

# **Elsworth Between the World Wars**



**An Elsworth Chronicle® Publication**

## **Foreword**

Elsworth Between the World Wars was written by Alan Farrow based on the recollections of Francis Allgood. It describes everyday life in Elsworth between the world wars and was published in two issues of the Elsworth Chronicle in 2008.

## ELSWORTH BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS



Francis Allgood is a true Elsworthian. Although he now lives in Over his heart clearly remains in this village where he was born, and where for many years he was a church warden. To this day he remains a member of the Parochial Church Council and is a regular member of the congregation.

As a lad Francis lived at Causeway House [the present No 1] where he was born. His father was the village coal-merchant and from his teenage years Francis assisted with home deliveries. At the tender age of 13 years he was humping one hundredweight sacks after school and on Saturday mornings, and frequently cycling to St. Ives railway goods yard to assist in bagging the coal.

In Elsworth the coal-yard was where the garden of No. 1 The Causeway is today, where also were stables for the horses. At one time the family kept six horses to pull the coal wagons on delivery rounds. But the advent of the internal combustion engine was to ring change and Francis's father became

the proud owner of the first petrol driven vehicle in Elsworth. A photograph of the lorry is shown overleaf.

Although the configuration of the village hasn't changed much since the 1930s – apart from in-filling – the way of life was more tranquil, as reflected in the street scene. Without motor cars it was characterised by horses and wagons and bicycles passing people on foot as they went about their daily business. There was no electric light in the village, the patchy street illumination being by means of paraffin lamps. In the vicinity of his home Francis can recall sites near the sluice, near the small stone footbridge opposite the junction of The Causeway and Brook Street, and near the church gate where the framework can still be seen on the side of a cottage. The lamp lighter in those days was Tom Throssell the village blacksmith, who also sold paraffin for lighting within the houses. Electricity did not to come to the village until 1940.

Another noticeable difference in the village scene compared with to-day was the appearance of the village brook. Then it flowed continuously throughout the year providing an attractive village feature, not as now a weed-bed for considerable periods during the summer months. The stream also served a useful purpose, acting as a sheep dip immediately downstream of Fardell's Lane, while a little upstream the work-horses were allowed to paddle thereby refreshing and cleaning their hooves.

While on the theme of water, Francis recalls that even in those not too distant days of the 1930s, water was drawn by householders by means of street pumps at strategic points in the village. As to mains sewage, this didn't come to the village until the 1970s.

A bygone age it would seem, but yet in the lifetime of many who are now absorbed in the rush and bustle of the 21st century.



### **Francis on the bonnet of Elsworth's first motor vehicle**

Francis Allgood's recollections of Elsworth between the two world wars would seem encyclopaedic.

As a lad he would visit his grandfather at his house in Brook Street which was later to be demolished by a bomb in the Second World War. Before retirement, Grandfather dwelt in his workshop in the rear part of what is now called Grove Cottage in Smith Street near the junction with Broad End. He was the village shoe-maker, a family tradition which went back many generations, although he was the last to pursue this craft.

Although the village was in many respects more self-sufficient than now, it was in no way divorced from the outside world. Although cars were few in number in the village, a relatively comfortable method of transport was provided during these inter-war years by means of a village bus. This was owned and driven by a Mr. Watts who lived at No.8 Brook Street. The bus was housed in his yard to the rear, being entered by the gap which still exists at the side of the house. Regular transport was provided between St. Ives and Elsworth on certain days and to Cambridge on one other. Mr. Watts, who had had his right hand amputated at some time, perhaps in the Great War, and had

instead a hook, moved to London just before the Second World War and the bus service was taken over by Frank Brand. Frank lived in what is now named Turner's Cottage, keeping his bus in an outhouse on the land of the present No.36 Smith Street.

For those in need of new clothes, the bus was a boon, particularly for those without a car or horse – the majority – as the alternatives were to travel by cart, or perhaps by bicycle or even walk. Daily needs in the main part could be met in the village. The bakery in the 1930s was on the Causeway; there was a grocery shop in Boxworth Road next to The George & Dragon; another grocery shop owned and run by the Throssell family was in Brook Street [now No.10]; and milk was delivered to the door from Ivyfold in Broad End out of churns, by means of a horse drawn cart. Horses, of course, were still of vital importance and blacksmith Tom Throssell provided for their needs. The Throssell skill as wheelwrights is well known and is commemorated in the village sign as a tribute in particular to John Throssell who was Village Clerk for 50 years. Joinery and other constructional skills were also available in the village. Social life, it seems, was healthy. There were three public houses – The George & Dragon, The Fox & Hounds [now The Poacher], and The Plough in Brook Street. The last named was popular with the children as from it sweets could be purchased. And once a year the Village Feast Week provided much merriment and good cheer.

As to occupations, working on the land was by far the most important, followed by those providing for the everyday needs such as those noted above. In the days of Francis's childhood the place of women was essentially in the home not in outside employment, but at the times when vegetables on the farms had to be cut or lifted women provided the necessary labour.

What is now the Old School building in Brook Street was vibrant with the voices of the children of the parish. Most pupils were on the school role from the infant stage until they left for the world of employment at 14 years of age. Francis was at the school in his early years, but at ten he was transferred to St.Ives Grammar School, to which he travelled by cycle.

In the Elsworth school there were only three classes. The infants occupied the northernmost room [on the left as you look at the building], with the higher

gabled section providing two classes for the remainder. At one time boys and girls were educated separately post the infant years, with sliding doors between the other two classrooms, but in Francis's time the classes were mixed, with a curtain separating the two classes. With such a meagre divide, the children were from time to time unintentionally made aware of activities in the other room, often to their amusement and interest. Cookery and woodwork were not neglected in those days and a separate building for this purpose was located off the Causeway, on the site of No.8. As with many of us, Francis has clear memories of his teachers. Mr.Darcy Addy was the Head, and taught the senior class. His wife, Amy took the middle class and Mrs Hale was responsible for the infants. Mr.Darcy supervised the boys for football - memories of chasing the ball on the present sports field come clearly to mind. In those days before the Second World War it was not kept as now, but was grazed by cattle. Longish grass characterised the land on which cow pats were not uncommon. No showers were available to remove coatings of those pats after falling or heading the dirty ball! Should the Head fall in such conditions, as once he did, the boys were of course delighted.



**A Young Francis Allgood**