairbrother can't just go along and say, 'I want that land because it's got ironstone in it,' and then take it? That would be awful for the Squire. No wonder he was so much against the idea right from the start. And it's not surprising that Mr Fairbrother thinks he's been struck off the Ambridge social register if he wants to go around doing things like that. But it's the Vicar I really feel sorry for in all this. I wonder what on earth he will think of Ambridge folk if he knows his own induction service is being boycotted. He's such a nice man, too.

Maybe Grace will be able to make her father see sense. It's all very well for him, he doesn't need to spend much time around here what with being away so much on business. But Grace has to face the village folk every day and it's not much fun for her at the moment. She's terribly upset and says the row has changed her father completely and made him very hard. Still with Christmas coming up it might help to thaw the freeze. If Grace can persuade him to come to the carol service that will help and maybe between us we can get it all patched up. I hope so.

1952

12 January

Children! Sometimes I wish I didn't have any. Honestly they're such a worry. Our Christine's been going through a terrible time of it these past days all because of her boyfriend, and Phil's in bad odour with his boss because of girlfriend trouble. There wasn't any hanky-panky like that when Dan and I were courting. We

were always straight with each other and if we had to work or anything then we just did it and knew the other would understand. Why, I remember we even had to change our wedding plans so that I could help out with a big party at the Squire's house. We were going to get married at Christmas but Mrs Lawson-Hope had a big do on so we got wed earlier and then Dan let me go back to help her. Still things do change, I know that . . . but I do wish they wouldn't change so fast. I mean, our Phil could lose his job just because young Jane Maxwell was feeling bitchy. What happened was his boss, Mr Fairbrother, rang the office just as Phil had left to come back to Brookfield when Dan had a bit of an accident. It's true he had just dropped everything and rushed off but that was understandable and Mr Fairbrother wouldn't have minded. Young Jane, however, simply told him that Phil had gone off. She said she didn't think to explain but I reckon it's because she's still jealous of Grace Fairbrother and had it in her mind that to make Phil out to be unreliable would widen the breach between them. That's not very nice and saying all's fair in love and war doesn't excuse it. I only hope Phil sees through it. Perhaps I should tell him?

The business with Chris and Dick Raymond, the local newspaper reporter,¹ was a lot more worrying and disturbing. It all started when we found a letter in a book from the library. It said that Dick was really married and had in fact deserted his wife and two kids, leaving them penniless. Dan said we had to tell Chris about it and she was heartbroken, especially when she spoke to Dick and he tried to shrug it all off. It looked very suspicious and Dan got quite bitter and for the first time in his life interfered with the children's affairs. But

¹Dick Raymond used to be a reporter on the *Borchester Echo* and I would like to reassert Mrs Archer's comment that there was absolutely no foundation in the allegation that he was ever married or had any children—*Ed.*

I'm glad he did for he was able to talk man-to-man with Dick and it soon became clear that it was somebody playing a vicious, nasty trick. If only Dick and Chris had been able to talk straight with each other in the first place all the nastiness need never have happened. But like a pair of young fools they hedged and fenced with each other until neither really knew what was true and what wasn't. Gosh, I could shake them.

11 August 1952

Dan was ever so grateful to our Christine for catching the culprits who've been breaking down the hedges around the farm and letting the animals stray. We always thought it was the new folk in the caravans on the waste ground belonging to Joe Blower, but we couldn't prove anything. Not until our Chris actually found one of the caravanners stuck right in the middle of a hedge. The conversation she had with him was quite funny really. From what I can make out it went something like a pantomime:

CHRIS: What on earth! What do you think you're doing?

MAN: My sweet rustic Diana, a few seconds of simple deduction should enable you to work out the precise situation . . . and a very uncomfortable one it is too. I'm stuck.

CHRIS: Stuck?

MAN: S - T - U - C - K. Stuck. Approach a little nearer and you will see that my clothes and my hair are held by innumerable thorns: a diabolical invention of Mother Nature in one of her Spanish Inquisition moods.

CHRIS: You mean you were trying to get through the hedge and got halfway and found you were stuck?

MAN: I find it impossible to improve upon that as a piece of accurate and wholly factual reporting. Go to

the top of the class, dear. And now . . . if you'd be so kind. A little assistance from those gentle hands of yours and I'll be a free man again.

CHRIS: Oh no. Oh no, my friend.

MAN: I beg your pardon? Are you refusing to help me? Don't you realise I'm in agony?

CHRIS: Good.

MAN: Diana, this sadistic attitude ill-becomes you. No rustic goddess can afford to let her public down like this.

CHRIS: Look you've started to come through this hedge from the field side. If I help you through to the road then it'll leave a hole in the hedge and all our sheep will get out. If I leave you stuck you'll keep the hole blocked up with your body and then they won't get out. We'd rather have it that way. Good morning!

The silly man panicked because he thought Chris really was going to leave him but of course she couldn't. She did help him out and gave him a piece of her mind. I can just imagine how he must have felt what with the seat hanging out of his trousers and our Chris laying into him.

It turned out he had never lived in the country before and just couldn't be bothered walking the extra quarter of a mile to the gate. He said he didn't mean to cause any damage and didn't think about the animals. Typical of a town-dweller! I mean, we don't mind anyone coming onto our land to enjoy a bit of the countryside just as long as they treat the property with respect and don't leave gates open. After all, we wouldn't throw our weight about in their gardens in the town!

Anyway it all worked out well in the end. Once Dan knew who was causing the damage he was able to speak to them and they apologised and I don't think they'll be so thoughtless again.

17 November 1952

Jack seems to have made up his mind about trying to get the licence for The Bull, though what he knows about being a publican I don't know. Dan and young Phil were having words about it the other day because Phil doesn't seem to think Jack's up to it. The trouble is Jack needs so many references for the brewery and one of the ones he wants is Phil's boss, Mr Fairbrother. He rather expected Phil to speak to Mr Fairbrother for him but Phil's not keen on doing that. I can't blame Phil too much because Jack is always telling him to mind his own business and keep his nose out of his affairs and he really can't have it both ways. But Phil was a bit too sharp when he said Mr Fairbrother didn't know Jack well enough to give him a reference and if he did he certainly wouldn't back him! He said he would feel a right ass if Mr Fairbrother acted on his request and then Jack made a muck of the job by serving drinks out of hours or getting himself tiddly or something like that. I'm sure Jack wouldn't do anything as stupid as that though. It's funny, I wasn't the slightest bit keen on Jack going to The Bull but ever since I heard Ben White and his cronies were against our Jack's application I've been doing everything in my power to see that he does get in. Well, the very idea of it. There were Archers in Ambridge, and Forrests for that matter, long before Ben White and his family ever came here and spoilt the place. Anyway it's one way of getting Peggy and the three kids out of that terrible place at Blossom Hill. She's been very unhappy there since they got back from Cornwall a month or so ago. It's very out of the way, inconvenient and overcrowded. There's such a lot of extra work there for her . . . all that rigmarole of lighting the copper and fetching in the old zinc bath out of the shed whenever they want a good bath. There's nowhere for her to do the washing when the weather's bad

because she can only drape it all around the living-room to dry if it's raining. Why, I think Peggy would go to The Bull just for the bath they would have there! Maybe that's not such a bad reason at that!

1953

30 January

It would be awful if we were to have lots of new council houses in Ambridge. It's not that we're snobs or anything like that, it's just that they don't seem to build council houses with any style and they wouldn't fit into the village very well. Besides it's all very well to build houses and bring folks out here to live, but where would they work? There aren't many jobs around here that aren't in farming and Dan's quite sure that he wouldn't employ any townsmen to milk his cows or look after the sheep. They wouldn't be able to stick getting up at the crack of dawn and working solidly throughout the day whatever the weather was like. Dan says they'd want to scamper indoors at the slightest sign of rain and you can't explain to the cows they aren't being milked because it's too wet! So if they can't work on the farms it'd mean they'd have to go back into the towns like Borchester or Felpersham to find work and that really would be daft bringing them all the way out here to live just to send them back every day to work. Mind you, I don't suppose Jack and Peg would mind having them around of an evening. They reckon it would bring a lot more business to them at The Bull. They're obviously right but that does seem an awfully high price to pay for spoiling the whole village. And then there's the loss of good, fertile land. They would evidently have to take over some farm land . . . about 250 acres I've heard mentioned. Nobody here would take kindly to that sort of thing, especially from Hollerton Town Council. It was Elsie Catcher, the local teacher, that

brought the whole thing out into the open. She's been campaigning for a new school for Ambridge for years. The present one is positively antediluvian and the heating arrangements are practically Stone Age.

Elsie is always saying the wiring must have been done by some punch-drunk amateur, while the sanitary arrangements leave a lot to be desired. Anyway, it was on one of her visits to the county offices that she heard about this estate because it would have meant she had more chance of getting a new school if there were more children in the district.

I don't think it's right that they can plan an overspill scheme like this without our parish council knowing anything about it, but Dan says they don't have to notify the parish council. Our safeguard is through the rural district council and that's where we have got to exert any pressure. All I hope is that it works.¹

Editor's Comment

The previous two extracts from Mrs Archer's diary are somewhat critical of townspeople. But they were chosen deliberately to highlight some of the areas of genuine conflict that exist between town and country. We believe that these conflicts stem, not from any feeling of antagonism, but from basic ignorance of each other's way of life.

For the townsman, the wide open fields are simply wide open fields through which he can wander and breathe in some good, clean, fresh air. The hedges simply add interest and break up the contours. And the animals are something to point out to the kids or to avoid if they look anything less than abjectly docile. Farmhouses are thought of simply as places where some lucky people can live away from all the traffic and the

¹Hollerton Town Council eventually abandoned the overspill scheme and the council houses were therefore never built in Ambridge—Ed.

farmers are lucky not having to work shifts in a noisy, dirty factory. That is the townsman's fantasy.

For the countryman, the wide open fields mean endless hours behind the plough, the threshing machine or the harvester. The hedges are his boundaries and his means of keeping his animals from straying. The animals have to be carefully looked after – properly fed, watered and groomed or milked. The farmhouse is just part of *his* factory and although he doesn't work shifts, he does work long, long hours without any overtime payment or time off in lieu! That is the countryman's reality.

With more and more people wanting to get away from the grime and bustle of the big towns, it is vitally important that we achieve a better degree of understanding. Perhaps this insight into a countrywoman's way of life might be of some small help.

5 August 1953

I've got a very strong feeling that our Jack is none too happy running The Bull again. The spell looking after Walter Gabriel's farm while Walter was poorly seems to have unsettled him. He's been right restless these past few years and can't seem to settle down to anything for any length of time. At the moment I'm pretty sure he's hankering to get back to the land and I can understand that. I'm sure Dan couldn't do anything else but farm. Take him away from Ambridge and he's like a fish out of water. But while Jack's been at Walter's place, Peggy's got things going a treat at The Bull. She wants to get rid of the old spit and sawdust atmosphere and she's smartened the place up no end. I know it doesn't suit all the older regulars, particularly old Simon. He thinks it's all too posh and knowing him he's not bashful in saying so. It upset Peggy a bit, especially when he said that some of the regulars were walking all



11 April 1953

Our Christine looks well on the back of Flash. When this photo was taken she was having a breather with Grace and her parents, Mr and Mrs Fairbrother. The Fairbrothers have been very good to the girls since they went into partnership in the riding school.



20 June 1953

Dan caught Walter Gabriel in the act when he took this picture with his new camera. Crafty old Walter was scrounging a fill of baccy from Simon Cooper when Dan clicked the shutter.

20 June 1953

Anyone could have seen Grace Fairbrother and our Phil were in love for ages. But they've been right daft about it and it's not before time they've decided to get married.



31 March 1954

This picture was taken by the *Borchester Echo* when they did a bit of a feature on life in the country. They were lucky to get it because unfortunately it isn't often that Dan and I have the pleasure of sitting down with both Philip and Christine.



the way to The Cat and Fiddle. I suppose one or two of them are doing that but then Peggy's attracting a lot more of the passing trade than The Bull used to get. She says it's the new customers she's got to think about. They'll be office workers - people with clean jobs who'll want to sit down for a comfortable drink. They'll want comfy chairs round little tables and I must say that sounds much better to me than the hard old benches that have always been there before. I hope Jack will back Peggy up so that they can both make a real go of the place. I mean the pub really is important in a small place like Ambridge. It's a sort of community centre really and a lot of village business gets done there. People don't just go in there to drink like they seem to in the big city bars according to Dan, although I've never been in one myself. At first I wasn't very happy about the children being brought up in a pub, but really it's all working out very well and I don't think they'll be influenced at all. In fact if Jack decides he does want to get back to farming and all the insecurity he had before, the youngsters will probably be worse off than ever. I hope he thinks about them before he decides to make any move.

25 November 1953

According to our Phil, the Squire is having to sell off Coombe Farm and it looks as if Mr Fairbrother wants to buy it to expand his holdings in Ambridge. It must be very discouraging for the Squire to see his estate dwindling after working so hard on it for so many years. But with taxation and other expenses as high as they are the poor man must be very hard-pressed. I suppose there's also the thought in his mind that Mr Fairbrother is out to don his mantle but Phil says he's certain Mr Fairbrother doesn't aspire to the squirearchy. He's not particularly interested in Coombe Farm but rather in

any farm, Phil says. He just wants to build up a really first-class herd of Herefords and although that's a very expensive business, he's quite determined. I think he'd have to be to go after Coombe Farm because it's terribly inconvenient being so far out of the village and all. Then there's that long drive from off the road. That would be quite an item of upkeep in itself. Why, it's about three-quarters of a mile long. Still it's the 140 acres of land he'll be interested in, though even the land'll need a lot doing to it by now. Old Amos Atkins has been too old these past few years to do much. Another man might have made a better job of it but not Amos, he's been more of a dealer than a farmer and the farm's gone back quite a bit in thirty years. Mr Fairbrother would have to spend an awful lot of money to get it back to rights. And even though he is the Squire's neighbour he'll not buy it cheaply. I know the Squire and he'll stick out for a fair price. Well, he has to, I suppose. After all he badly needs the money to spend on the rest of the estate and then he'll have to find something else for Amos. He's an independent, cantankerous old chap and I know the Squire's been trying to persuade him Coombe Farm's been too big for him these past few years. If he's got him seeing things his way, the Squire must have some alternative accommodation and probably a few acres of land to offer him. He's got several cottages I know but I don't think any of them are vacant at the moment. He'll probably have to wait until one comes up.

I wonder about that business about Mr Fairbrother hoping to be Squire . . . maybe he's keener on that than he lets on. And if I was in the Squire's shoes I think I'd resent a newcomer – and an industrialist at that – coming along and biting off chunks of the estate that I can't afford to keep and seeming to cast an eye on my very position in the community. We'll see . . .

1954

6 January

Young Ann Trentham reckons she knows that man John Tregorran who lives in the caravan on Heywood Berrow. He is quite a mysterious figure but most folks seem to have taken to him, especially after he helped old Walter when his damaged hand was healing. Ann was telling me she thought she recognised him the first time she met him but now that she has seen him a second time she is pretty sure she knows him from somewhere. She almost gave herself away it seems by sitting there staring at him. She thinks it's the beard that is stopping her from actually placing him. It's very exasperating when you see someone you are sure you know and you can't think how or where or when; our Chris suggested that somebody had only seen him on television, but Ann never looks at television. Like me she thinks life is too short to spend every evening in semi-darkness gazing at a lit-up box. Ann says she knows his face, his build, his walk, the mannerisms, but she just can't fit them against a background. If her memory would fit him into some sort of environment she would remember when and where. I don't expect she will get a moment's peace until she has remembered him. When some of the villagers tackled him early on about his beard he said something about the police of several counties having him listed as a wanted character and only having photos of him clean-shaven. We thought he was joking, but I wonder if he was? He certainly doesn't seem to be short of money, although I don't suppose it ever occurred to anybody that it might not be his own he is using; not that he seems dishonest, but you just can't tell nowadays. Old Walter says he had a session trying to prise out more about him. He thought he was running away from something, perhaps his wife, but Mr Tregorran assured him that he had never ruined

any woman's life by marrying her; anyway, he said young ladies didn't go much for a wandering vagabond. Mind you, he's wrong there, he obviously doesn't know much about women because he's just the sort of romantic chap that they do go for in a big way. Somebody else thought he was a gipsy because he talked about visions of dancing a wild czardas with some primitive beauty neath the light of a million stars, while a swarthy gipsy Paganini filled the air with his wildly exhilarating music. Gosh! see what I mean about him bringing out the romantic in a woman, anybody would think I was a teenager again. I read somewhere that gipsy girls rub hedgehog oil into their hair to make it strong and glossy, but I can't imagine that doing anything for a man unless he happens to have a fancy for romance flavoured with rancid hedgehog oil. Old Walter said he had never seen a bald gipsy, but Mr Tregorran said he would rather go bald; I wonder how long he has been on the road - a bit too long I would think, because he seems to have grown weary of it. It's a life you have to be born to and grow up with, you can't just assume it, you can't put it on like a new pair of shoes and imagine it's going to fit you, because it might not. It's all very well to say, 'I must keep free, free as the robin in the hedge,' but it's different when it's cold and wet and miserable; no, I think Mr Tregorran seems ready to settle down again. You never know, he may decide to stay in Ambridge, and he's the sort of eccentric character who would fit in well here.

30 April 1954

There's a right old barney going on between Ben White and young Carol Grey over some of her plans for re-organising our old smallholding. Sometimes I wish Ben would mind his own business. Trouble is he sees himself

as a guardian of the common rights in Ambridge and the thought of anyone doing anything not quite right makes him see red. Since she took over the smallholding from Dan, Miss Grey's worked very, very hard. Simon was down there the other day and says it makes you tired just to watch her. She starts at seven every morning and does everything herself. She even borrowed a pick and shovel from Simon to move the gatepost herself. In fact, that's when she fell foul of Ben White. He dropped in on his bread round to try and get her order for bread and cakes and things when he found her moving the gatepost. She was also cutting back the verge a bit to put a hard surface down across the entrance. Being on the parish council, Ben took it on himself to try and stop her by saying the verge was common land and that any encroachment by her would be against the law. He might well have got away with it with anybody else but young Miss Grey is a very independent lass and she told him exactly where to get off. When he came out with all that blether about being a guardian of the common rights she just told him to go and guard them elsewhere! She knew her rights only too well and especially having just sorted out all the title-deeds and things she knew her property stretched to within a yard of the road and did include the verge. If he'd been right about it being common land I'd have backed him because you can't have everyone who feels like it just cutting a bit out of the village green – and especially not strangers, like Miss Grey still is. But it's just like Ben to get his facts wrong or worse still to shout his mouth off without checking the facts. It serves him right that he didn't get the order for bread. Miss Grey bakes her own! She sounds quite a woman. I do hope everything works out for her. She's the sort who deserves to be successful and she's got a good head on her shoulders. She caused a bit of an upset between our Jack and Peggy, though it wasn't her fault I don't

think. There isn't a phone in there yet and Jack said she could use the one at The Bull without mentioning it to Peg. Well, she took up his offer and evidently spends hours on the phone – mostly long-distance. Peg got fed up because she wanted to make several calls herself and couldn't. Then when she realised Jack hadn't come to any definite arrangement about paying for the calls she got really angry. You can't blame her. Our Jack is hopelessly easygoing sometimes.

