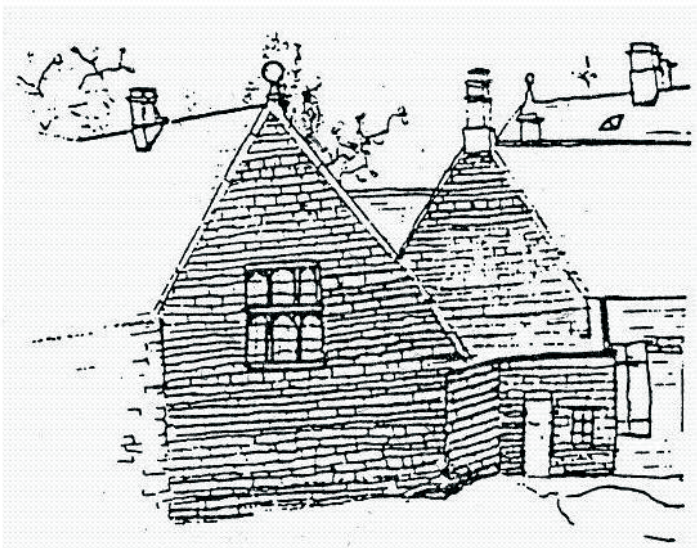


Childhood Reminiscences IV
Lea Bridge and Holloway

Edited by George Wigglesworth

Dethick, Lea and Holloway

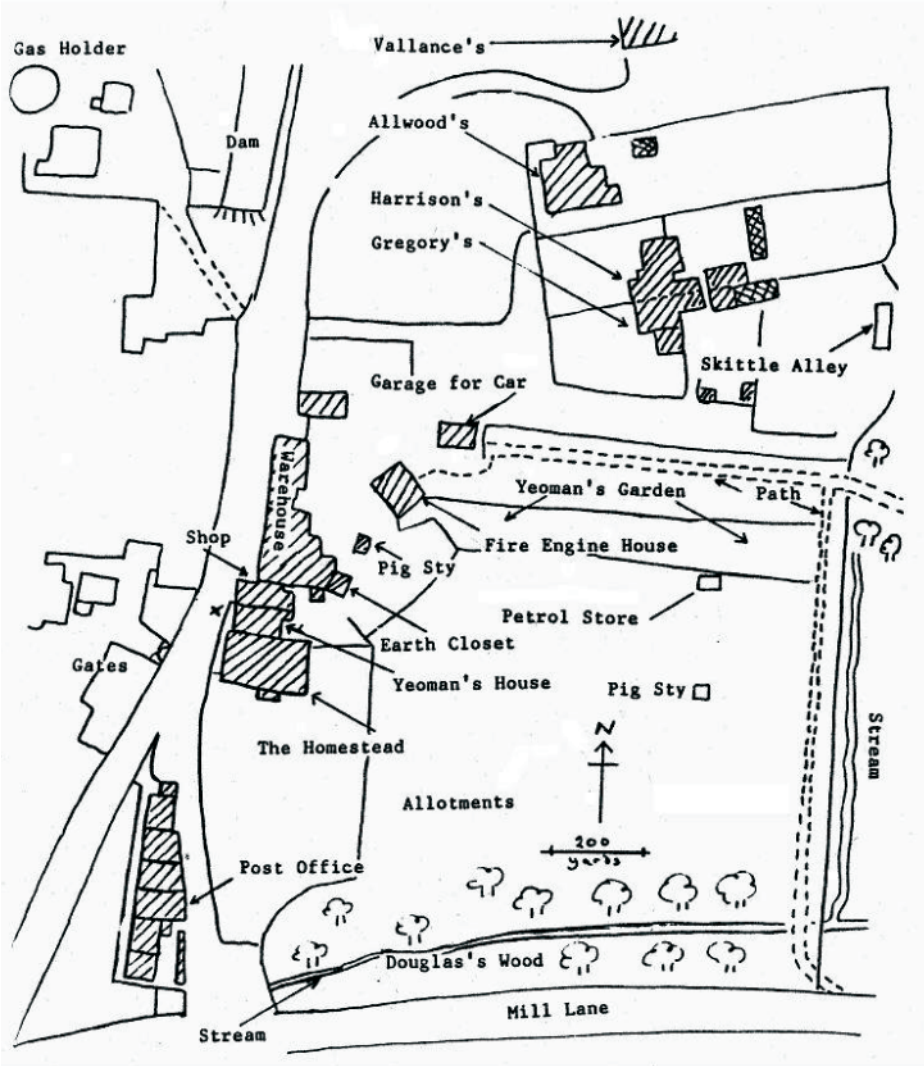
Life by the Mill Bert Yeomans

As a child I never really thought about it, but our house was probably about a third of what had been a larger and grander establishment, the house of the Smedley family in 1835. The rooms of adjacent houses interlocked in places and at one spot upstairs a mere wooden partition separated us from next door.