30 June 1954

The Squire's decision to sell up the estate completely came as something of a shock to Dan and me this morning. Of course, everybody knows he's been hard-pressed these past few years and he's already hived off bits of the estate. But it's still a bombshell to learn that even our farm will be up for sale. Why, Dan's family have been at Brookfield for years and years and years. The Squire and a man called Smedley turned up this morning so that Mr Smedley could assess the value of the farm ready for selling. Poor Dan was shaken badly and although I wouldn't let on to him I had to sit down and have a jolly good cry when I heard the news. I mean it would be awful to have to leave Brookfield. It's been the only home we've known since we were married over thirty years ago. Where could we go? The Squire's always said if he sold out he'd give us tenant farmers first option on our own farms. He's a good man and he's kept his word by offering to let us buy the farm. He even said we didn't have to accept his valuer's assessment of the price but could get an independent valuation if we wanted. He's not out to squeeze anybody out and as sitting tenants we'd get special consideration. Dan would love to buy, of course, but it depends how much money was involved and whether or not we'd be able to raise it. As Dan says, it's all very

well having first option but finding the money's a different thing. The Squire wants an early answer but Dan can't do anything until we've got some idea of the price. We're not the only ones, of course. There's Walter and the others and I'll bet some of them won't be able to buy. At least Dan's got some money and he is quite happy to go and see the bank about getting some kind of loan from them. I can't imagine Walter Gabriel being too keen on going to see a bank manager and getting all tangled up in forms and papers and things. It'll have him in a real tizz. Not that our Dan's in any better state just now!

6 July 1954

Well, thank goodness all the worry and anxiety is over. Brookfield is definitely going to be ours after all. The Squire came over to talk about the offer Dan had made – it was £500 less than the Squire's valuer had suggested – and after a bit of haggling they split the difference and agreed on the price there and then. It was funny really because when the Squire arrived he looked very miserable and both Dan and I were convinced that he'd come to throw the offer out of the window! But it turned out to be his gout coming on. He said he hadn't had an attack for years but he knew all the symptoms only too well. It's a shame really because gout's like bellyache or toothache . . . one of those complaints you laugh about until you've got it yourself and then it isn't so funny. He was so irritable, the poor man, because he knew that there was nothing he could do to stop an attack coming on. He knew that he'd wake up in the middle of the night with a toe joint as big as a beetroot – and probably the same colour – and that the next four or five days would be purgatory. Dan suggested he go and see Walter Gabriel. Walter's always talking about some cure his old Granny had for rheu-

maticky complaints like lumbago, gout and all the rest. He gave Mrs Perkins some and it evidently did her the world of good. I'm not sure I fancy trying it myself, mind you. From what I hear of Walter's Granny she'd dish up some sort of evil-smelling brew just like in *Macbeth*: 'Eye of newt and toe of frog,

Wool of bat and tongue of dog,

Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting . . .'

or something like that! Of course, if I actually had gout I might just be prepared to try even that! But Walter's isn't really as fanciful as that. It's a mixture of herbs and things – quinine, aloes, jalap and all that sort of stuff. Walter swears by it.

Anyway, after the Squire accepted Dan's offer they had a celebration drop of Scotch and that seemed to make both of them a mite cheerier!

Dan's not all that bothered about the mortgage business either. The bank has been very helpful and are quite happy with Brookfield as security against the loan. If we have a good year we'll pay off as much as we can but then if we have a bad year we only have to pay the interest and simply extend the terms of the loan. But knowing Dan he'll want to get it all paid off as as possible. I expect we'll have to scrimp and save a bit but it'll be worth it to actually own Brookfield!

10 September 1954

I was beginning to think that Philip would never get round to proposing to young Grace Fairbrother. They've been going out together for donkey's years, but they've had so many quarrels I don't think the question of marriage ever had much chance of discussion.

Anyway, Philip told me last night that he had proposed and Grace has accepted. He was so excited and he's running around making plans and arrangements already, although the wedding isn't until next year.

Mr Fairbrother seems to be almost as pleased as Philip and I know he's offered to rent them Coombe Farm. He is only asking for £1 a week rent but they'll have to pay for all the alterations and redecoration themselves. Philip doesn't mind that and he's jumped at the offer. He's not slow off the mark at snapping up a bargain.

It's funny to think of him being married and going off to have a family of his own. I know he's twenty-six but I still can't help thinking of him as just a slip of a boy. It seems like yesterday that he left the village school to go to grammar school and I can remember all the trouble we had trying to get him to wear the school cap. He hated it and it kept getting lost. Kept getting thrown over the nearest hedge more likely. Even when he was a youngster our Philip had a stubborn streak . . . just like his older brother.

Actually Jack is a bit of a worry himself these days. Since he got caught serving drinks after time at The Bull last year he's been very unsettled. The brewery insisting that the licence be transferred to Peggy was a very good thing for them both but it obviously hurt Jack's pride.

In the past few weeks he seems to have got more and more depressed and I'm scared he's beginning to get a bit mentally unbalanced. I know that's a terrible thing to say about your own son but it's what I honestly feel. I know Peggy's worried too and she's trying to persuade him to see Dr McLaren. But that's where Jack's stubborn streak comes in. He's convinced he's all right and just doesn't want to listen to Peggy. I hope he doesn't find out the hard way that she's right.

6 December 1954

Dan's finally decided that we will go up to London next Monday for the Smithfield Show. We've got a nice

hotel booked and while he's doing business at the show I'll be able to slip off and so some Christmas shopping. It'll be lovely to see all the shops specially decorated and with all those fancy lights right across the middle of the streets. Philip suggested we drive up in the car but luckily Dan wasn't very keen on that idea so we're going by train. It'll be much more restful for both of us. As Dan said, he can't stand the traffic in London – cars coming at you from all directions: arrows pointing here, arrows pointing there: keep left for this: go right for that: one-way streets. I'm not surprised he can't stand it. Being with him in the car makes me nervous at the best of times, in London I'd probably die of fright. It's not that he's a bad driver or anything. He manages beautifully along the country lanes and he's all right in towns like Borchester and Felpersham – but Hyde Park Corner and Marble Arch are different. Christine said talking like that made us sound a real pair of country bumpkins. Funny . . . Philip said the same thing earlier about putting an electric light out in the backyard. When he and Christine came home in the dark, Christine fell over a bucket Dan had left outside. Luckily she didn't hurt herself very much but it's obvious the storm lantern in the back kitchen isn't giving enough light for the outside yard. Phil suggested we get an electric light fixed up with a two-way switch – one inside and one outside – so that you could switch it on while you're out there and then be able to switch it off when you get inside. I thought it was a good idea but Dan was none too keen. He said if we did, everyone would forget to switch it off and it would cost a fortune in electricity. His solution was to bang a nail into the wall and hang a storm lantern outside. Anyway I'm sure he can't understand why if we've managed dark nights for so many years this should become a problem. That's why Philip said that about us being country bumpkins. Well, maybe we are but I'd much rather

be that than have to live all the time in a town. Big places are all very well for visiting occasionally but I wouldn't want it all the time. Just think at this time of the year when we get snow, the countryside looks wonderful . . . all clean and fresh and white. In the towns the snow soon turns to horrible dirty slush and everyone gets fed up and miserable with wet feet all the time. No, I'll stay a country bumpkin if being a town-dweller is the only alternative.

1955

7 January

Since our Jack had that spell in the mental hospital he's been a changed character. Instead of being all miserable and irritable he's much happier in himself and Tom was saying he's even able to joke about being in there. Tom met him walking Turpin in the woods and when he said he was looking much better since coming home, Jack saw he was a bit embarrassed because Tom had nearly said coming home from the loony bin! He expected Jack to take it badly but all he'd done was laugh and it was Tom who'd been upset. Jack explained that he's not the slightest bit embarrassed about it and in fact he's only too pleased to be able to talk about the time he was in. He knew he was in a very shaky state beforehand and if he'd gone on much longer he would probably have done himself in. He obviously was worried about going in and he felt Dan and I and the family would be ashamed because of him. Of course we weren't. When someone you love so much as we do Jack is in trouble, you only feel terribly sorry and anxious to help. I will admit I did feel a bit funny when it was first suggested but it only lasted a few seconds until I realised it was for his own good. After all, they weren't going to lock him up, just take him in to cure him. It's just like going into an

ordinary hospital with a pain in your tummy. A specialist takes a look, prods around a bit, then says you've got appendicitis. They take you into the operating room, out comes the appendix and you're up and about again in no time. It's exactly the same in the mental hospital. They put their finger on the trouble, diagnose it and then prescribe treatment. You undergo the treatment and you're as right as rain in no time. Just the same! Thank God, that's how Jack sees it too. If he didn't, life for poor Peggy and the kids would be hell. As it is they all seem ever so much happier.

12 April 1955

Easter Tuesday and all the pandemonium about the wedding is over and Phil and Grace are safely off on their honeymoon. I thought they were taking a risk getting married on Easter Monday because it usually rains on Bank Holidays but it didn't yesterday, thank goodness. It really was a lovely wedding. Dan and the two boys in their morning suits looked smashing and I felt very proud of them. And Grace . . . she looked absolutely wonderful. Very, very, beautiful. I'm so pleased she and Phil *finally* made it. I always expected them to but somehow it seemed it would never happen. They fell out so often and had so many other partners for ages that I thought Phil had left it too late. And talking about late, the bride really was yesterday! Poor Phil, he stood there in the church with panic on his face and sweat pouring down his forehead. The organist had to play the Organ Voluntary twice while we were waiting. But it wasn't Grace's fault. She was all ready in time and then the starter or something on the limousine jammed just as they were about to leave for the church. Some of the neighbours were still around luckily and they were able to rock it free. Anyway it was a lovely service and I don't mind admitting that I cried

most of the way through it. I'm not too sure about the send-off after the reception though. Reggie Trentham and all that lot with their hunting horns made an awful din and all of them chasing after them in the car could have been dangerous. Evidently Phil lost them when he drove straight across a ploughed field. Paul and Christine tried to follow them but got stuck and it jolly well serves them right! But it was bribing old Billy that really did the trick. He was on the road with his horse and cart when Phil passed him. He stopped and gave Billy ten bob to block the road with his cart and nobody could get past! That was very crafty and I'm sure Phil will show as much sense in his new life with Grace.

Editor's Comment

For Thursday, 22 September 1955, Mrs Archer's diary has only the briefest entry: 'Grace died.'

Grace was Mrs Archer's daughter-in-law, the young wife of Philip Archer. She died in a fire tragedy that stunned not only her family but everyone in the Ambridge district.

Mrs Archer was grief-stricken and completely unable to commit her thoughts and feelings at that terrible time to paper. This part of the story is, therefore, pieced together from newspaper reports and the recollections of some of the people involved.

Mrs Grace Archer died in her husband's arms in the ambulance rushing her to hospital after a blaze at her riding stables.

The stables were part of Grey Gables, which had been converted into a country club. Grace and Philip were dining at the club with some friends. For them it was a celebration because they had just decided to start a family. Then Grace missed one of her earrings which she thought might have fallen off in the car and she went outside to look for it.

While she was rummaging in the car she saw flames in the loft above the nearby horseboxes. She shouted for the others and then rushed into the stables to get the horses out. Between them they managed to get them all free.

Mr John Tregorran, one of the club guests, takes up the story: 'We had all the horses out but the flames and smoke must have terrified them and one – a mare called Midnight – became frenzied and dashed into the blazing building again. Before anyone could stop her, Grace bravely plunged into the flames after Midnight. Just then part of the roof collapsed and she was trapped under a falling beam.

'Her husband, Phil, was only seconds behind her and he guided us to her through the smoke by shouting. Reggie Trentham and I managed to hold the beam up while Phil dragged her clear.

'Grace looked pretty poorly but she regained consciousness as they put her into the ambulance and we thought she was going to be all right.'

The ambulance journey to the hospital is one Philip Archer will never forget. 'Grace just lay there saying my name. I tried to comfort her and told her there was nothing to worry about. She just looked up at me and said: "Phil . . . I love you, Phil." Then she died.'

Everyone was badly hit by the tragedy and it was difficult for many to remember that life must go on. Mr Dan Archer recalls: 'The morning after the fire I was up early sorting out the animals as usual. We had brought the horses to Brookfield and our Christine, who ran the stables with Grace, was there.

'I asked her to make some breakfast and she turned on me something awful. "At a time like this . . . you talk about bacon. Haven't you got any feelings?" she almost screamed at me.

'It was very upsetting, of course, and I remember saying her attitude wasn't very helpful. I had the same

feelings as everybody else. Grace's death was heart-breaking and dreadful and it took all my strength to believe myself that it wasn't the end of the world and that the milking and ploughing and everything else had to go on.'

And in Ambridge, life did go on . . . though for many a long day it was at a much slower tempo than before.

1956

22 February

I never thought I'd live to see the day when I'd want to leave Brookfield and go and live in a town somewhere. But last night Dan and I could see it as the only answer to get away from the heartbreak that this foot-and-mouth disease brings.

I can still hear the guns ringing in my ears as every single one of the cows and sheep and pigs were slaughtered. It doesn't seem real somehow that a whole lifetime's work can be wiped out in less than an hour.

Not only that, but Brookfield doesn't seem like home any more. It's more like a prison. We can't leave and nobody can come here and everywhere there's that awful sickly smell of disinfectant. Poor Constable Bryden has to stand outside our gate just like a jailer. It makes you feel almost criminal – no, more like a leper. And we don't even know how the disease started.

I suppose the vets and men from the ministry know their job but I don't see much sense in all the questions they're asking. All their bright detective work in tracing the cause won't help Dan any. It's too late. And all their prying and poking tends to make everyone feel guilty, especially old Simon, who's responsible for the pigs. They have really been pumping him, even wanting to know every single place and market he's been to in the past fortnight or so. I'm sure it's not his fault – though they're not trying to suggest that either –

because he's been more or less laid up with lumbago these past few weeks.

I don't think they'll ever find out how it started. Whether or not they do, I know one thing . . . life at Brookfield will never seem quite the same again.

Editor's Comment

Foot-and-mouth disease is the farmer's nightmare. In the outbreak at Brookfield, Mr Archer lost his entire stock of forty-eight cattle, forty ewes, thirty lambs, forty-eight young pigs and five sows. For him it was, of course, a personal tragedy which changed his attitude towards farming and he switched away from his dairy herd to concentrate more on poultry. But the other farmers in the area were greatly relieved because the outbreak was contained and traced to infected liver that had been added to the pig swill.

If there had been any spread, every animal within ten miles would have been destroyed and it's a disease that can spread at an alarming rate.

This was never clearer than the outbreak which was discovered at Oswestry in Shropshire in October 1967. At first it was just another case that would soon pass into a statistic. But then it spread to another part of the county and into neighbouring Cheshire. Within days the alarm was raised and it was obvious an epidemic was on the way.

Hour by hour the reports came in from all across the country and thousands upon thousands of animals died in a desperate attempt to stamp out the disease.

For eight long months the experts battled on and eventually contained the disease. But along the way 2,500 farms had been hit; 430,000 animals had been slaughtered and the cost to the country was around £26 million.

These are staggering figures, but even they don't

adequately convey the shattering impact on the countryside and the people who live in it. For them, life virtually stood still.

As Mrs Archer wrote, every stricken farm was immediately isolated and then all the other farms cut themselves off and threw up protective barriers. Hunting, shooting and fishing stopped. Children stayed away from school and all forms of community life – W.I. meetings, whist drives, dances, etc. – came to a halt.

For those who did have to move around, there was an awesome atmosphere in the countryside. At first you couldn't work out what exactly caused it, but after a bit you realised that nothing was moving in the fields, there wasn't an animal in sight. Then occasionally you would see something moving among the trees that explained it all – a yellow bulldozer moving relentlessly backwards and forwards burying another condemned herd.

These were trying, tragic times for the farming community and it says a lot for the resilience of the country-folk that today most have recovered from the shock.

15 June 1956

Jack and Peggy had a bit of a setback with their plans to go to Bournemouth for a week's holiday. It's going to cost 32 guineas for them and the three kids and that's without the cost of travelling and spending money added on. It does seem an awful lot of money. I remember when we went a few years back it only cost us £3 a week for me and Dan and 30s. for the children and that was at a right comfortable hotel. Now it's 8 guineas for Jack and Peg, 6 apiece for Jennifer and Lilian and 4 for little Anthony William. If they let Peggy's mother, Mrs Perkins, pay for the kids as she's offered they could just about manage it. Peg thinks

they should forget about an hotel and try and find a furnished house or flat and look after themselves. I don't think they'd get one at this late date in the summer and besides it wouldn't be much of a holiday for Peg if she was doing all the cooking and the shopping and everything. She needs a real holiday. She does enough waiting on people at The Bull and it's her that should be waited on during a holiday at the seaside. I'm glad Jack agrees and he's told her to forget any idea of anything other than a hotel. Anyway, as he says, the private house owners probably wouldn't want to know them with three kids. I must say, I don't think I'd be all that keen on letting my house out to a family with three energetic, destructive kids! I think they should take Mrs P's very kind offer and go and enjoy themselves for a week. They can bring her back a big stick of that lettered rock. She'd love that!

10 September 1956

Not satisfied with getting herself married, our Chris was trying to marry off Carol Grey and Philip this morning! Poor Carol only came round to talk about supplying the flowers that Chris and Paul would want for the bouquets and table displays and so on, and then Chris bent her ear about the joys of wedded bliss and what a fine lad was Phil. Poor Carol. Mind you, I can't blame Chris too much because Carol was moaning rather about how everyone just regards her as a highly successful business executive, a sort of glorified adding-machine, rather than as a woman. She nearly bit her tongue off as she said it but it was too late! Chris was in like a bolt from heaven. She reminded Carol of at least two proposals – one from John Tregorran and the other from David Cavendish. Carol just laughed that off, saying David only wanted a financial partner and John didn't know what he wanted. When they talked

about the actual wedding plans Carol *did* seem a bit envious and even I couldn't help but think she may have fallen for someone! When Chris asked her she flatly denied it and said she was thinking of a long cruise somewhere warm and sunny and might well find somebody there. We said she needn't go so far afield and Chris threw in Phil's name as a suggestion. I must say I never thought of Phil and Carol in that way. They've always just seemed friendly to each other. I'm not sure, but I think Carol was a bit too quick to pooh-pooh it. She said they were only very good friends and neither was interested in getting married. I think maybe Chris pushed it a bit too far and Carol started getting hot under the collar – especially as she'd come to talk about the flowers! It seems that November-time's not very easy for blooms and she's obviously anxious to put on a good show. The trouble is they still haven't fixed a definite date. I hope they're not shilly-shallying because of Mrs Johnson. She's not exactly pleased at losing her only son. When Paul sprang his engagement on her she was quite upset and Chris found it all very embarrassing. Mrs Johnson actually told Paul off in front of Chris and there was quite a scene which ended with Paul and Chris storming out of the house. It wasn't just the engagement that was the trouble. Paul also took the opportunity to say he would be leaving the family business because he wasn't satisfied with the money he was getting, nor with his position. I don't think he likes being an agricultural contractor even though it is big business. It must have been pretty upsetting for the parents. It's always hard when your children grow up and want to cut the apron-strings. Anyway, Mr Johnson soon saw sense and got Paul and Chris back in and celebrated with champagne!

It was a great relief for Chris because she'd also had an upset over Nelson Gabriel. Evidently he collared Paul outside The Bull one night and went on and on

about how much he loved Christine and he'd wanted to marry her. Nelson really is a fool. He seems to mess up everything he does. He worked hard and got a commission in the RAF and then spoiled that and at one time he and our Chris really were making a go of it until he started being stupid. Luckily Paul knew all about his relationship with Chris so he wasn't unduly perturbed, and anyway Nelson ended up by threatening Paul if he caused Chris any unhappiness. Just as Paul knew about him, Nelson knew one or two things about Paul and his escapades with other girls. He said if he broke Chris's heart, he'd break *his* neck! I'm sure Paul has no intention of doing anything but trying to make a good life for him and Chris.

5 November 1956

The new man, Ned Larkin, will be coming to work at Brookfield in a fortnight. Although Dan said he'd write to him later when he'd made up his mind about whether or not to take him on, Mr Larkin and his wife turned up in Ambridge today and he talked Dan into giving him a decision on the spot. He sounds like a very good man even if he does talk nineteen to the dozen. When he first came for an interview I remember him telling Dan how he couldn't stand folk who just talked and talked and talked! He said he didn't see any occasion to speak unless he had something to say. All I can say is he must have an awful lot he wants to say! His wife, Mabel, seems a friendly soul. They've got five kids, but all grown up and left home. The youngest evidently works at a car factory and gets £10 a week for just sweeping up the floor! They must have more money than sense there. Mr Larkin's got first-class references from his present boss. He's been with him fifteen years and seems to have done everything – ploughman, cowman, hed-

ger, ditcher, vet, mechanic and even weather prophet! Paul Johnson knows his boss and has seen him at work when he's been visiting the farm and he says he works very hard. He seems quite a progressive type too. When he was here last he was telling Dan about some old farmer he knew who'd still been hand-milking his cows until eighteen months ago and he was quite critical of his stick-in-the-mud attitude. He said the only thing that persuaded the old man to buy machines was an accident that damaged his hand and left him unable to milk the old way. Mr Larkin's only giving up his old job because his boss is retiring and giving up farming altogether. Actually Dan had been thinking about giving up Brookfield too. He had a very good offer from that Mr Wynford, the Borchester businessman who wanted to set up his son in farming. He hasn't actually said yet that he's not going to accept, but I've got a feeling he's too attached to this place to sell up. I think we'll be here for the rest of our lives now – and I can't say I regret that! Brookfield has always been a happy place for Dan and me and the children. Of course, we've had our ups and downs, what family hasn't? But in all honesty, there's very little I'd want changed in all the years we've been here. I hope Mr Larkin and his wife enjoy themselves in Ambridge as much as we have.

1957

24 January

Mrs Perkins could find herself an ally in her campaign against cruelty to animals in Borchester market! John Tregorran said he met that Mr Sprogett over there on Tuesday and he was going on something terrible about some drover or other who'd been ill-treating his cows. According to John, Mr Sprogett was very concerned about animal welfare and wasn't content to leave it to

the auctioneers or the police to see that the market was properly run. I must say I can't understand people who are cruel to animals, but I wonder if any of the market men really are? It could be that Mr Sprogett just doesn't understand their ways. Though he did tell John about an incident just before Christmas. He said one of the drovers was trying to get one animal out of a pen with eight or nine others in it and he was beating the animal about the head in an awful manner. It made him sick and he felt even worse when he intervened and tried to stop it and none of the other people gave him any support. He thought that people took it for granted that it was normal behaviour so far as animals were concerned. Poor John seemed to get quite an earful and he had only gone along to get some background for a lecture he's going to do on markets through the ages! He told Mr Sprogett and that's what seemed to set him off. According to him there hasn't been any change and today's markets are just as appalling as they were in the Middle Ages. He said walking around Borchester and Felpersham markets on busy days made him feel more attracted to the four-legged beasts than to any of the two-legged variety! His answer is to get about half a dozen of the worst offenders, put them in a pen and give them a dose of their own medicine. Mind you, if he did the magistrates would send him to prison for six months for cruelty to human beings . . . and that I suppose makes his point precisely! Maybe Mrs Perkins' method is more effective. She just goes round lashing out with her broolly at anyone she thinks is guilty of ill-treating the livestock. That must be quite a sight.

14 May 1957

Not enough buses and too many planes! That seems to be the general complaint in Ambridge at the moment. The aeroplanes are causing a lot of bother by flying too

low over the village. Our Tom was moaning about it this morning. I reckon it's the people from that Aero Club that's started up on the old aerodrome near Hollerton. It's not so much that folk mind anybody flying a plane around, but you wouldn't persuade any of them that it's necessary to zoom down low like that. They put the wind up every living creature in sight – including me. It's this scaring of the birds and animals that annoys our Tom. He's so livid he said he'd quite happily take his twelve-bore and treat the plane like it was a wood-pigeon. Pru, that's Tom's wife, said one plane flew very low over the village green the other day – must have been when I was in Borchester with Dan. I thought there was a law against them doing that, but no one seems too sure. I know they mustn't do it over the big towns, but I suppose this is classed as open country. Anyway, it's surely a foolhardy thing to do – not that I know anything about flying or aeronautics or anything like that. What I do know is that we could certainly do with the bus service Walter Gabriel is hoping to start. He's bought himself a minibus and wants to run some sort of private hire service. I thought it'd be off the ground by now, but Mrs Perkins was telling me today that there's some palaver about a licence. She wanted him to quote her a price for a W.I. trip out to Lordsleigh Manor, where the gardens are open to the public. But he said he couldn't until his application for a haulage licence was approved. She said the women wouldn't want to be 'hauled' but driven in comfort and they'd be happy to pay, so why couldn't Walter oblige? Evidently, it's not as easy as all that. He'd been to the traffic commissioner in Borchester and he was very helpful, but it seems there might be objections to Walter's application. He says Bert Sutton and the Borchester Bus Company might try to get it squashed on the grounds that the job Walter wants to do is already being done efficiently by them.

Now, we all know that it isn't, but according to Walter he's got to prove it! Mrs Perkins is determined to help and she's going to organise a petition. I hope she's careful and doesn't go around saying anything terrible about Bert Sutton and the bus company that would allow them to come back at her for slander or something.¹

Editor's Comment

Murder is not an everyday part of life in the country, but it does happen and the reactions of a small community to the people directly involved is an important part of the overall picture. In the early part of 1957, Mrs Archer's diary is dominated by the subject. But as the man at the centre of the allegations was her brother, her comments are too personal to give a true reflection of the actual happenings. Therefore, with her agreement, we have pieced together, from other people and the court reports, the following account.

It was in the early hours of 21 February 1957 that Mrs Archer's brother, gamekeeper Tom Forrest, and her son Philip, set out to trap poachers on the Fairbrother estate. Mr Forrest had been bothered by the poachers for some time and earlier in the day he had pushed most of the birds down to the lower end of the estate so as to reduce the area they would have to cover. He and Philip Archer then spent the night on circular patrols meeting up with each other at regular intervals. Just as they were about to give up, they heard a shotgun being fired in the woods not far from them. They split up and converged on the poacher from different angles. Mr Forrest got to him first and when he confronted the

¹Mr Gabriel's application for a licence was successful and for several years he operated an efficient and popular minibuss service around the district. It was failing eyesight that forced him reluctantly to give up in the end—*Ed.*

man he tried to make a break for it. There was a struggle, a shotgun went off and the poacher fell to the ground with blood pouring from a wound.

It all happened very quickly and Philip Archer arrived on the scene to find his uncle covered in blood standing over the poacher.

In his statement to the police, Mr Forrest said of the incident: 'He put up the gun as though to threaten me and I had to jump in and grab. We were trying to twist it out of each other's grip when we fell and it went off. I swear I never touched the trigger. Good God, if it had been pointing two inches this way it would have been me!'

That could have been the end of it – a tragic accident in which no one could be blamed. But it didn't turn out that way. The victim was Mr Bob Larkin, brother of Ned Larkin, who worked for Mrs Archer's husband. And it was well known in Ambridge that there was an awful lot of ill-feeling between Mr Forrest and Bob Larkin over Pru Harris, barmaid at The Bull.

Mr Forrest was very fond of Miss Harris (he subsequently married her) and he was enraged by Mr Larkin's constant pestering of her. One witness later testified that he heard Mr Forrest say on several occasions that he would 'bash Bob Larkin's head in'.

At a special magistrates' court, Mr Forrest was formally charged with murder and, despite his solicitor's pleas, was remanded in custody pending further inquiries. The reaction to this was what you would expect in any small community – a rallying of friends on the one hand and gossiping and sniping on the other.

Tom Forrest had lived all his life in Ambridge and those who knew him as a friend could not believe him capable of murder. He was gamekeeper on the local estate and a reliable, level-headed man who had a quiet, gentle personality. Philip Archer, his nephew, kept asserting that the tragic death was an accident

and was horrified that the murder charge was preferred. Mr George Fairbrother, Forrest's employer, stood by him throughout, arranging solicitors, etc., and continuing to pay his wages.

Understandably, the major bitterness came from the Larkin family – or to be more precise, from Mr Ned Larkin. Although he had thrown his brother out when he was suspected of stealing petrol from local cars, Mr Larkin was badly affected by the incident and reacted violently against Mr Forrest. He felt so strongly that he refused to go on working for Mr Dan Archer just because he was Mr Forrest's brother-in-law, and he also spread gossip around the village. Eventually, of course, he realised that it *was* an accident and tried hard to make up for all the trouble he had endeavoured to stir up for Mr Forrest.

There were others, too, who were convinced the killing was deliberate. Several of Bob Larkin's associates were even heard planning revenge if the law didn't punish Mr Forrest. But perhaps the man with the most difficult role in the case was Police-Constable Geoff Bryden. He had been Ambridge's local bobby for years and was a personal friend of Tom Forrest. Yet he had to go round making inquiries to support the charge of murder.

He recalls: 'It was a terrible time for me. Most folk felt certain Tom was innocent and they resented my questions. What they didn't realise was that I resented having to ask them! But it was difficult. Phil Archer was the only witness of any sort and even he didn't actually see very much. His own statement simply said he heard Tom call out Bob Larkin's name followed by a shot and then the two men falling to the ground.

'As my detective-inspector said, everyone who thought they knew Tom felt he couldn't have done it deliberately, but how many really *did* know him properly. Only God and Tom knew the true story and my

superiors wanted every avenue explored. It was my job to help and friendships just couldn't come into it. What was most hurtful was that some folk said I was after a conviction towards a promotion. Damn it, that never even entered my head.'

And what of Tom Forrest himself: 'In jail they treated me nicely and couldn't really have been more considerate. But the lack of freedom left me almost mindless. Having been born and bred in the country, it was more difficult than ever to do without the fresh air and the birds and the animals and all. You tend to take freedom for granted and think of it as just a small thing. By golly, it's not! It isn't a little thing. It's life itself. At first, when the initial shock of the nightmare eased, I was very, very depressed. Then as my family and friends rallied round me I felt certain that I'd get a fair deal and everything would work out fine.'

And, of course, he did get a fair deal. The charge was reduced to manslaughter and Mr Forrest stood trial at the Assize Court on 4 July 1957. It was a dramatic trial which came to an abrupt end when the foreman of the jury interrupted the defence's evidence to say the jury had already reached a verdict of not guilty. Tom Forrest was immediately discharged.

That could have been the end of the story . . . if the setting had not been a small, close-knit community like Ambridge. But it wasn't. On his return to the village, Tom Forrest was actually welcomed by every single one of the villagers and a silver band laid on by Mr Walter Gabriel. Our reporter who covered that particular aspect of the affair recalls the emotion of the occasion: 'This was a community totally united. They had – each and every one of them – suffered a nightmare and they had come through it . . . together. I am not surprised that there were tears in Tom Forrest's eyes. There was a lump in my throat.'

12 September 1957

I met Phil's girlfriend, Jill Patterson, by accident last night. She seems a nice enough girl but I'm not at all sure that she'd make a good farmer's wife. She was giving a talk to a meeting that Helen Fairbrother and I were at in Stourhampton and as Phil asked her to marry him before we'd ever met her I couldn't contain my curiosity. She's a very direct girl. It flustered me when she came right out and said she wanted to know as much about me and the family as we did about her. When Mrs Fairbrother invited her to supper, she said she'd love to come as long as she could bring *her* microscope too. I didn't understand what she meant until she made it clear she didn't really mind being looked at through our microscope. I suppose we do have to examine each other very closely. It's only natural. Anyway, from what I've seen already she's certainly honest and straightforward and her relatives are nice people according to Mrs Fairbrother. She'd never met Jill before or knew anything about her, but while we were talking it came out that she and Jill's closest relative – a cousin over in Crudley – were at school together. It's a small world. Still a nice family isn't necessarily a qualification to be a farmer's wife. Mrs Fairbrother doesn't agree with me about that. She says that because Phil's not a hands-dirty-all-day, feet-in-the-midden kind of farmer, he doesn't need a traditional farmer's wife type . . . not to the same extent as if he were a struggling smallholder without a couple of ha'pennies to rub together. That may be so but I still think he needs a country girl, somebody to give him help, companionship and understanding. At one time I thought Carol Grey might have been the ideal farmer's wife for him but that never came to more than friendship. Mind, Grace wasn't exactly a country girl either and she certainly made Phil very happy. Poor dear Grace. It's

hard to accept that she's not with us any more. Sometimes when I think about her the pain is very bad and it takes all my strength to put the fire and that awful night out of my mind. I know I mustn't dwell in the past: maybe if he does marry Miss Patterson it will help.

1958

23 January

Mrs Perkins's party at The Bull last night was a great success and I must say our Tom and Pru Harris played a big part in it. Tom's a very good carver and he served up some delicious slices of beef, while Pru served the vegetables and both were charm itself. It was right nice to see them so happy together. Afterwards I overheard them chatting and I thought Tom was going to propose on the spot. I know I shouldn't have listened but I couldn't resist it. After all Tom is my only brother and I would like to see him married to someone like Pru. Anyway, I heard Tom say the party had put an idea into his head and the quicker he and Pru did something about it the better. Well, it must be a proposal, I thought. Pru obviously thought so too because she went all coy. So you can imagine how disappointed I was when he finished by saying they would have to give a party of their own! The poor girl was shattered though she didn't let on to Tom. I could have shaken him. Sitting there in front of a blazing log fire all romantic like, it was the perfect moment and Tom didn't see it. I don't think it was because he's not interested in marrying or because he doesn't fancy Pru as a wife. In fact I'm sure it wasn't. Maybe he's just too shy and needs to work up to it more slowly than most. The party he's got in mind might well be his next big chance. He told me about it this morning and it sounds like another very good do. It's to be at Pru's house and Tom's going to supply all the victuals. He's hoping to get a brace of

pheasants from Mr Fairbrother and a hare or too from the estate. That's an awful lot of food for the small party they have in mind – just Dan, me, Walter Gabriel and Mrs P. I hope Tom doesn't overdo the hospitality too much. I also hope he'll have plucked up the courage to ask Pru to be his wife by then. Neither of them are getting younger and I wouldn't like to see Tom miss the boat just because he was too slow!

11 August 1958

Jill and the twins are all doing very well and Phil's as proud a father as it's possible to be. They're the first twins we've had in our family and Phil is so pleased at getting a boy and a girl in one go. The first thing he did on hearing the news was go and buy a bottle of champagne and crack it right on the spot. That was in the middle of Hollerton and he shared it with Walter Gabriel, who was the first familiar face he clapped eyes on! Those two didn't take long to swig it down because they were both in a state of shock – Phil for obvious reasons and old Walter because he'd just been to see an accountant about sorting out his business affairs! Walter never was one for financial management and it seems the accountant fellow frightened him half to death with the detailed list of information he needed to prepare Walter's books for him. Evidently whenever Walter does a job for a friend and doesn't take any money but gets an ounce of tobacco or something as a present, it should all go down in the books. What Walter is supposed to do is work out his wear and tear, petrol, oil and so on and put that amount on one side and then put the price of the tobacco down on the other side. I think that's a bit of an exaggeration but the accountant's really aiming at the idea of Walter paying all his bills in money and getting receipts and always charging folk in money and giving them receipts in duplicate.



11 September 1955

On the farm, breakfast is the most important meal of the day and I've always liked to make sure everyone has a good start with plenty of bacon and eggs to go with the cereals. This morning Len Thomas joined us after checking the animals and he helped himself while Phil and Chris had their usual banter with Dan.

Top right: July 1958

It's not every day all the Archers are under the one roof and it's jolly hard work for me when they are . . . but it's wonderful nevertheless! Living in the country seems to bind a family together and Dan and I have been very lucky with our lot.