Our 'hall' was tiled and quite large but led nowhere except under the stairway into the living room which was indeed the only really liveable-in downstairs room. It had a coal stove in the darkness between two windows. Our 'middle place' was an unlit area of uselessness and the 'back place' showed signs of a former elegance but was now reduced to being a washhouse. The pantry was wonderful - cool, a stone slab floor, huge stone thrall, airy - a veritable larder of food.

The best part of the former building was Paulson's house which faced Mill Lane, later to be called 'The Homestead'. It had an ornate patio and graceful lawn with a gravel path to the wicket gate at the Mill Lane entrance. There were paths which went round the allotments; one led to Lea Hurst, the other, gravelled, all the way to Mr Jack Smedley's house, then at The Poplars (Lea Holme).

Our house also locked onto the house and shop on the other side where obviously alterations had taken place. Part of that later became a medical room cum rest room and dentist's room as part of Lea Mills' Welfare Department. We shared a common back yard and a rear exit up four steps and a steep path to the allotments, the shop-house garden and the privies. Smedleys stored petrol in sealed two gallon cans in one pig sty. Local boys helped the lorry driver, Mr Glover, to carry the cans up there, to be rewarded with a ride to Cromford Station. We kept a pig in our sty there: a flitch of very fat bacon often hung, salted in our pantry, with a large barrel of flour nearby. Mother baked a stone of bread at a time in her primitive coal oven in the living room.


Gas Holder
Vallance's
Allwood's
Dam
Harrison's
Gregory's
Skittle Alley
Garage for Car
Warehouse
Yeoman's Garden
Path
Shop
Fire Engine House
Pig Sty
Petrol Store
Earth Closet
Gates
Yeoman's House
Pig Sty
The Homestead
N
Stream
Allotments
200 yards
Post Office
Douglas's Wood
Mill Lane
Stream

Lea Bridge

There was a skittle alley behind Glenhurst, mainly for Harry Gregory, who although, sadly, handicapped held his own with the hefty men through judicious use of crafty 'grubbers'. Ethel and May Gregory were known for their music and nursing and Mr Gregory, as well as his managerial duties at the mill, was bandmaster. There was some jealousy at Lea Mills between those recruited for their musical ability and the local men. As an errand boy I would take deliveries up to Gregory's house whistling snatches from some brass band piece or 'The Messiah', hoping to impress Mr Gregory with my abilities! In the end my musical education was limited to the boys' section of the church choir under Mr Heath, with Miss Ethel as organist.

As boys we used the Wesleyan Chapel for a gymnastic club called 'The Fratres' ('a band of brothers'). The school was taken there during the extension of the present building. The gas made at Lea Mills was taken to Lea Green in a gas main which passed nearby so the chapel was well lit. But I remember once being one of a party of mischievous boys who turned the gas off at the main, plunging the assembly into darkness.

Allwoods lived in the next house to Glenhurst. Before they emigrated to the USA around 1923 their only son was my friend. They had a bathroom which I was allowed to use with Ian. The father had a potting shed, kept bees and goats and was very learned. In the dining room there was a mirror on either side and as I sat at the table I was awed to see myself reflected and re-reflected to eternity. When their great wooden crates left for Matlock Station, the USA and for ever, I had another, much sadder glimpse of eternity!

Lea Mills dominated our lives. My father and three or even four sisters worked there, as I did for a couple of years. All our eggs were in one basket and when my father was made redundant ('sacked' in those days) the bottom dropped out of our world.

We lived in such beautiful countryside and yet the house itself was a dark place of inconvenience and difficulty but there our parents cared for us with great love and made us very happy. Our move to Little London lifted my mother's heart despite the despair of losing work.

In the house at Lea Bridge our gas lamp ebbed and flowed with a frustrating light. Noise and dust were constant. I dimly remember hay or straw being spread over the road to deaden the sound and keep down the dust when someone was very ill.

The Midland Railway horse dray came each day from Matlock. Mr Purseglove's Clydesdales were the envy of local farmers but once my brother fell by their feet and got badly cut by a massive fetlocked foot. The milk floats from Lea, Lea Moor, High Lees, Low Lees and Dethick hurtled down on their daily dash to catch the milk train at Cromford, with drivers like charioteers. All day the whine of machines, the shouts of lasses' voices, the smell of wool, of oil, of steam and of cardboard boxes used for packing pervaded the house.