In Mrs Archer's picture are from left to right (standing) Peggy, Paul Johnson, Jack and Phil. Seated: Mrs Archer, Dan, Christine, Jennifer, Jill and Lilian

Bottom right: 3 November 1958

Brother Tom is really a romantic at heart. Seeing him with his new wife Prue, they look like a couple of teenagers in love.



I don't see the problem and I told Walter that the days of barter are long past, anyway. But he doesn't agree. He insists that it pays him to take payment in kind now and then. For example, he said, if he did a job for Bill Sawyer up at the kennels and instead of paying him he gave Walter a little puppy because he happens to know someone who wants a puppy, well it pays him better than taking a couple of pounds. Bill Sawyer's better off and so's the chap who got the pup for £3 and, of course, so is Walter! He's not so daft as Walter, but I can't see him putting that sort of transaction down in double-entry book-keeping. As for his income tax problem – well, there isn't any answer to his comment that he wished he hadn't joined!

15 October 1958

This business of a new road is causing the Fairbrothers a lot of heartache and it's not helping Mr Fairbrother's health either. He's been looking a bit better since he had a holiday in Pembroke, but if he isn't careful all the worry and bother about the road will put him back to square one. Helen was right to insist that he should go to see a specialist.

The trouble is the planners intend to put the new road – a town by-pass – right through the Fairbrother estate and, of course, Mr Fairbrother finds that difficult to accept. Especially as he has worked so hard in building up the estate after taking over from Squire Lawson-Hope. He worked out an alternative route that would save his land, but would affect the Heydon estate.

I saw old Sir George storming up to the Fairbrother house, no doubt to have it out with Mr Fairbrother. Luckily he was out and Sir George saw Helen instead. There could have been quite a row but Sir George is too much of a gentleman to get angry with a woman and as it turned out they had a very friendly discussion.

Sir George said he understood Mr Fairbrother's problem about losing good farming land which would be destroyed by the road scheme, but that was no excuse for trying to whip up enthusiasm for ruining his estate instead. Helen could only agree and anyway she personally couldn't care less where the road went. All she was concerned about was her husband's health and the effect the trouble was having on it. Sir George was most sympathetic and said it was quite obvious an up-and-down row wouldn't do him any good, but he pointed out that nothing Mr Fairbrother could do would get the road rerouted over his estate. He'd already had the surveyors and engineers on his land and they'd declared it utterly unsuitable for building road foundations. He knew this all along, but he hadn't let on because he was so angry with Mr Fairbrother that he decided to let him go on making rude remarks about Sir George using his friends in high places to avoid having the road on his land. Then eventually he would have sued him for slander.

It was lucky Helen spoke to the old boy because she won him over completely and he's agreed to drop any such ideas. For her part Helen's undertaken to stop Mr Fairbrother – and now she knows he's wasting his time that shouldn't be too difficult.

12 December 1958

With Christmas just round the corner life is getting very hectic around Ambridge these days. Here at Brookfield, Dan is flapping around working out plans to reorganise and modernise the place. He was in a right tizz this morning because we had a chap from the Land Commission to talk over the scheme with a view to Dan getting some grants. He didn't exactly go overboard with our plans, said some of them were false economies and we'd find ourselves patching up old buildings within a

couple of years. He suggested we pull down the older buildings and replace them with new ones using modern materials. It'll be more costly in the first place, but it'll pay off in the long run. Reorganisation's a lot more technical and scientific than Dan thought and it's a jolly good job the Land Commissioner came along. Dan's quite sold on his suggestions and will go ahead with them if he can convince the bank manager. The man said he'd recommend the appropriate grants.

Down in the village, Walter Gabriel's working hard on his White Elephant sale and all the W.I. members are sorting out things for the Christmas Fayre next week. I think they've left it a bit late this year. Most folks will surely have bought all their presents and things by now? Peg doesn't agree. She says there's bound to be lots of last-minute rushing around and the Fayre could do very well by cashing in on people who want to find something in a hurry for somebody they've forgotten. Maybe she's right, I don't know.

She and Jack had a bit of a row about the youngsters' presents this year. Young Lilian wants a bike, but Peg thought that a bit expensive and said to Jack they shouldn't buy one. She really did want to buy one, but was testing Jack's feelings. He didn't realise that and suddenly lashed out about how Peg was always picking on Lilian and even said she had her knife into the girl. He said she shouldn't make distinctions between the kiddies like she did. Jennifer has a bike already and so has Anthony William even though he's much younger than Lilian. Both are getting what they want for Christmas so why shouldn't Lilian? If he'd been right about Peg's attitude I would have backed him, but as usual he just steamed off without bothering about the facts. Peg had in fact already put an order in with Pollards, the bike shop in Borchester! That fair took the wind out of Jack's sails and no mistake. They made up and everything's as right as rain now.

1959

4 February

I've never suffered from migraine myself, but I do feel heart sorry for Walter Gabriel. He's laid up with it at the moment and the pain he's in must be something awful from the way his face is all drawn and pinched. It seems his is brought on by a chill in his nerves or something. Whatever it was it's certainly laid him very low.

He was very worried about his bus service and particularly about the school run. But John Tregorran has come to the rescue. He can drive Walter's mini-bus and he's volunteered to drive the kiddies to and from school and he says he can also fit in most of Walter's other bookings with running his antique shop. He's a bit slack there at the moment and if he can use the bus to collect one or two things from sales he can kill two birds with one stone!

Poor old Walter was delighted. He said it did his heart good the way folks rally round to help out. That's the joy of living in the country among people who really care about each other. I don't think it would be the same in the town but then I'm letting my prejudices show again.

Still it's not just prejudice, everyone really is helping old Walter, and look at the way they've made Mr Grenville welcome in the village since he took over the Fairbrother estate. It's true that he's an old friend of Squire Lawson-Hope but that was way back before the war. His family have been landowners and squires in this country for more than 300 years and it took the war to break up his estate. He went out to Africa and had a big important job in the Colonial Service. While he was there he also did some pretty large-scale ranching - several thousand acres. When he sold up in Africa a couple of years ago, he went on a world tour looking

at agriculture in the different countries. He must find running a horticultural business in Ambridge pretty tame after all that.

7 April 1959

It's been three Sundays since our Tom has been to the local church. He really has taken offence at the Vicar's anti-hunting sermon and seems determined to keep up his boycott because he's convinced much of it was directed against him.

Dan and our Phil have been at him to give over and not be so silly but he won't listen. Right enough the Vicar has got a bee in his bonnet about it probably because John Tregorran's been working on him. As Tom says, you go to church to worship quietly, not to have the Vicar's personal opinion. Tom took it more than that and said he wasn't going to sit there and be denounced just because he's a gamekeeper.

Dan says Tom's a crackpot to think like that. The Vicar, he says, was aiming at some youngsters who've been ganging up and hunting and maiming birds, squirrels and other animals. It was in the *Borchester Echo* the other day and the Vicar took it up because there were one or two Ambridge kids involved. Tom finds that too hard to believe because he says the Vicar looked him straight in the eye as he ranted and raved about people who shoot and trap and snare God's poor defenceless creatures! Mrs Turvey obviously thought the same as Tom because she stopped him in the street and said she hoped he had taken the Vicar's sermon to heart. That really hurt him because Tom has to trap and snare to keep down vermin.

It's not like Tom to be bitter but he really is and he let our Phil have it when he tried to persuade him that the Vicar was a nice man and had asked Phil to try to sort things out with Tom.

Tom said the Vicar should have come himself. If he had the courage of his convictions he would have the guts to come and have it out in person. It's not that Tom resents anyone holding different opinions to him. No, he gets on all right with John Tregorran and he certainly doesn't hold with hunting and shooting. It's just that he resents the Vicar using the subject to preach against something which Tom says he doesn't understand.

The fact that Tom's often given the Vicar a hare or brace of pheasants he's shot doesn't make it all any easier. I can't see the two of them getting together somehow!

22 May 1959

Jack and Peg must regard Aunt Laura as something of a fairy godmother. They couldn't raise the money to buy The Bull after the brewery had offered it to them. In fact they were just sitting down to write a letter declining the offer and feeling very sorry for themselves when Laura, Dan and I dropped by to see them. It didn't take Laura long to drag out of them exactly what was wrong and she got quite cross with them for not coming to her for help in the first place. 'Just because I've been living in New Zealand doesn't mean I'm not one of the family, does it?' she railed at poor Jack. She complained that no one ever came to her for help and she wanted to know what was wrong with her. Jack didn't really help when he said Aunt Laura was down in Surrey on holiday when he was trying to raise the capital. She wouldn't accept that and he finally admitted he wouldn't have gone to her anyway because he thought it would have been a waste of time. There was a lot more argy-bargy before it became clear she really did want to invest in The Bull and she was prepared to put up £3,000 or £4,000. The brewery want

£5,000 for the place, so that doesn't leave Jack a lot to raise as a mortgage from the bank. Mind you, I'm not sure that I'd like Aunt Laura as my partner – sleeping or otherwise! I remember last year how much she tried to interfere with the way Dan ran Brookfield and what he told her to do with her money when she tried to buy in on a partnership basis. She can't know very much about pubs either, because she never touched alcohol until she had some brandy for medicinal reasons a month or so ago. Fancy a teetotaler being part-owner of a pub!

Still she does seem very shrewd in the way she uses her money. She doesn't exactly throw it about although she's far from being a skinflint. She wanted to know why the brewery were selling and Jack was perfectly honest. They reckon the new by-pass road will divert a lot of the custom from The Bull and it could become an uneconomic proposition.

On the other hand, Peg reckons it will take about two years for the road to be ready, during which time there will be a lot of very thirsty road-workers around. Then in that time they can continue to improve the place and establish a reputation that will bring people from all around the district and from Felpersham and Borchester. Jack envisages creating some sort of speciality – I don't know exactly what he's got in mind – that really will put the place on the map.

Much to everyone's surprise, Aunt Laura agreed with Jack and they more or less tied up an arrangement on the spot. She said if they handled the place properly it could be a little gold-mine . . . and anyway she's never put money on a wrong one yet. She's also prepared to put up the cash for stock, refitting and redecorating.

Her one reservation was that she felt the place would need both Peg and Jack on a full-time basis. Jack's not too sure about that. He enjoys his job on the estate and he thinks his wages might well be necessary to tide them

over the first few months. I think he's right. It's never wise to put all your eggs in one basket.

11 August 1959

No one knew that Mr Grenville had bought the old Arkwright Hall until John Tregorran and Ned Larkin found £5,000 worth of gold sovereigns underneath the floorboards there. It was a bit complicated as to who would get the sovereigns. John Tregorran thought it was treasure trove and that he and Ned would collect a tidy sum each. But he knew the owner of the Hall could also lodge a claim to it and that's when it came out that Mr Grenville's the new owner. Luckily he thinks John and Ned should collect any reward that's going so there won't be any arguments in the village, thank goodness.

I can't understand why Mr Grenville bought the Hall though. It's not exactly a masterpiece of architecture and there's no agricultural land with it, so I would have thought it a bit of a white elephant. There are also all those stories about the place being haunted. Old Walter and Ned Larkin were frightened out of their wits a few months ago. It was just after the sale of the Hall's contents and they'd gone to fetch some things that Mr Grenville had bought. They heard lots of weird noises – or so they say.

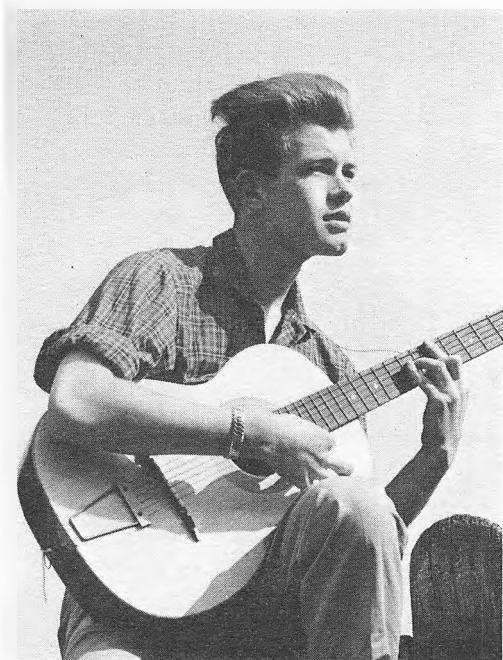
I know Walter and Ned are a pair of romantics and they could have been letting their imaginations run wild. But I don't think I'd go there on my own . . . let alone buy the place!

Of course, Mr Grenville must know what he's doing and he's certainly not one for wasting money on anything. Mind you, if what I'm told he intends to do with the Hall is true, he could well be making a mistake this time. Evidently he wants to convert it into some sort of private hotel where he can entertain all his business



18 June 1959

Dan says this picture proves that I'm just like an old mother hen! I know what he means but I can't help worrying about the family.



29 September 1959

A new variation on the singing cowboy? Young Jimmy Grange takes time off from milking the cows to bring a bit of 'beat' to Ambridge. I'm not sure that I appreciate his talents but the youngsters seem to think he's great!



14 December 1959

Old Walter Gabriel's bus service to Borchester is a fair boon to Ambridge. Dan persuaded him to have one of our calves as a passenger. Peggy didn't mind but Mrs Perkins happened to be on board as well and she kicked up a right old fuss. Still, they got to Borchester in the end.

friends when they come to see him in Ambridge. He wants them to feel really comfortable and enjoy a bit of country air. That's a very nice idea but it seems very extravagant. Why, they could put up at The Bull and then they would only have to pay when there are folks here instead of having to fork out for the upkeep and staff all the year round. Mind you, I'm biased about The Bull because our Jack and Peg run it. Maybe it isn't good enough for Mr Grenville's posh friends.

23 December 1959

A pair of softies, that's what our Jack and old Ned Larkin are. And I thank God that they are like that. Little Susan Blake tried to steal one of my chickens and Ned and Jack went round to give her a real telling off. But when they arrived at the Blake cottage they were overcome with pity for the poor child and just couldn't bring themselves to be angry.

Mr Blake is away in hospital and so the family has no money. Then to make matters worse poor Mrs Blake is ill and confined to bed and that leaves little Susan looking after the house and even she has a very bad cough.

As soon as Jack and Ned knocked on the door, Susan blurted out the truth that it was in fact her that had tried to steal one of my chickens. She was very, very upset and panicked in case she'd be carted off to prison. Poor little mite. She wanted it for her mummy's Christmas dinner because they couldn't afford to buy one. She said she would have explained it to her mother by saying that I had given it to her for being a good girl in helping me to do something or other.

It's ever so sad and I couldn't help crying a bit when Jack told me about it. Jack and Ned felt very cut up about it all and they decided there and then to do something about it. They had to be careful because Mrs

Blake's a very proud little woman and wouldn't accept charity. Luckily she was upstairs in bed so they sent Susan up to make sure she was all right while they concocted a story . . . it's something our Jack's always been good at but this time he excelled himself!

He said that after they had made the Christmas draw at The Bull, they found one hamper left over. As some folk had already won things it was decided that the names of all the unlucky ones should go into the hat. When they had drawn again it was Mr Blake's name that had come out. He and Ned Larkin had just popped round to let them know so they wouldn't waste too much time going out shopping on Christmas Eve and they'd be bringing the hamper next day.

The little girl was overwhelmed with delight. I wish I could have seen her face. Our Jack's was certainly a picture when he told me about it. His kindness caused quite a rush in getting the hamper together but everyone was only too pleased to help and it really was a bumper one.

That's the real joy of living in a small community. Whenever anyone is in difficulties all the villagers rally round and being able to help makes you feel good . . . particularly at Christmas.

1960

26 April

I don't know, we can't seem to win in this part of the country. Just as we're getting Arkwright Hall sorted out as a new community centre we're faced with the threat of great electricity pylons being plonked down right across the landscape.

It's very good of Charles Grenville to give Arkwright Hall to the village and I think it could be very successful. At first I thought it might just be competition for the Village Hall but as Mr Grenville pointed out there

are a lot of gaps in the sort of facilities required in a place like Ambridge.

I've been working on curtains for the Hall and Mr Grenville was quite pleased with them. Although he's not worried about money, the businessman in him appreciated that they were jolly good value. He popped in to see them this morning and we had quite a long chat about the Hall and I told him the only thing bothering me was our committee's decision not to apply for a licence. Mr Grenville said that with two pubs and the Country Club, the village didn't need another licensed house.

But it's occurred to me that there are a lot of stalwarts in the village whose help could be of great value to us but who wouldn't come anywhere near the place if they couldn't buy a pint. I mean think about Ned Larkin, Walter Gabriel – people like that who really use the village pub as a club and don't seem happy to engage in any activity without a pint at their elbow. We shall need people like them if Arkwright Hall is to be what it's intended to be – but are they going to come if there is only a glass of pop at the end of it?

Mr Grenville feels, of course, that we should have all age-groups at the Hall and a licence could lead to complications. That's a point I had never thought of, I must admit.

So far as the pylons are concerned, I don't think there is anyone in the area who isn't against them. We don't want great, ugly, metal monsters striding across the countryside and thanks to Mr Grenville we are able to make our protests before it's too late to stop the plan. We've got a committee together and it's nice to see some of the young folk get involved – Joan Hood and Jimmy Grange, for example. It's quite a lively group and Mr Grenville thinks we might be effective.

The county planning committee is meeting next week and the various district councils will be rep-

resented. They'll all be anxious to hear what the generating board officials have to say. In fact, we will all be hanging on their every word. Mind you, we're not closed to the possibility that they might be a necessary evil in the interests of progress.

15 June 1960

I think I quite like the idea of Dan and two or three other farmers getting together in an association to cut their overall costs. It was the National Farmers' Union chap, Fred Barratt, who suggested it.

He farms 175 acres just about the same as Dan and he's very worried about what's going to happen to folk like us who farm on a comparatively small scale. He says that unless we do something drastic hundreds of us will have to throw in the sponge in a few years' time, go bankrupt or out of business.

Dan says that's a bit too pessimistic but he is realistic enough to know something's got to be done. Fred Barratt said he wished everyone was like Dan. It's got to the stage where so many small farmers seem to have their heads stuck firmly in the sand pretending there isn't a storm blowing up. Even Dan's been trying to kid himself that things would buck up at the Price Review and there would be some improvement in subsidies and government aid. But he knows he's only kidding himself and matters aren't really going to get any better.

Though he's branch chairman, Fred had a rough time at the NFU meetings when he tried to say that the time's come when the agricultural economy of this country can no longer be geared to the most uneconomic producers. The trouble is that it's farms like Brookfield that are uneconomic and all the farmers get hot under the collar because they reckon themselves to be efficient. Dan certainly does, I know. But then, as Fred

pointed out, we couldn't manage without the subsidies and so on.

I suppose we take the financial support a bit for granted and assume it will always be there. Maybe it won't be?

If we were very small – just thirty or forty acres – Dan and I would be able to do everything ourselves. We could eat well and live well without any labour costs. It's true we'd be little farmers and would have to be content to stay that way. But as it is we're paying out two men's wages and what with overtime that comes to more than £1,000 a year.

Fred Barratt says with careful planning and labour-saving we could manage with one and a third men – a saving of £350 a year. But you can't take on one-third of a man. You have to employ two, and so two-thirds of a man is being wasted! It certainly made our Dan sit up and think.

He's not completely sold on the idea, mind you. He says a co-operative is a scheme that works well for shopkeepers and traders but not for independent farmers. I suppose the shopkeepers used to say the same before they tried it.

Fred Barratt's a very determined man – and persuasive. He is convinced Dan and him could talk Fred Wetherby and Jess Allard into amalgamating all four farms. Knowing Jess Allard that's going to be very difficult but Dan's agreed to go into the whole idea further so we'll just have to wait and see what happens.

1961

14 February

It's Valentine's Day and you can almost feel the romance in the air. Dan, the sappy thing, sent me a whopping great card and then pretended not to know anything about it and played at being jealous. Fancy

him expecting me to believe that after all these years together. It was nice of him though.

Talking about romance, Peg is right worried about young Jennifer. Since she came back from her Christmas trip to Switzerland, the lass has been moping around in a sort of daydream. She certainly has all the symptoms of calf-love . . . picking at her food, sitting staring into space and generally mooning around.

Peg was clearing up her room when she saw part of a letter in which someone called Max had written: 'I agree with you Jenny, I don't think eighteen is too young to marry, especially if it's the real thing. We must live our own lives and not let other people live them for us.'

Peg immediately assumed that Jennifer had met this boy in Switzerland and had pretended to be eighteen. She was very shaken because though Jennifer is only sixteen she does look older and Peg's worried about what went on. She thinks maybe she kidded this young fellow into thinking she was ready for marriage.

I told Peg not to be so daft. The letter was probably a continuation of a discussion they had. I mean everyone knows what the youngsters are like these days for discussing problems together and quietly suggesting that we older ones are making a mess of the world and it's up to them to put it right.

It was different when I was young. Gosh, if I had so much as looked at a boy when I was sixteen I'd have got what for from my dad. Mind you, that didn't stop me actually looking when dad wasn't around! Not that we ever got up to anything shameful. We just had some good fun and I'm sure today's girls are much the same in that respect. Look at all the fuss Peg and Jack kicked up about Jennifer going for walks with young Gary Kenton and that all turned out to be perfectly innocent.

The trouble is, we all knew about Gary, and Jennifer was quite open about it. She's never even mentioned

this Max, though she's talked a lot about all the other people she met in Switzerland.

Peg's got it firmly in her head that some gay, dashing ski-instructor thought Jennifer was eighteen and set his cap at her and that she egged him on. She says Jennifer's always acting older than she is, she always wants to be three or four years older.

I keep telling Peg not to worry. Even if she did fall for some handsome Swiss, he's a long way away and a romance at that distance will soon cool off. Anyway Jennifer could just as easily have fallen for one of these pop stars like Elvis Presley or Marty Wilde and she'd go around in the same moon-struck way for a couple of weeks. Then it will wear off!

No, as I told Peg, she should have a word with Jennifer if she's really anxious and then she'll find the whole thing the sweetest and most innocent affair that ever happened!

Editor's Comment (March 1961)

A fire on the Grenville estate merits only a brief mention in Mrs Archer's writings. But Mrs Archer was pre-occupied with domestic matters at the time and didn't really take in the seriousness of the incident nor its repercussions. As it in fact highlights one of the major problems in the countryside – vandalism – we have expanded on Mrs Archer's brief comments, again using our own files.

The fire was in a hay-filled barn and it was started deliberately by three teenagers who had ridden out into the countryside on their motor-bikes. Miss Sally Johnson, Mr Walter Gabriel and Mr Charles Grenville, the estate-owner, were all on the scene very quickly and when they tackled the youths there was a very nasty mêlée in which Mr Gabriel was kicked about the head and left unconscious. One of the youths broke his arm

in a fall and a second was badly bitten by Mr Gabriel's dog.

The youths were arrested, and charged with arson and grievous bodily harm. When they were tried at the Assize Court, their defence counsel suggested that the whole incident started off when one of the youths accidentally dropped his cigarette among the hay. Miss Johnson, who was the first witness on the scene, had to admit she didn't in fact see anyone deliberately set the hay on fire. But she did say the three youths just stood and watched the flames rise without trying to put them out or call for help. Then when Mr Gabriel arrived and started to stamp out the flames, the three attacked him. Miss Johnson said in evidence she heard one of the youths say: 'Look, the fool's put the flames out.'

When Mr Gabriel was in the stand, the defence counsel suggested that his evidence was coloured by his own dislike of leather-jacketed youths on motor-cycles. Mr Gabriel did not disguise his contempt of the youths but denied that this affected his evidence. Counsel suggested that Mr Gabriel did not rush to put out the flames but had set about his clients and had then fallen over, bumped his head and become unconscious. Mr Gabriel said when he tried to put out the fire he was attacked from behind. His dog, Butch, then attacked the youths and one of them tried to stab it with a flick-knife. When Mr Grenville arrived to help, he too was attacked by the youth with the knife.

An article from the *Borchester Echo* was also produced in evidence. In the article Mr Grenville had made a scathing attack on the teenagers of the day and he said the only way to cure juvenile delinquency and bring young people back to law and order and sanity was to bring back corporal punishment.

Under cross-examination, Mr Grenville said that the article was *not* written out of a desire to condemn or denigrate, in the most contemptuous terms, the youth

of Britain today. He said he was not referring to youth en masse but to the hooligan fringe, the ones who spoil things for everyone with whom they come into contact.

Mr Grenville said he broke the youth's arm with a judo blow when the youth lunged at him with the flick-knife. It was not deliberate but had been done instinctively out of a feeling of self-preservation.

In his summing-up, the Judge pointed out that careful examination of the barn had failed to find any cigarette end that might have caused the fire if accidentally dropped. His direction to the jury was fairly explicit and it took only a few minutes to come back with the verdict – Guilty.

The two older boys were sent to prison for two years and the youngest went to Borstal. These were severe sentences but they served as an example to many others that setting fire to a barn was not the harmless bit of excitement they thought.

8 August 1961

Tom and Pru are a bit over-anxious about their plans to foster a child from the home in Borchester. Now that they've had all the necessary clearance as foster-parents they can only think of finding the right child.

I know Pru wants a little girl but it seems they have a waiting-list for girls and no one can give any indication of how long they might have to wait. There are plenty of little boys, though, and Tom would be happier with a lad – someone he could take out shooting, fishing and suchlike.

Tom has already made friends with one of the boys at the home. He's a poor little fellow called Johnny and he scratches his face to make it bleed so somebody will make a fuss of him. Isn't that the saddest thing you've ever heard?

Miss Weldon, from the welfare office, says he could

be a very difficult problem to have at home but Tom's got a soft spot for him and I know he's prepared to invite him for the week-end. Pru's very cagey. She thinks Johnny is a man's boy, not a woman's. Still that's hardly surprising if the little fellow's mother deserted him, and I'm sure someone like Pru could easily restore his faith in women.

Tom says a week-end would be a good trial and being just a week-end it wouldn't be too difficult for any of them. But Pru raised the point as to what would happen if Johnny liked being with them. It would certainly hurt the lad if they were to have him for a week-end and then foster some other child.

But Tom and Pru are such a fine couple that I'm sure they won't do anything that will hurt or upset a child. Whatever they decide I'm sure it will all work itself out in time.

I mean, look at all that fuss about young Jennifer and her friend Max. After finding a letter from him Peg got all hot and bothered and felt sure Jennifer was getting seriously involved. I told her not to worry because they were just a couple of youngsters trying to have an adult discussion. I was right as it turned out and now Peggy's perfectly happy with the friendship that's developed. All it takes to sort out this kind of problem is time.

7 September 1961

All the children in the district have now been immunised after it was confirmed that the Trenthams' little girl, Hazel, had polio. Poor Reggie and Valerie are very upset, of course, but they're taking it very well.

Young Hazel is responding to treatment and because her chest isn't affected she hasn't had to go into one of those terrible iron lung things. The hospital people have started on baths and massages and they seem reasonably satisfied with the progress she's making.

We don't know yet whether or not she'll be badly crippled but it's likely she'll never ride again and that's a bitter blow to Reggie because he's very keen and was looking forward to having her in the field this year. It's also put paid to the poor little mite's chances of being flower girl at Carol Grey's wedding to Charles Grenville.

It's a very old country custom for a young maiden to walk in front of the bride and scatter flowers in her path and Carol thought, as she grows flowers, the local folk might like to see the idea revived. I'm sure we all would, but now that little Hazel can't do it the idea might be forgotten.

I don't think many people around these parts will forget to get their kiddies immunised in future, though. Miss Sheldon, the district nurse, was saying she thought young Hazel had been done because she made all the arrangements for Valerie to take her to Borchester Hospital last year. Well, it seems she took her for the first jab all right but then things got so busy at the country club that she forgot about the second one. I can just imagine how the poor woman must feel now. She's blaming herself for her daughter catching polio and there's not much anyone can say to get that idea out of her mind.

It's not much comfort for the Trenthams, but at least little Hazel's trouble means that it's not likely to happen to any of the other local children. There's been a rush of people to the clinic who have had their first two injections but have left the third booster too late or just remembered it or who hadn't even thought about it in the first place.

I do hope Hazel will be all right. They've got some marvellous treatment these days and I'm sure Reggie won't spare any expense if there's anything that can be done privately that can't be done on the national health.

It's funny how you take normal good health so much

for granted. Most times it doesn't seem special that the kids can run around and play all sorts of games – like our Lilian's archery or Jennifer's riding. Then suddenly it all comes home to you that we have so much to be grateful for in just being able to walk around the countryside.

1962

3 February

I don't know if it's me getting old or what, but farming doesn't seem to be much fun these days. Ever since Dan and the others got together as Ambridge Dairy Farmers all this modernisation lark has been something of a nightmare. Now Dan's talking about setting up an office out in the old wash-house!

He used to be happy to do all his accounts on the dining-room table and it was nice for me to sit at the fire and watch him struggle with figures and things and occasionally give him a hand. Fancy him moving out there after all these years. He got very short when I suggested he moved the sacks of fertiliser before he moved in. He said of course he'd move them, it was going to be an office not a pigsty.

He's going to take out the old copper and put in new doors and windows. There'll be a wooden floor, fluorescent lighting and even a phone. Sounds as if it's going to be like a palace rather than an office. I thought he was going to do it all himself but he put on his very efficient voice to assure me that the days are long since past when he could afford the time to spend on such jobs himself. Nowadays his time is so valuable it'll pay to have the builders in and let them get cracking on it.

He says it's going to be properly furnished and it'll have the proper equipment, including heating, whatever the cost. I said it sounded as if he was suddenly made of money and had decided to spend some of it

like water. I know he won't really do that and I suppose Ambridge Dairy Farmers has got to have a proper businesslike headquarters. As Dan says it's too big now to go on with hole-in-the-corner arrangements any longer.

Mind you the bigger it gets the bigger the problems. At the moment Dan's very worried about the Allard farm because the two boys look as if they're finished. Rex has gone off with his girlfriend, Ruth, and Joe has taken to the bottle. Jack was saying he was in a terrible state in *The Bull* the other evening, could hardly stand it seems.

Dan says he'll give him a little longer to try to pull himself together but after that the company will have to do something about it. They can't let the Allard farm become a liability. Being adjacent to us we depend on it and we haven't got the reserves to carry it. If it sinks, we sink . . . and Fred Barratt too.

Dan says he just can't let that happen and if it comes to the put-to he won't care what Ambridge might think of him. He's just got to do something and that's that. I don't like to hear him talk like that because I've always believed that folk were the most important thing and I'm not happy that business is so big that we can't spare a thought for weaker folk than ourselves.

15 March 1962

I don't know whether or not it's a sign he's slowly getting over Carol Grey marrying Mr Grenville, but John Tregorran has actually offered young Dawn Kingsley a partnership in his antique shop.

Poor John has been carrying a torch for Carol ever since they met a few years ago and though he put on a brave face at the wedding, I'm quite sure it affected him pretty badly. I know he's been a lot more short-tempered of late and that's not like him.

I hope the partnership between him and Dawn works out. She's been his assistant-cum-secretary for nearly a year now and he's been letting her do quite a lot of buying around the sales, so he obviously trusts her judgement. She was acting for him yesterday but she didn't buy anything because the big dealers from London were at the sale and everything became too pricey.

John had been particularly interested in a little escritoire and though it was only a restored piece, it went to some wealthy American for an extortionate sum. Dawn said she backed out at £200 because she just wouldn't dare use John's money at that rate. I think it was showing so much astuteness that finally persuaded John to make his offer.

Dawn wasn't all that sure because she was afraid John was just offering it to her as he felt in some way responsible for her. She always said John looked on her as some sort of good cause and of course she doesn't want to be like that. She just wants to be normal.

She's only too well aware that she's spent most of her life being a bit of a drudge . . . never having much idea of dress sense or the things that make young ladies sociable. But she's changed now and doesn't want to be the lame dog needing help any more.

John assured her that he wanted her as partner for purely selfish reasons: he says you need a woman around in the antique business. She can talk trinkets and things to the old dowagers that ham-fisted males know nothing about. The only helping hand he was holding out, he said, was the one that was going to whop some more money into his pocket as the result of her success.

Dawn finally agreed to accept but not before she had insisted on paying at least a nominal sum of capital into the business. That showed spirit and determination, I think, and I hope they'll both benefit out of it.

4 June 1962

It's been all go down at the Walton Grange stables over the week-end. Our Chris and Paul have been packing up ready to move to Newmarket where Paul's got a new job. And young Sally, Paul's sister, cut short her honeymoon to come back to take over the stables for Chris.

I don't think they should have let her do that but it seems Tony Stobeman insisted even though I don't think he wants Sally working at Grey Gables at all. I heard him say he wanted her to help him out at the new betting shop he's opening up in Hollerton. But she can't do both and it was nice of him to let her stay at the stables because that's the work she likes. I'm sure she'll be much happier looking after horses than watching people lose money on them!

Mind you, I don't know how long she'll stick it because it's very hard work and although she did very well while Chris was there it's different being on your own. But Chris isn't daft and I guess she's hoping Major Woodfield and his wife, who are moving into the house, will keep an eye on things as well.

Anyway, I've got a feeling Chris and Paul won't be away all that long. Chris is far too fond of her horses – particularly Midnight – to stay away too long and I know Paul was very happy in Ambridge. Maybe I'm letting my own wishes run away with me because I'm really very sorry to see them go and I shall miss Chris very much. But I know you have to move where your living takes you and it is a very good job Paul's going to in Newmarket.

I wonder just why Tony Stobeman has acted as big as he has? Perhaps he's trying to create a good impression with the family because I know Mrs Johnson didn't like him and Paul was none too keen on his little sister marrying a bookmaker.

Whatever it is it's working with Paul at least because

when Chris said she thought Tony was going to make Sally a good husband, he agreed emphatically. Chris says Tony just wants Sally to be happy. He's not like some husbands who try everything to drag their wives away from their family roots just so that they can have a feeling of power.

Paul's a good husband to Chris, too. They stopped by at Brookfield before leaving and they were both quite upset about going away from Ambridge, but Paul's promised Chris can come home as often as she wants and I'm sure he meant it.

19 November 1962

I've been down at Newmarket seeing our Chris these past couple of weeks and the rest has done me a lot of good but it's nice to be back in my home with my own man. I'm glad I came back when I did because Dan and the other farmers are very bothered by a serious case of sheep-worrying.

When I got in last night Dan was having a meeting about it with Tom, Ned Larkin and young Nigel Burton. They were planning to try to trap the dog that's been causing the trouble over at Grenville's.

Len Thomas found an old ewe with her throat torn out up by the old quarry in Bramble Park. It was a big black dog that did it, because Len got a quick look at it.

It's a terrible thing when a dog gets the taste of sheep-worrying. There just isn't any cure at all. I remember when Tom and I were kids they said if you tied the skin of the dead sheep round their necks it would do the trick - keep it on for weeks until they got to hate the whole smell of sheep. It was a very messy business and no one was ever really sure that it worked. I don't think there's anything for it but to go after it with the guns.

It seems a pity because it can happen to some decent dogs, too. It happens to the best of them. Something

just seems to get hold of them – like drink in some human beings. I'll never forget the time we had about ten years ago up at Bert Garland's farm, a bit nearer lambing time than this. They just couldn't catch the dog, there was no trace of it at all. And then one night, when the men were on watch, Bert saw it creeping up through a bramble patch and he let fly with both barrels!

He only winged the poor beast and it got away. Soon as it was light they went back to the field and followed the blood trail. Nearly a mile it was. They traced it to a house just the other side of Blossom Hill. It belonged to a poor old fellow called Moorfield – he's dead now – who was very lonely and crippled.

It nearly broke my heart when I heard the story. Seems the dog was the old chap's only companion near enough. It was a big golden retriever. When the men arrived at the house the old fellow was waiting for them with his own gun still smoking in his hand.

When the dog got back wounded, he knew exactly what must have happened because the word about sheep-worrying was all over the place. He knew there was only one course and he preferred to kill his old pal himself before the farmers got there. He never said a single word when he took them into the shed to show them the dead dog but the tears were all down his face. It must have been a pitiful sight.

All I can hope is that the big, black dog that Tom and the others are after isn't somebody's pet like that.¹

1963

23 April

Len Thomas seems to be causing an awful lot of trouble these days. I thought he was happy as shepherd to Mr

¹In this instance, the dog responsible for the sheep-worrying was not owned locally. It was a stray from one of the nearby towns and it was never caught but disappeared from the district—*Ed.*

Grenville and he used to get on very well with the estate manager, Andrew Sinclair. But something's gone sour and Len's a real misery at the moment.

His wife Mary is a very docile creature and it's just as well for Len that she is because few women would put up with his behaviour. He's been knocking her around and taking it out on their little boy Owen. He never used to discriminate between Owen and David, his son by his first wife. Nowadays Owen gets all the misery and David gets all his father's affections. It's very upsetting for poor Mary.