But after six o'clock a quietness settled over our little village and we played ball games and team games in the road to our hearts' content while the swallows and swifts screamed through the chasm between the buildings and the night watchman took over.

At a quarter to eight the next morning, after the cows had come to the farmer's calls of Coo-up, the mill blower would sound out, echo and re-echo mournfully, six or seven times from the surrounding cradle of hills. The jay birds from which John Smedleys took its logo would scream away from the fruits on the allotments and work would begin again in the wonderful world round our home.

Life of a girl in the early 1900s Mrs Minnie Redfern

I was born in 1906 at the house on Leashaw Road now known as Leashaw House but it was then Ivy Cottage for the front wall was covered in beautiful variegated ivy. The driveway up to the house had a large farm-yard gate and as a child, when I was sent to get the groceries from the 'beer-off' or off-licence up the Hollow, particularly in the dark nights, I used to swing the gate back as far as it would go and see how far I could run before the gate banged shut for I was afraid of the dark and this was before street lights.

At the age of 3½ I started at Lea Infant School. The girl next door, Ada Richardson, (who lived in the cottage which became a cobbler's shop) took me at first until I got used to going on my own. The Infant school, which is now the main hall and dining room, was made up into two rooms separated by a wooden partition. The beginners' class was taught by Miss Ada Harrison, a lovely lady, and the other was taught by the headmistress, Mrs Marples. She was a very good teacher but I think all the children were a bit afraid of her. She was a little bit deaf and the children used to say things about her under their breath. When she got annoyed we were all 'in for it'. She had a big ruler which she used to rattle our fingers with. You knew about it, especially if you had to bend your fingers to write.

Everyone had to go home at dinner time except for the few from Bow Wood who couldn't make it in time. I think I was the farthest away so I had to hurry home, get my dinner and be back at school for 1.30. In the fine weather sometimes Ada and I used to have a race to see who could get to school first - one of us going by the main road through the village & the other one going up Chapel Lane, up the wood and on to Long Lane before going down through Church Wood and into the field next to the school.

In winter time Miss Harrison had a beautiful big coal fire with a large fireguard round. If our coats were wet she would put them by the fireguard to dry out. In very bad weather we were allowed to take sandwiches and stay in school during the lunch hour but we were always supervised by one of the teachers. The cloakroom, which is now the canteen, had pegs with numbers on so we knew which one belonged to us.

We always looked forward to September for the annual Cromford Wakes. On the Sunday afternoon we used to go down to the High Peak Junction to watch the Fair people come along Derby Road. Mr Arkright, who lived at Willersley Castle and owned most of the property in Cromford, would not let any of the Fair people into Cromford until after Church Service on Sunday night so they queued up along Derby Road - often as far as High Peak. On the Monday afternoon we were let out of school about 2 p.m. so our parents collected us and took us along the canal bank into Cromford so we could have the first ride upon the roundabouts before dark.

My Grandfather was a stone mason working at Homesford and as I got older and during the holidays I used to take his dinner down Lea Hurst Park to the canal. He would come across the river bridge for which he had a key, to meet me. Grandma always made him a big meat and potato pie and dead on 12 o'clock she put it in a large straw basket with a cloth over it and I ran down the steps to Bracken Lane and set off across the park. It was always piping hot when he got it and we both sat down while he ate it (giving me some as well). I'd set off back with the empty basket and he went back to work.

As he was a stone mason there were nearly always about three months in the year when he couldn't work because of bad weather (snow and ice) and there was no money coming into the house at all, so we had to be prepared to meet the hard times. During the summer Grandma would prepare jams and pickles, etc to store. We always kept fowl so there were always eggs and poultry. We kept a pig which we asked Butcher Walker to kill for us in autumn so we had plenty of pork

etc. Grandma made lots of black pudding. I well remember how revolting it was having to stir the blood continuously. I mustn't ever stop or it would congeal and then it would be no use. Needless to say I didn't eat much of it although friends and relations said it was delicious.

We had two big damson and apple trees as well as gooseberries and raspberries so after making numerous preserves there was always some fruit to spare. I remember having a large zinc bath tub in the yard filled with damsons which we sold for 1d a pound. I loved being the little 'shopkeeper' and the little extra money was used for fresh supplies of food.

I looked forward to the days in the week when Mr Stoppard, the pork butcher who lived on the Common (now Church St), made his 'savoury ducks' (faggots). On my way back to school in the afternoon I called at his shop with a large basin and left it till I came home at 4 o'clock. It would have been filled with the delicious 'ducks' and lots of rich brown gravy - all piping hot - so I hurried home to have them for tea before they got cold.