She got so worried about Len's ranting that she went up to see Andrew Sinclair to warn him that Len was trying to stir up trouble among the other agricultural workers and had even talked about going on strike! He's secretary of the local branch of the National Union of Agricultural Workers and he could well ferment a lot of discontent.

Andrew's a very sympathetic man and he had a long chat with Mary to try to get to the bottom of it and he's pretty convinced that it's Len's health that's to blame and has promised to persuade him to go to see Dr McLaren. In the meantime he's going to have to keep an eye on Len. The thing is, Len was all built up about going to look after Mr Grenville's Welsh hill-farm. He very much wanted to go back to Wales and when Mr Grenville changed his mind, Len took it as a reflection on him. Andrew did try to tell him Mr Grenville had decided to keep him in Ambridge because he needed him so much, but he was wasting his time.

Mary is so worried because she knows Len will one day be very regretful for what he's doing just now. I hope he doesn't have too much to regret!

28 June 1963

It's going to be quite a day in Ambridge tomorrow

when our number one bachelor, John Tregorran, finally gets wed. After years of having all the girls swoon over him, John's at last been caught by our lovely young district nurse, Janet Sheldon.

I'm sure everyone is every bit as pleased as I am because John's been such a marvellous character around the village and he's had his fair share of unhappy affairs. I remember how potty he was about Carol Grey and how miserable he was when she married Charles Grenville. Anyway, all that's behind him now and I'm sure he and Janet will be very happy together. It's funny how neither of them are country types and yet they should meet in Ambridge.

It's quite natural for Janet to come here to work as a nurse but how John came to the village is quite a story. I remember when he turned up at first in his old green caravan everyone was very suspicious of him and he always seemed to be in somebody's bad books.

Our Tom was one of the culprits. He'd been attacked in the woods after disturbing a poacher and because John Tregorran had some scratches on his face, he assumed it was him and called in the police.

Squire Lawson-Hope didn't take too kindly to his broken-down caravan being around the place and he moved him off his land and then our Jack and Peg wouldn't let him put up at The Bull. Only old Walter Gabriel showed any consideration and he said John could park the caravan on his land until such times as it could be repaired. Then just as folk were beginning to warm to him, the Christmas club money disappeared from The Bull and John got the blame and even when a horse was stolen from the Squire everyone looked in John's direction.

Of course he wasn't involved in any of the trouble at all but you couldn't blame the local folk all that much because he was a bit of a mystery and wouldn't tell anyone about his background.

It wasn't until Ann Trentham recognised him as a former tutor at her university that he began to be accepted. Finally it turned out he had just won a lot of money on the football pools and it was that that enabled him to take to the open road in his caravan. Once in Ambridge, however, he lost his restlessness and decided to stay here and buy an antique business which has been very successful.

Nowadays he's very much part of the village community and it's difficult to remember what it was like before he came along. I'm sure the whole village will turn out tomorrow to wish him and Janet the best of luck. And it's nice that the whole place is so spick and span for the occasion as well.

We've been entered for the Best-Kept Village competition being run by the Rural Community Council and everyone's been doing their fences and things up. I saw Walter Gabriel painting his fence a beautiful white the other day and others are following his example.¹

It's not only things like that that make Ambridge beautiful, mind you. The wild roses are out and the elder is in flower. They say when the elder is in flower it's the beginning of summer. It's certainly the beginning of the summer for John and Janet. There I go getting sappy again!

1964

31 January

Whatever will Walter Gabriel think of next. He's going to start up a maggot-breeding business with some of the money he made on selling that old-fashioned musical

¹Mr Gabriel and all the other villagers earned the rewards of their work in smartening up the area when Ambridge won the top prize in the Best-Kept Village competition. Although the village failed to win in later years, that one success made a tremendous difference and its effect is still seen in Ambridge today—*Ed.*

juke-box thing. I think it's a horrible idea but Walter's managed to persuade himself he's doing a service for the community. You should have heard his argument.

When I said it wasn't a very nice job he agreed but said somebody had to do it. He says if it weren't for the worm and the maggot and suchlike you wouldn't have the ordinary chap sitting out on the quiet summer bank with a rod and line in his fist.

He says the ordinary man has as much right to his dreamy, poetic thoughts as any rich, posh fly-fisherman. No one would argue about that and when Walter goes on you just have to laugh. He says that what helps the man throw off the cares and worries of a hard, cruel world and a lifetime of clocking in and clocking out is that little maggot at the end of his hook. If you look at the maggot the right way it's instant poetry.

Instant poetry indeed! Fancy earning a living from breeding maggots. Mind you, Walter admits he won't be putting that down on any forms anywhere. He pointed out that the fishermen used another name for maggots . . . 'gentles'. So what's he going to call himself? Why, a gentleman, of course!

I hope the people who have to put up with the horrible smell that there's likely to be will agree with his description. Maybe somebody will succeed in talking him out of the idea because he doesn't really need the money what with being a partner in the pet shop with Bill Sawyer and Mrs Turvey and his other bits and pieces.

The other two wanted him either to give up his partnership or do more around the shop but he's too stubborn to pay much notice. He likes being a company director, makes him feel important, and he won't work in the shop because he's afraid of Mrs Turvey. She's been after Walter for a long time and if he's not careful she'd have him on his knees in front of the Vicar saying 'I do'.

I can see his problem there!

3 June 1964

I can't help feeling very, very sorry for that young Sid Perks. I know he's caused a lot of bother for folk in the past but since he came to Ambridge from Birmingham I'd swear he's been as straight as a die and now some of his old cronies come along and threaten to ruin everything the lad's built up for himself.

He's fair worried that any word about his latest trouble gets back to Mr Woolley and he ends up getting the sack. Mr Woolley, who runs the country club at Grey Gables, is a bit of a rough diamond and I think he saw something of himself in young Sid. Anyway he took him under his wing and employs him as chauffeur and right-hand man at the club. Sid's been very happy there and has worked jolly hard and is really making a go of it. Now all this comes along and hits the poor lad very hard.

He and his girlfriend, little Polly Mead, were just out enjoying themselves at Hollerton Fair when two layabouts came up and started talking to Sid. They were some of the gang he got into trouble with in Birmingham and he said he didn't want anything to do with them. They started to cut up rough but Sid got the better of them and they cleared off . . . but not before making a lot of threats about revenge and so on!

The next thing that happens is Sid's motor-bike is stolen from the car park at The Bull. He had just dropped in for a quiet chat with young Polly who's the barmaid there. It was missing a couple of days before the police found it all smashed up at Lower Henford on the way to Birmingham. It was deliberate vandalism because the lights were smashed in and all the tyres were slashed.

Sid was very upset because he'd spent so much time on doing it up. It had only cost him £50 to buy and that's all it was insured for but he'd spent a lot more

money and time on improving it. But he was a lot more worried about whether or not Mr Woolley would find out.

Personally I don't think he need worry too much because I'm sure Mr Woolley would understand the situation. And anyway I can't imagine that nice new village bobby spreading any gossip about and he and our Jack and young Polly are the only ones who know about it.

I'm glad young Constable Bates is such a nice lad because we were all very worried what sort of man we'd get when Geoff Bryden went off to become a detective at Borchester. We needn't have been anxious because I'm sure it takes a special kind of chap to be a village policeman and the chief constable wouldn't send anyone unsuitable out to a place like this.

Young Albert Bates comes from a country family. His father was a farm-bailiff up in Staffordshire somewhere. He only got married last October to a lass from Worcester and they're expecting their first baby soon. That's good, I like to see these young fellows become family men. It makes a big difference to them. Sort of rounds them off somehow.

1965

22 *January*

Charles Grenville's death has shocked the whole village. It all happened so suddenly. Carol got an urgent message from America that he had collapsed in his hotel room and was seriously ill. She left Ambridge immediately but he had died before she even left this country, though the poor lass didn't know it at the time.

Life won't be the same without Mr Grenville, he was such an influence in everything – the estate, Arkwright Hall and the houses he owned and built and all sorts of other things. He certainly filled the gap that Mr Fair-

brother left when he died.

But never mind the village, what will Carol do now? She's got Charles's cousin Harvey with her, so that'll see her over the American end of the business, but it's when she comes back to Ambridge her biggest difficulties will arise.

It's strange when you look over all these years. I mean, in the old days we all thought it would be her and John Tregorran that would get married. Then she marries Mr Grenville and John weds Janet Sheldon and everything seems all right . . . until that terrible accident when Janet was killed and Mr Grenville lost a leg.

Janet had been visiting the Grenvilles for the afternoon and Charles was driving her home when the car crashed. It shocked everyone in the village and my heart bled for the Grenvilles and John.

Poor John. He hasn't got over it yet and it was well over a year ago. Poor Carol. Mr Grenville was never the same man since then either.

I've had a queer uneasy feeling about him for weeks, especially since Carol came back from the business trip to America and left him there. All that new strangeness of his and the way he was driving himself so hard. He always did drive himself hard but it seemed to get worse towards the end.

When he lost his leg he also had a very nasty head wound and it could have been deeper and more serious than we ever thought. It could have lain hidden causing him pain all the time and he's the sort of man who wouldn't let on because he hated sympathy.

Carol isn't one for sympathy either but she's going to need a lot of help when she comes back. That is if she comes back to live in Ambridge. I hope she does because of all the places she could be, I'm sure Ambridge is the best of all for her and her little son, Richard. This is her home and she'll be among friends.

It's a pity John Tregorran isn't here at the moment because I'm certain he is the one person who could really help her over the worst. Maybe he'll come back from Spain as soon as he hears the news.

3 May 1965

I hate to admit myself beaten but the motor-car has well and truly done me in and I've made up my mind. I'm not going through with it. I won't take any more driving lessons. They are just a waste of time and money.

Dan warned me I was a bit long in the tooth to start trying to master the internal combustion engine when I decided to have a go back in February. I remember getting quite shirty and saying all I wanted to do was learn to drive a car not build one. But he was right. I'm just not cut out for being behind the wheel of a motor-car. They're noisy and dirty anyway!

I think I made the first mistake by letting our Phil try to teach me. It never does for members of a family to try to teach each other. I know that now, too. The air in the car got bright blue sometimes with me panicking and Phil losing his patience and both of us cursing the other up hill and down dale.

It was ever so frustrating because Dan had promised to put down the deposit on a nice little second-hand car the day I passed my test. He even persuaded me to take lessons from the driving school at Hollerton and we both thought that would be the answer but that didn't work out either. Dan says I didn't have enough lessons but I'm sure I had enough to convince me. Not that I had anything against the school. The instructor was a very nice young man and he had all the patience in the world and as far as it's possible to understand a machine at all, he made me understand that one.

As Dan says, me and machines don't mix. Mind you, telling him brought back a few memories of before we

started courting properly. I used to ride a bicycle very well then and Dan said I used to taunt him by showing off my ankles! It's a bit different from what the young girls show off today.

I am sorry in a way because I was hoping that when we and the Barratts go on holiday to Ireland I would be able to take a spell behind the wheel and give Dan the chance to take it a bit easier and relax more.

Dan's not really bothered about that, though. He says it's very pleasant driving over there where the roads are very quiet and not much heavy traffic about. In any case, Fred Barratt will be able to take his turn, so it won't be too bad, really.

2 September 1965

Sometimes I think Ambridge Farmers Ltd is more bother than it's all worth! Dan and Phil are in a right stew again because they've heard a rumour that Fred Barratt is thinking of pulling out and retiring to the seaside.

You can't really blame Fred for thinking like that. He hasn't been keeping well lately and Betty says he's suffering from blood pressure and suchlike and worrying about the company's reorganisation and labour problems can't be doing anything for him.

On the other hand he can't just clear out leaving Dan and Phil holding the baby in the shape of new milking parlours and thirty new head of dairy cattle, etc. Phil got very angry and asked why the blazes he ever came into the company if he'd no intention of staying? It doesn't make sense.

Dan's a bit more sympathetic than Phil and he says it might well be that he rather bulldozed Fred into it a bit but I really don't think anybody can bulldoze Fred Barratt into anything.

In any case, the company is all tied up legally and

there is a signed agreement so Fred can talk as much as he likes about selling or going to Somerset and buying bungalows. But his farm is part of the company and he can't muck about.

The only thing is, Fred could put it all down to his ill-health and it would be difficult for lawyers or anyone else to argue about that. Anyway, if the worst comes to the worst the agreement does stipulate that he can't sell his farm to anyone unless Dan and Phil approve the new purchaser and they also have first refusal of buying it. I hope it doesn't come to that because I'm pretty sure Fred would want a lot more for his place than Dan and Phil could raise between them.

Dan knows just how Fred ticks and once he's had it out with him I'm sure it'll work out well in the end.¹

1966

12 January

Young Jennifer has just had another story accepted by a magazine and she's been told to write some more. She must be a lot better than any of us gave her credit for. Writing is one of these funny kinds of professions that you never think anyone in your family will do!

Jennifer's latest story is quite simple and straightforward but that writer fellow who once spoke to us at the W.I. said that's the way stories should be told. Don't wrap it up too much, he said. If you do you'll tie yourself in knots and strangle the reader's interest at birth!

Quite naturally Jennifer is feeling very pleased with

¹Mr Barratt did retire later in the year but not before an amicable settlement had been reached on the disposal of his farm and land. In fact he sold out to Mrs Laura Archer, who in turn rented it to Ambridge Farmers Ltd. The situation was further eased by Mr Barratt agreeing to let the company pay off his financial interests by instalment. This was a remarkable solution to a very complex problem and highlights the countryman's facility for reaching the best possible compromise—*Ed.*

herself and Jack Woolley told me she was talking to him about actually writing a book. He met her down by the river just sitting gazing across the water and she was obviously deep in thought. When she told him about her latest acceptance he became quite enthusiastic himself and they had a long chat.

He suggested she might be so successful as to be able to give up the idea of becoming a teacher and do her writing full-time. I'm not sure that I agree with that idea, though. She's had an awful lot of training and besides writing is a very precarious sort of job, especially in the early days.

Jack Woolley says you can say the same about a whole lot of jobs but that's all the more reason to fight things out and make a go of it. There's nothing like a bit of adventure in these times when everything is laid on for most folk. It keeps you alive!

Jennifer obviously wants to write but she's still keen on teaching, thank goodness. In the meantime, her ambitions lie in the direction of a novel though the thought of it seems to have left her a bit daunted.

She says it takes a lot of working out and planning to do a novel and then putting down all those thousands and thousands of words. It would frighten me to death! But I think Jennifer will get down to it one day, especially if Jack Woolley's got anything to do with it.

Once he knew she was interested in history, he commissioned her to write a brochure about Grey Gables. The place has a lot of history attached to it and Charles Grenville was going to write it up just before he died. Mr Woolley has all his notes and they contain lots of fascinating information. It was originally an old monastery. Then it was a manor house and it was attacked and destroyed by Cromwell's Roundheads. There's even some stuff about ghosts . . . some old monks creeping along the corridors!

Mr Woolley wants the brochure to hand out to his club guests to make sure they know they are visiting a place with a real background. I think Jennifer can do it.

11 April 1966

What sort of people are they who go round deliberately starting fires? They must be poor demented souls who don't know what they're doing. I mean it's not natural to get a kick out of watching a place burn down and the flames grow higher and higher. I wonder if it gives them a sort of feeling of power that so much destruction has been caused just by them?

Whoever started the fire here at Brookfield didn't seem to stand around to watch, however. Not unless he's so well known that he can mingle with the crowd and people expect him to be there. That's an even worse thought, that the twisted creature might be someone we all know. I pray to God that he's not. That would be too much.

The damage at Brookfield is terrible. It was bad enough seeing it happen in the night but in the cold light of day it's even worse. It really is heartbreaking. Luckily the house isn't affected – apart from the sickening smell of smoke and that awful dampness – but the barn, the pig-house, the machinery shed and the other outbuildings have been destroyed.

Thank God all the animals are safe. If Ned Larkin, Walter Gabriel and the others hadn't acted so quickly we would probably have lost the lot. Poor Ned is conscience-stricken about it all. Because of the earlier outbreaks, we have all been organising patrols to try to catch the fire-raiser. We were all up at a party at Carol Grenville's and Ned was on duty at Brookfield. He slipped off home to have a bite of supper, as Dan had told him to, and wasn't gone more than fifteen minutes when it happened.

Of course nobody blames him but he's got to sort it out in his own mind. There's nothing any of us can say to convince him.

Editor's Comment

When a fire-raiser is at work in a country district like Ambridge the repercussions can cause untold harm to personal relationships because of the fear and suspicion that is aroused.

During this outbreak many people were suspected – even Mr Dan Archer himself. He had just increased the amount of his insurance cover a month before the fire and he had plans to rebuild part of the farm in any case. Burning the buildings was one way of clearing the site and he could pick up a tidy insurance claim . . . that was the reckoning.

Then there was Mr Fred Barratt, a former director of Ambridge Farmers Ltd. He was thought to have had a grudge against the Archers and burning down their farm could have been his way of getting revenge.

Perhaps the most unfortunate suspect was Tom Forrest's adopted son, Johnny. Everyone knew young Johnny was a very difficult boy and he liked to be on his own a lot and had a mania for lighting camp fires and brewing himself tea over them. He resented being adopted – not having his real parents to love and care for him. That resentment could have so easily boiled over, some people thought.

And there were others who suffered the lash of wagging tongues. But, as so often is the case, the real culprit was never suspected. Not until about a month after the Brookfield fire. Then one afternoon Mr Frank Mead was actually caught starting a fire in an outhouse of The Bull.

Mr Mead, whose daughter Polly was then barmaid at The Bull, was an eccentric old character. He was



27 July 1962

Our local fête today was opened by film star Richard Todd. He's very handsome as this picture of him with our Phil and Jill shows.

Opposite:

Top left: 14 October 1963

It's just Anthony William Daniel! I can't help thinking he looks like Just William though he gets cross whenever I mention it!

Top right: 30 April 1964

Ned Larkin loves playing the country yokel but that straw hat doesn't fool me. I know he's got a lot more sense in his head than he'd like us to think.

Bottom: 18 July 1966

Lilian and Roger Patillo make a very happy and handsome couple. I wonder if they'll ever get married. (Roger, whose real name is Travers-Macy, actually married Lilian's sister Jennifer—Ed.)



well known around the village for carrying banners and placards about the iniquities of mortal sin and so on. No one believed him capable of such violence, but no one was surprised either when he was committed to a mental hospital, where he has since died.

All that is but one side of the coin. On the other is the real compassion of the country people. When Brookfield was so badly damaged, the neighbours immediately pitched in with offers of help and Mr Archer's animals were accommodated in various other farms. Even the electricity board reacted with more than common speed in repairing the damaged cabling that stopped the milking systems.

And for the Mead family – Mrs Mead and young Polly – there was sympathy and understanding. Not a single malicious word was directed against them and the village took them to its heart.

Stories like this make one glad to be one of the country people!

2 June 1966

There's an awful lot of gossip in the village just now about Ralph Bellamy and young Mrs Clare Madison. She left her husband some time ago and has been friendly with Mr Bellamy for about six months. Now her husband is threatening to take Mr Bellamy to court for enticement or something. His partner, Jack Woolley, is hopping mad about it because he knows Ralph and Clare have a genuine friendship and nothing more. In any case she had left her husband before she met him. The trouble is, in a small place you get too much gossip about folks' private business and that could play right into the husband's hands.

According to Jack Woolley, he has already started proceedings against Ralph for what's known as alienation of affection. Although he in fact hasn't a leg to

stand on he could cause an awful lot of damage to Ralph's reputation. You can just see the headlines: 'Admiral's son entices beautiful young wife from husband.'

If it does reach court, Ralph Bellamy won't do himself much good either. He's got a very strong temper and if he gets needled he's likely to react angrily. When you defend yourself too angrily everyone at once jumps to the conclusion that you really do have something to be guilty about underneath.

Maybe Carol Grenville's got the right idea. She suggested that someone try to find out more about *Mr* Madison's behaviour since the separation. She says he doesn't sound the sort who would be without a woman of some kind for long. It could be that there might be reasons for Mrs Madison to counter-petition and that might get the whole alienation thing knocked sideways before it starts.

I'm sure Jack Woolley will take up Carol's suggestion . . . just as long as it's done through solicitors.¹

1967

17 January

I just couldn't believe it when young Jennifer told me she was going to have a baby. It just didn't seem possible. I've always thought of her as a sweet, innocent child. It's difficult to realise she's in fact twenty-one and a very mature woman now.

The lass was terribly upset, hadn't even been able to tell her mum and dad, and I don't think I was a big help to her. I honestly don't remember exactly what I

¹It would be wrong to allow this item to stand without making it perfectly clear that Mr Bellamy was never taken to court by Mrs Madison's husband. The matter was dropped and the friendship between Mr Bellamy and Mrs Madison continued until she later left Ambridge—*Ed.*

said. I was so shocked. I know I felt ashamed and kept saying to myself that it couldn't happen in the Archer family. In other people's families yes, but not in ours. I hope I didn't say that to Jennifer.

My first instinct was that she must get married right away but she said she couldn't. The father didn't love her and she didn't mean anything to him. I tried to persuade her but she wouldn't have anything to do with the idea and point-blank refused to say who the father was. I got a bit angry then because when girls take that line it's usually because they don't know exactly who is the father.

It was disgraceful of me, I know. Young Jennifer isn't a trollop and I had all but suggested it. No wonder she rushed off crying. I felt so ashamed. She had come to me for help and all I could do was feel sorry for myself and the Archer family.

I suppose it's because I don't understand the young people of today. They look as if they never wash, have long hair, wear dirty old jeans and they've absolutely no morals at all! You've only got to watch television or read the papers to see what I mean. Not that I would have included our Jennifer in that lot.

The thing that brought me to my senses about it all was our Jack's reaction. He was livid and all he could think of was turning the poor mite out into the street. He ranted and raved so much that Dan got angry and said maybe Jack would be happier if Jennifer just did away with herself and then she wouldn't be an embarrassment.

It was a horrifying moment but I'm ever so grateful to Dan. It was him who made us realise it was a human being – our own flesh and blood – we were discussing. He's a good man, Dan Archer. Now we can forget about shame and embarrassment and get on with helping the lass. She's certainly going to need it.

Being an unmarried mother is bad enough anywhere

but in a small community like Ambridge it's even worse. Everyone knows each other and each other's business. If our Jennifer is prepared to face all the gossip among her own friends then she's a brave girl and deserves our support.

I know her young sister Lilian will certainly stand by her. Lilian knew before any of us and she didn't tell a soul. That's real loyalty and you might not expect it from a teenager. But then Lilian is rather unusual for a girl of nineteen anyway.

She's already got solicitors working out an agreement for her to rent stables from Aunt Laura so that she can open her own riding school later this year. There was a possibility that she might take over the Grey Gables stables with Mrs Woolley losing interest but she acted very grown-up and said that would be too ambitious for her. She doesn't want anything big and spectacular to start with.

Yes, she's got a clever head on her shoulders has young Lilian.

3 May 1967

Ned and Mabel Larkin have been very good about the rent for Glebe Cottage. They had it rent-free while Ned worked for us. Ambridge Farmers Ltd paid me the rent. But when Ned retired I let them stay on and never liked to mention rent.

The other day Ned came to me all official-like and invited me to tea in order to discuss the rent. Then blow me down if he and Mabel didn't insist on paying exactly the same as what I had been getting from the company. Not only that but they'd been putting it away each week since Ned left us and they paid all the back rent.

It was ever so nice of them because they could well have taken advantage of the situation. They knew I

wouldn't ever ask them to leave. Though what'll happen when Dan retires and we want to leave Brookfield I don't know.

You see, Glebe Cottage was left to me by the Squire's wife. I worked in service for her before I married and she was always good to me. She said I should have the cottage as a place of my own to retire to. It's been my dream ever since, though I often wonder if I'll ever be able to get Dan out of Brookfield.

I must say I couldn't wish for better tenants than Ned and Mabel. Mabel keeps the place spotless. She won't let Ned in with his muddy boots and if he wants to sit down in his working clothes he has to spread paper under himself first. So far as the garden's concerned, Ned keeps that beautifully. I thought as he was doing other folks' gardening he wouldn't have time for his own but I was wrong.

I'm a bit worried about whether they can actually afford the rent, though. I suggested Ned might come and do a bit of gardening for me and we'd forget the rent. But he's far too proud and said he was sorry his gardening time was all booked up!

4 August 1967

Trust Ralph Bellamy to take on a glamorous young thing to look after the sheep on his estate. Somehow I can't see the beautiful Miss Fiona Watson as a little Bo-Peep. She seems far too capable to lose anything! She must be a very capable girl to be able to break down all the male prejudices about women doing men's jobs.

Carol has known her family for many years and says she's very well qualified. She went to Studley Agricultural College and then worked for a couple of years in the heart of the sheep country on the Shropshire-Welsh border.

She certainly seems keen and very knowledgeable and full of go-ahead ideas. Her problem has been to find a unit large enough to show what she can do but which would even consider employing her in the first place.

Whatever I may think of Mr Bellamy as a lady-killer, I know he's a very good employer and all his staff get a fair chance to show what they're made of. If Miss Watson turns up trumps she'll be well rewarded by him.

I'm sure she's the sort that will grab the opportunity with both hands and do something with it. She doesn't come from an agricultural family but I don't think that matters. Her father's a solicitor and her brother's reading law at Cambridge. She was expected to do the same but took to the land instead.

Anyway they have lived in the country most of the time and I understand Fiona's a very fine horsewoman, so she must have a way with animals.

I'm sure she'll do well¹ . . . unless she falls under the spell of the charming Mr Bellamy!

1968

2 February

Our Jack has gone sick again and this time there's no doubt about it, the bottle is the cause of it. Poor Peg found him in bed unconscious this morning and there was an empty whisky bottle lying on the floor.

It's an awful nightmare, especially for Peg. She says Jack was just lying there looking a very bad colour and not breathing, as if his heart was about to give out or something.

¹Women's Lib. would have been proud of Miss Watson. Long before it became fashionable, she firmly established equality of the sexes by winning the job and doing it well. Who says the countryfolk are behind the times?—*Ed.*

I just don't know what we're going to do with him. He's been a terrible trouble over the years what with his mental disorder a few years ago and now all this gambling and drinking. It's enough to drive Peg mad herself. She says he's been having a good strong nip most mornings for some time now but she'd never seen him drink a whole bottle before.

Dr McLaren gave him some sort of injection and left Peg some tablets and very strict instructions that he wasn't to have alcohol under any circumstances. What with the drink and the fact that he never eats - he's just skin and bone these days - it's not surprising he collapsed.

He's been in a very funny sort of mental state lately, too. After really going downhill he seemed to be aware how close he was to the borderline and was trying to make a desperate attempt to get back to normal. He'd thrown himself into work, coming back into The Bull with a job in mind. He'd done a good breakdown of work between Ronnie Beddoes, Peg and himself. Dan said it was a really good piece of administration and we thought he'd got himself in hand at last. And now this happens.

You certainly can't blame Peg. She saw only too well what was happening and tried to warn Jack but when you get into his state you can't stand being humoured and every time Peg talked to him she just got her head bitten off and was told to mind her own business.

Dan tried to reason with him, too, but he wouldn't listen. He said if Jack kept hitting the bottle he was almost bound to end up in another institution of some kind. But Jack said he wouldn't go there under any circumstances. He went once, he said, to the mental hospital and he was cured and was grateful to the doctors but in future he'd be master of his own fate.

He said if he cracked up again it would be entirely his own fault and he wouldn't dream of taking up the

valuable time of doctors and nurses all over again. That will make it very difficult to get him into a nursing-home this time because he has to go voluntarily. Nobody, not even Dr McLaren, can force him to go.

But there's one thing for certain, the last place Jack can be allowed to stay is The Bull. All we can do until something gets sorted out is pray.

10 April 1968

Peg was really proud about how well her Tony is doing with Mr Bellamy. Even though his plans with Jack Woolley for development schemes have failed, Mr Bellamy has big plans for the future and he says he wants young Tony to be part of them.

Tony went to see him about the future and it seems he filled him in about some of his ideas. Mr Bellamy made it quite clear he was in farming for profits, for big productions. He said sentimental, fuddy-duddy talk about green fields and trees and hedgerows and the beauty of the English countryside didn't wash with him.

He's only interested in high farming – American and Canadian style with intensive breeding and production of livestock. Not two acres and a cow, as some folk around these parts would like to see. He says those days are gone and there's our own country to be fed and other countries besides and sentiment won't fill the bellies of the starving millions.

He got quite carried away with his thoughts and Tony brought him back to earth by asking him why he didn't pass all his plans on to the rest of the staff. That way, said Tony, he would head off the unrest and uncertainty the staff were feeling about the future because the rumour was that Mr Bellamy was packing up and moving to East Anglia.

Mr Bellamy was a bit taken aback that he hadn't

thought about it himself and was very pleased with Tony and undertook to tell the staff all about it at the earliest possible moment because he knew, of course, that the men should be taken into his confidence. After all, his big ideas are no use if he doesn't have the right men to implement them.

Tony's due to go off to the Walford Institute in Shropshire for a year and Mr Bellamy's pleased that he's got a place and has guaranteed to keep his job open for him when he gets back.

His only worry was that Tony might turn out like some of the other students who are making 'student' a dirty word at the moment. They are people with no knowledge, no background . . . no anything except a highly exaggerated opinion of their own importance, he said. They are trying to lay down the law about how their colleges, this country and even the world should be run.

Tony said he couldn't get a word in edgeways and when he said people were entitled to their opinions, Mr Bellamy said not when they are people who are being fed, clothed, and educated by the taxpayer and then behave like hooligans and think it's clever.

The poor lad was almost shaking in his shoes when Mr Bellamy finally made it clear that he wouldn't employ any so-called student who came to him for a job in that frame of mind.

I'm sure he got the message and in any case I can't see our Tony turning out like that.

27 September 1968

This is to be Jennifer's wedding day. I couldn't sleep a wink and just lay there all night thinking about it and how wonderful it is that everything has turned out so well for her.

When little Adam was born and Jennifer wouldn't

marry his father, Paddy Redmond, I thought her whole future was ruined. I didn't think she would ever be able to be happy again. But this morning the sun is shining, the birds are singing in the trees and the world looks a wonderful place from my window.

Jennifer really is lucky to find someone like Roger. He loves her so much that he was prepared to give up the whole Travers-Macy family if they didn't accept his marriage to her. He's also taken well to young Adam and that cannot be easy for a man to do, accept the son of someone else and your wife.

Not only that but he has rearranged all the honeymoon plans just because Jennifer was so upset about leaving Adam behind. Now they are going to take him with them to Spain. I will miss the little fellow. It has been marvellous looking after him these past few days and I'd love to be in Ibiza with them just to see him cavorting in the blue Mediterranean.

There are a lot of people ready to say Roger is making a terrible mistake and that he is throwing his life away, even his own mother and father. I'm glad he has had the guts to stand up to them all and go his own way. I don't think he will regret it. If I know my granddaughter she will put all her troubles well and truly behind her and concentrate now on making a good life for Roger and young Adam.

I wonder if his father will turn up today. His mother certainly will and his brother is going to be best man. It would just top everything off if Mr Travers-Macy came, though I know he doesn't like the idea of his son being married in the Register Office.

Me? I don't care where the wedding takes place. I know I will enjoy it and I know I will have my usual little cry at the crucial moment!



4 July 1967

Jill and I look like something from outer space. But we didn't particularly care what we looked like when we visited the Royal Show with Ned Larkin and found the ground all wet and muddy.

Top right: 28 September 1968

Sid and Polly Perks had a lovely time in Boulogne when they won a competition in the *Echo*. This was one of the nicest pictures in the paper.

Bottom right: 8 July 1969

This is a nice picture of Nora and Greg Salt, I think. It was taken when they were at the Royal Show over at Stoneleigh.



3 December 1968

Our Chris has been telling me about the problems Paul has in getting money out of some of his customers. If she had come to me in the first place I could have told her most of the folk who aren't very bright when it comes to paying up their debts.

She says things are so bad that there is a real danger that they might have to go bankrupt. They've tried everything to get folk to settle up. They even had Sid Perks go round personally and although he did very well, it still isn't enough.

Paul says his difficulty began the moment he started up in the garage business. He was so keen to get himself well known and to build up good will that he tended to take people on face value and was too ready to take people on trust.

It's mainly farming folk he deals with and that's embarrassing for all of us but it's not the efficient farmers that cause the trouble. Paul says it's the chap who isn't properly organised who lets him down every time. The chap who is forever scratching around to find a few quick pounds, and who is always just able to pay his mortgage. Jill says I would be surprised at some of the names on the bad-debts list. Somehow I don't think I would be, I've lived around these parts too long not to know folks pretty well.

Paul's going to take more advice from his accountant and have a chat with one or two other people like Brigadier Winstanley and Mr Bellamy. He's also going to get Sid Perks on his rounds again.

Talking about Sid, he and Polly still don't seem to be absolutely agreed over the stores and post office business. I think Sid is still upset that he couldn't apply to be postmaster himself just because he was a bit of a tearaway when he was at school and had a record.

Anyway Polly has got it all sorted out in her name

and she takes over in the New Year whether Sid likes it or not. He says it's hard to get enthusiastic about two gross of this or five crates of that and how many five-bob postal orders are needed.

He's going to keep on with his job at Paul's garage as an insurance against the whole thing flopping and Polly losing all her money. But I'm sure we'll see him helping out at the shop. It's not him to just sit back and watch other folk work. He'll soon be in the thick of it, I'll bet.

1969

21 March

Well, it seems as if someone has been able to calm down Hugo Barnaby at last. For ages he has been steaming around getting all angry about factory-farming and the so-called cruelty to animals. Now he seems to be much happier.

He had this pamphlet given to him in which there was a photograph showing some poor beasts in appalling conditions. It was pretty awful and I can understand him, especially him being a writer fellow with very deep feelings.

As it turned out, however, the photo wasn't taken in this country but somewhere abroad and some of the allegations made about the cruelty allowed in this country weren't true.

Like his cousin, John Tregorran, Hugo is a very determined character when he gets his teeth into something and he made it his business to find out all about factory-farming. He found that there was an Act of Parliament only last year which dealt with cruelty to animals and there are other Acts that ensure proper vitamin and mineral content of animal feeds, among other things.

Anyway, whatever else he's found out, Hugo now knows that the farming folk around Ambridge are not

half as bad as he seemed to think. And to show his regret for ever having thought it in the first place, I understand he is going to mention the village in his book. In fact, he is going to dedicate the book to us.

Phil suggested he'd put in the flyleaf something like: 'To Ambridge and all its layabouts.' But Hugo insists that he's going to make the whole last chapter a tribute 'to the village as I've known it and seen it. A picture of a community that presented a new way of life to me.'

He says this district gave him the tranquillity and peace of mind that enabled him to sit down and write his book. Without Ambridge he'd never have started, let alone finished it.

I wouldn't have thought that Ambridge was a particularly peaceful place what with all those arguments of his. But he says the arguments and different points of view are what makes the place so interesting. He's right.

23 June 1969

Dan really will have to remember that Phil is a director of Ambridge Farmers Ltd, and not just his son. They were going at it hammer and tongs the other day over something Dan had been discussing with Ralph Bellamy and hadn't mentioned to Phil.

Now they're rowing again because Dan had a meeting with Brigadier Winstanley and Jack Woolley about the proposed shooting syndicate and neither Phil nor Ralph Bellamy were invited.

The first thing wasn't particularly important, just some report or other that Mr Bellamy had completed about how many small farmers and farm-workers he thought would be going out of farming in the next ten years. It was only his personal viewpoint and he had asked Dan for his opinion and for that of the company.

Dan said he just forgot to mention it to Phil because the lad was so busy with his new pig-house unit.

The syndicate meeting was a bit more delicate. Bellamy hadn't been invited by the Brigadier because he and Jack Woolley seemed to be getting further and further from each other's point of view. Phil hadn't been asked because it was rather thought he was a supporter of Mr Bellamy in everything he did. That's what really made Phil see red. He said he agreed with a lot of what he said but he certainly wasn't anyone's yes-man.

Dan knew that only too well, of course, and did his best to smooth things out. Honestly, politics in these big business circles leaves me cold. Sometimes I could just take Dan and Phil and knock their heads together.

7 October 1969

I don't know what we're coming to these days. There was I in Sid and Polly Perks' shop in the village buying Scotch eggs – frozen ones – out of the deep-freeze. What's more, Dan is actually eating them and enjoying them.

I can remember the day when he wouldn't touch a Scotch egg or a faggot or a rissole unless I made it myself. Who would ever have thought we would give up making fresh stuff in favour of buying it. Mind you, these frozen Scotch eggs have really got some flavour and there's never any gristle in the sausage-meat. Or am I just kidding myself?

Maybe it's me that's getting too old and lazy to be bothered cooking the way I used to do? No, it can't be just that. My Dan's too fond of his belly to let me get away with serving up something he doesn't enjoy.

I never eat much of a breakfast myself, can't seem to face it. But Dan, on the other hand, couldn't face the day without a good, solid breakfast inside him and if he doesn't get his sausages and bacon and things every morning he's no use for the rest of the day.



Left: 10 October 1969

I couldn't resist this one of Carol and John Tregorran. They look so proud of the new baby and Carol was delighted to let me have it – the picture, not the baby, I mean!

Right: 21 October 1969

Jennifer always was a pretty little girl but now she's a beautiful young lady.

Below: 11 March 1970

Young Tony was just playing around with his new camera when he took this picture in The Bull. I think it came out jolly well.

Nora Salt is serving (from left) Walter Gabriel, her husband Greg, Sid Perks and Tom Forrest. In the background is John Tregorran.



It's funny how something as daft as a Scotch egg can make you change your mind about something you thought you felt very strongly about.

I've always been very much against all these new-fangled kinds of food in the shops. Pre-washed this, ready-wrapped that, sliced bread, tinned potatoes and everything you can think of pre-frozen! I was convinced they had managed to squeeze all the goodness out of it with their preparations or whatever they do.

Now I'm not so sure. It does seem to taste all right and the experts say the nutritional value is no different from fresh food. And there is one undeniable fact . . . it is all very much easier to cook.

1970

5 January

After all the trouble with rowdies just before Christmas, Peg has finally decided to close down the play-bar thing at The Bull and convert it back to a restaurant of some kind.

Jack hasn't taken very kindly to the idea after they had spent so much money on it, but Peg is the licensee and it is her that's responsible for the place. She says the play-bar attracted the wrong sort of customer and if they weren't careful they would get a terrible reputation.

I must say it would be awful to hear the sort of comment you get about so many village pubs these days: 'Oh. The Bull at Ambridge. Yes, it did used to be a very nice country inn but it's gone down these days. Landlord too interested in a quick profit to bother looking after the customers.'

Peg's quite right to take out the juke-box and those terrible one-armed bandit things. I never liked them in the first place. I always said they would bring trouble. And they can't afford to have any more trouble there

otherwise the licence might be in danger. I know that's what Peg is worried about and I'm sure Jack has sense enough to see that it is the only way.

The basic equipment in the play-bar could be adapted quite easily and without an awful lot of expense to serving good snack meals. Peg is thinking even of a steak bar with one or two really good items, like those frozen cooked meals that Carol Tregorran discovered.

They are very good. I tried one on Dan the other night and he wouldn't have known it was frozen if I hadn't told him. And they are very easy to do. You just take them out of the freezer and you can prepare it in a few minutes ready for serving.

There are quite a number of folk locally who will be glad to get a meal at The Bull again . . . though according to Jack, not enough to make it pay. Still, once they build up a reputation they'll attract more visitors of a better sort.

27 February 1970

While we've been packing up getting ready to move out of Brookfield and into Glebe Cottage all I've wanted to do is get the whole thing over and done with. But now that this is our last day here I suddenly feel very, very sad.

Dan and I haven't known any other home in all the years we've been together and for Dan it's even longer because he was brought up in the place. It's been a very happy home for us and I honestly wouldn't have wanted to live anywhere else. But now that Dan's retiring we have to move because the farmhouse is far too big for just him and me, and anyway Phil and Jill will need to be here if Phil's going to run things from now on.

Dan and I wandered through all the rooms last night and seeing everything looking un-lived in wasn't very pleasant. I suppose it's the end of an era really. I can

remember all the noise and bustle that the family used to make and the happy sounds of their laughter ringing through the house. Now they've all grown up and left, it seems very quiet with just Dan and me.

I'm not looking forward very much to seeing all the furniture that we've collected over the years being auctioned off to the highest bidder. I did hope that Phil and Jill might keep it for when they move in but that isn't very realistic. They've got all their own stuff and anyway their tastes aren't the same as mine and Dan's. What we thought beautiful they would probably think was hideous.

One or two things will be able to go to the cottage but it's not big enough to take as much as I would like. Still I mustn't get too maudlin. Life will be ever so much easier when we get into the cottage and Dan won't be tempted to rush around doing so much. That's a great blessing in itself and I think it will make up for leaving Brookfield.

19 March 1970

I just cannot take much more unhappiness. Retiring and leaving the farmhouse at Brookfield was a big enough ordeal in itself. But then there was all that terrible time when young Adam was kidnapped and missing for a whole day. Now this latest tragedy has hit the whole family very, very hard.

Honestly if anything else terrible happens I just won't be able to go on. When I got the phone call saying that Lilian's husband, Nick, had been killed it didn't register. They told me he died when he fell down a flight of stairs actually in a Canadian hospital. He had been sleepwalking it seems.

I still don't really believe it. It couldn't happen to young Lilian. She was so happy with him and she was so sure the treatment he was getting over in Canada

would cure his illness. What can you say to the girl? Why does God let such things happen? There don't seem to be any answers. All I can feel is blind despair and anguish. I don't want to do anything any more.

2 July 1970

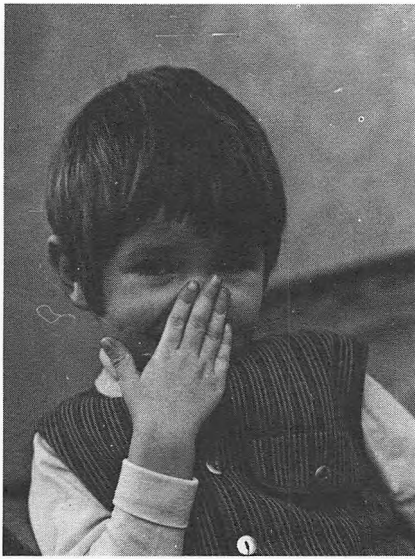
This idea of the WRVS to get some poor kids from the town out into the countryside for a bit of a holiday sounds very good. Quite a few folk around Ambridge might well help out and I know my sister-in-law, Pru, has one or two names in mind.

Pru got all the information at one of her WRVS meetings and the object is to give children from problem homes in the town a real holiday in the country. Let them get some fresh air and see the way things happen away from the smog and noise they have to put up with all the year round.

One or two folk might be put off by the fact that the kids are from problem homes, but that's daft and it's not fair either. It isn't the kiddies' fault if they have the wrong parents nor if they have some sort of personality problems.

Pru says most of them have never had a happy home background and that living among normal families would do them a power of good. Sid and Polly Perks would have been only too keen to have one of the kiddies stop with them for a while, but the WRVS prefer to use homes where there are other children they can mix with. It's a wee bit hard on them but I think it's right and besides, with them not being able to have kids of their own, having other folks' around would probably only upset Polly.

Chris and Paul had a bit of a disagreement over whether or not they should have one of the kiddies with them for two weeks. Chris was all for it but Paul wasn't too keen. In the end Chris won and I'm sure Paul will



4 July 1970

Jennifer and Roger don't like this shot of little Adam but I think it's gorgeous. He looks ever so bright for three.

Right: 2 May 1971

Jack Woolley looks every bit the country gent in this picture that the *Echo* took at Grey Gables.

25 December 1970

This was Dan and I spending our first Christmas away from Brookfield. It was a wee bit sad but when Phil and Jill popped in to Glebe Cottage they soon brightened things up.





muck in to give the lucky youngster a whale of a time when he does arrive!

29 December 1970

I never thought he would do it, but our Jack is definitely going up to Brookfield tomorrow to start work. I thought all his huffing and puffing was just so much wind because he felt out of the management of Ambridge Farmers Ltd.

No one took very much notice of him at one of the company meetings when they were talking about extra help being needed. Not until he insisted that he was fit and able to help. They didn't really want Jack there, I think they felt he was just sticking his nose in. But he was adamant and for a quiet life they minuted their acceptance of his kind offer.

Dan thought that would be the end of it but then Jack collared him later and asked what he would be doing and when he would actually be starting. Dan was fair flummoxed but finally had to agree that he could start as soon as he liked – doing the morning shift of feeding the animals and the afternoon stint of forklifting the muck out of the yard.

Jack didn't flinch at all but asked if he could leave it until after Christmas because Peg was so busy at The Bull that she needed his help there. He went to see Dan this afternoon and Dan tried to talk him out of the whole idea, but when he gets something into his head, our Jack can be very stubborn.

Dan made it quite clear that Jack would have to work under Greg Salt and that he would be treated as a new man who didn't know all the ropes. Jack said he did know something about farming but Dan wasn't having any of that and said he had only been a spectator for years.

For his own good, Jack will have to learn to do exactly

what he's told on the farm. He is out of practice and accidents happen so easily. I think he sees that point and he is only asking for a fair trial. I'm sure he will get it from Dan. As long as he doesn't make life hard for everyone, he'll get all the help he needs.

I am just going to keep my fingers crossed about this one.

1971

1 February

Yet another young man is leaving the land to find a better living in another job. It must be very worrying for those folk still relying on men instead of machines to do the farming.

Greg Salt has been trying to make up his mind about whether or not to stay on at Brookfield but Nora tells me he's finally decided to leave and he's got the offer of a job as a roundsman with Borchester Dairies.

Delivering milk doesn't seem to be an awfully good job to me but it seems the money is much better than he could earn in agriculture. It seems a terrible pity that a man can slave his heart out working in the fields from morning until night, caring for his beasts and looking after the crops, and not earn as much as a man who just comes along and plonks a bottle of milk on your doorstep.

Why, even in the newspapers you can read about men at the big car factories who earn £40 a week for cleaning out the lavatories or sweeping up the floor. It's damn disgraceful!

Mind you, you can't blame Greg Salt for any of that and he would be daft not to go for the most money he can get. I think the thing that has pleased Nora most about it all isn't the money, though. She is just very happy that Greg actually got up and went for the job of his own accord.

Usually Greg is very reluctant to do anything without first getting a big push from Nora and she's been worrying about appearing to be a nagging wife. Now that he's done this for himself, she's hoping it will give him a morale boost and restore his old confidence.

He badly needs some confidence because I happen to know he still hasn't plucked up the courage to hand his notice in to Dan or Phil!

8 March 1971

I don't know much about all this Woman's Lib. business but if it was left to the womenfolk then something would be done about the village school. The main wall is in a bad state and Dan says they're only going to prop it up temporarily.

It seems they won't do the job properly until it's been decided whether to keep the school or close it! Fancy even thinking of closing it. They can't do that. Dan's on the school management committee and when I asked him what he was going to do about it, he got all flustered and said Jill had asked him the same question.

I know he's only one voice on the committee but at least he could do something, not just wait and see. He got quite touchy and told me not to get on my high horse. Well, maybe I was fussing but I think with good reason.

Dan says the threat is still only a possibility and not a certainty, but then all threats are only possibilities until they happen and then it's too late! Still, I know he is concerned. I just wish he would do something about it and not just organise a sit-in as he suggested either!

It's all very well to say nothing is going to happen quickly and that the proper 'process' must be gone through. But the men on these committees are too fond of 'process' and nothing ever gets done.

Jill and Christine are both kicking up a fuss and I say good for them. The school means a lot to the village. Just because one wall needs repairing, there's no reason to close it.

Dan says the wall is only part of the trouble and that a lot more will need doing before long. There's a lot of money involved, that's why there is so much humming and ha-ing. They want to be sure it's worth it and it wouldn't be worth it if they were going to close the place.

I thought there were about sixty kiddies going to the school but Dan says there are only forty and even that number is likely to drop in the future.

Maybe on paper it makes sense to shut the school, but it will not do the village any good if we start sending our youngsters away every day by bus. They might get into the habit of going away and then one day they won't bother coming back to Ambridge.

19 July 1971

I wish I had been able to get along to that meeting in the village hall about Jack Woolley's scheme to create some sort of country park in the Ambridge district. It sounded very interesting and Dan said Mr Woolley had most folk eating out of his hand by the end.

He's very clever, Mr Woolley, because I know a lot of folk went along to make a very determined effort to oppose his ideas as they are frightened that it will ruin Ambridge and bring in all sorts of undesirable people and day-trippers and the like.

Dan thinks that it was calling it the Ambridge Country Park rather than the Woolley Country Park that really did it in the end. Mr Woolley made it quite clear that he didn't want to damage the amenities of the area and he had no intention of using up any good agricultural land either.

Mr Woolley said he wanted to create a park because it was one of the big things of the future. Anyone who had studied the subject in any depth, as he had, must know that in a very short time hundreds of thousands of people in Britain were going to have more and more leisure, more money and at least one car per family.

Dan didn't really see what he was getting at until later when he pointed out that those of us living in the country had already seen for ourselves how many people from the towns and cities were flocking into the quiet and peace of the countryside.

Mr Woolley's right, of course, and there's not much we can do to stop it even if we wanted to. It'd be like trying to stop the tide coming in at the seaside!

He threw in the fact that what with the new motorways so close by, there are something like five million people within a fifty-mile radius of Ambridge. My gosh, we'd be in trouble if even one per cent of that lot chose to come into our neck of the woods and I'm not so sure that that's what Mr Woolley's park might do.

Anyway, what he wants to do is open this park just outside the village on land that's mainly heath, scrub and hill. At the most there's only about a hundred acres of very poor-quality farmland involved so there's no worry from the farming interests.

That's all very well, but I can't see exactly what's in it for Ambridge. I agree that folk who have to live and work amongst all the dirt and noise of the big towns should be able to get away from it occasionally. The only trouble is if they are all sent in this direction they'll bring their cars and their litter and our lovely little village will become just as dirty and noisy as the place they're trying to escape from!

25 August 1971

Going back to Brookfield is a funny experience these

days. I still haven't got used to the idea that it's not my home any more and when I go to visit Phil and Jill I sometimes wonder where all my furniture and things are and it's difficult not to dash into the kitchen when it's teatime.

We had a lot of very happy times . . . Dan, me, Jack, Chris and Phil. I loved that place. Dan and I never knew any other home. He took it over from his Dad and I joined him there when we wed nearly fifty years ago. There aren't many of those years that I'd change either.

It was fun building the old farmhouse into a real home and I remember the thrill of blowing out the paraffin lamps for the last time when we went over to electricity. Dan and I were so scared to switch the blessed lights on for the first time that we sat in the dark for nearly an hour before we realised how daft we were and just burst out laughing.

Mind you, there was a lot of hard work in the place. I had to get up in the middle of the night to light all the fires so that the place would be warm enough for the children. Then cleaning out the big range every time I had to bake, that was an awful chore.

With washing-machines and spin-driers, the weekly washing is dead easy now but when I used to use the big copper out in that broken-down wash-house every wash nearly killed me.

It was a hard place to bring up children but none of them seemed to suffer very much by it and the three of them were always happy youngsters.

I'm glad it's stayed in the family and I'm sure Jill and Phil will be happy there.

Editor's Comment

The first of Mrs Archer's extracts was about a family gathering, and so is the final one. This is no coincidence.



17 September 1971

Young Lilian's wedding to Ralph Bellamy was a very grand affair which brought together almost everybody in the village. For Dan and me – with our golden wedding just round the corner – it brought back a lot of happy memories, even though ours was a much more simple occasion.

In this picture are Tony, Peggy, Jack Woolley, who was Best Man, Ralph, Lilian, Jennifer, me and Dan.

We chose to start and end in this way because it seems that the whole essence of life in the country is captured in the tremendous family spirit evident at most of the Archers' parties and get-togethers.

It is a fair analogy, we believe, to liken the country community to the family circle. When times are hard, everyone pulls together: in difficulties, they rally round to help one another: and if they are attacked from outside they band into one tight unit. And when life is good? They bicker amongst themselves: they nag each other: and interfere with everybody else's business!

Perhaps it's not so much different from life in the town?

3 September 1971

It's way past midnight and Dan's dead to the world but I just cannot sleep, I still feel so excited. What a day it's been. I think it must have been the finest wedding there's ever been in Ambridge.

Young Lilian looked a picture in that beautiful café-au-lait wedding dress with all the lace and Mr Bellamy – I'll have to get used to calling him Ralph now – made a very handsome bridegroom.

The whole village turned out and it was grand to have nearly all the family together as well. I do wish Jack had been well enough to attend but the doctors said the long journey from the clinic in Scotland would have made him even more ill. Still he did speak to Lilian on the phone and that stopped all the tears that weren't far away. She really wanted her dad to be there and she was understandably disappointed. She wanted to postpone the wedding until he was better but he wouldn't hear of it and now I'm sure he was right. Everything went off a treat and everyone was very careful not to remark too much on his absence.

Too much has happened today for me to remember

and if I don't put this little bit in my diary right now even that will have gone. Dan thinks me daft to put everything in this book. He says I'd be ever so embarrassed if anyone else read it but it's not for anyone else, it's just for me and if I enjoy it why shouldn't I do it? It helps me to remember things and going back over the pages makes me appreciate what a good life Dan and I have had.

At the reception in Grey Gables tonight, even Dan's eyes were a bit wet when all the family – even great-grandchildren – and everyone from the whole district suddenly toasted us and sang 'For they are jolly good fellows'. Somebody had let it out that the next big do would be our Golden Wedding party.

Dan's a soft old thing really. I couldn't have wished for a better husband and Jack and Christine and Phil couldn't have had a better father. It's funny how sometimes you think your children don't appreciate you and then suddenly, like tonight, it's quite obvious that all the love you have for them is returned. It's a wonderful, wonderful feeling.

When the reception was over, Dan insisted on walking me back home to Glebe Cottage just like he used to when we were courting and I lived up at the Manor House. In the moonlight, with all the stars twinkling and the owls hooting, it was ever so romantic. When he kissed me down by the stile, all the years faded away and we really were a happy pair of teenagers again.

It was a magic moment and for me it summed up all the happiness that I've had living in Ambridge.



Doris Archer's Diary

Selections from 21 years of *The Archers*

1 January 1972 is the twenty-first anniversary of the BBC Radio serial *The Archers*. All that time, it seems, Doris Archer has been keeping a diary.

Now Mrs Archer has loaned her diary to the editor of the *Borchester Echo*, and he has made this selection of some of the things that have happened in Ambridge over the last twenty-one years. Together with sixteen pages of photographs from her scrapbook, this is Doris Archer's story of Ambridge and the people who live there.

Peggy Archer's Book of Recipes

Concentrating on home-grown, home-produced ingredients, Peggy Archer presents a selection of country and traditional recipes as used in 'The Bull' at Ambridge. 17½p