Sometimes going past Mr Hall's bakery I could smell the lovely aroma of freshly baked cakes and pastries which he made in a little hut at the back of the house. If he saw us passing he often came out and gave us a bun or a delicious 'Topham square.'

Further along the road was the smithy and we would call in and ask if we could blow the bellows. It made a lovely glow and we could warm our hands by the fire on a cold winter day.

At the age of 6+ I moved up into the Junior School and soon after that there were lots of alterations and extensions done to the school so some of us were housed in the 'bottom chapel', the Methodist Chapel, so called so we weren't confused with the other one on Chapel Lane, 'top chapel'. I enjoyed being there as it was not so far to walk and we didn't have the biting winds to contend with as we went 'over the knob' by the cemetery. I think we were there about three months before going back to the school buildings.

During the 1914-18 war, every Friday we were taken to collect blackberries and rose hips which were sent away to be made into syrup. We were very eager to see who could collect the most for we were given ½d for every lb of rose hips we collected. By the time I reached Standard 7 we were given allotments in the school garden. The girls had the bottom plots (where the grass play area is now) and the boys had the area at the top near the school. We all had numbers and if the girls were stuck for digging or advice we could call on our boy counterpart to help out. My number was 2 and my counterpart was Herbert Taylor who helped me quite a lot. We grew lots of vegetables as well as flowers which we were proud to take home. There was a prize for the ones who produced the most.

I remember being a monitor in the top class and at playtime I had to fetch Mrs Berrison's lunchtime drink. She was the wife of the head-master and also taught in school. They lived at the school house. When I first went for her hot milk I was astounded to see the maid put salt in it. She said Mrs Berrison wouldn't drink it if it hadn't any salt in it.

At that stage of my life I attended the 'bottom chapel' Sunday School and we looked forward to our summer time treat which invariably was to Ripley using the 'coal boat' from Lea Bridge Wharf. During the week it plied between Lea Wharf and Hartshay bringing coal from the pit for Lea Lead Smelting Works. On a special Saturday in June or July the boat would be scrubbed and clean seats put along both sides all ready for embarkation. At 1 p.m. prompt we all clambered into the boat. The beautiful horse pulling the boat had also been given a good grooming and its brasses well polished. We loved watching the horse pulling us from the tow path. It went through Gregory Tunnel and out into 'Wide Hole' which is a broader part of the canal. This froze over in winter and the people from the village went skating there.

Our excursion went on via Whatstandwell where the horse was unhooked and taken over the road bridge because there was no tow path there. The boatman used his feet to get us under the tunnel to be reunited with the horse on the other side. Sailing merrily along, watching all the wild flowers and animals and singing songs we reached Hartshay, where

we had to disembark to walk up to Ripley. A delicious tea had been laid on for us at the Methodist Chapel there. After tea and a few games we walked back to Hartshay where the horse, fresh and well fed, was waiting to take us back to Lea Wharf. Tired but very happy we went home already looking forward to next year's treat, weather permitting.

At the age of 13, another girl, a boy and I passed an exam to become pupil teachers. This involved lots of work. We attended the pupil teacher centre in Bakewell where we were taught every subject. It was a long day for we had to walk to Cromford Station to catch the 8 o'clock train. After the day's tuition we caught the train at 5 o'clock so it was nearly 7 o'clock by the time we arrived home.

During the week we had two days observing and helping in all the classes; the other two days we could use the staff room to do our homework for the following Saturday. The other day was free to make up for the Saturday work but we often spent that either finishing our homework or preparing the lessons we had to teach. We had at least one observation lesson and one criticism lesson when the class teacher and the headmaster sat at the back of the class making notes. This went on for four years during which we acquired a range of teaching experience. At the end we spent a whole week taking our final exams in Buxton.

We were all delighted later to learn we had all passed to become teachers and so as we set out on our individual careers it was the end of my happy school days. After teaching in some other schools I came back to my old school to teach and stayed there until I retired. I have had a long and happy connection with Lea School and with my village where I still enjoy the life.

Lea Mills Fire Engine Turns out Bert Yeomans

It was early on a summer's evening when word came that a stack was on fire at Pear Tree Farm where the Outrams lived. Amid much shouting, advising and preparing, keys were found, the padlocks to the fire engine shed were undone and the engine revealed. It had a high driver's seat in front and a long pole for steering and control. There were also two huge brake handles, one each side of the seat.

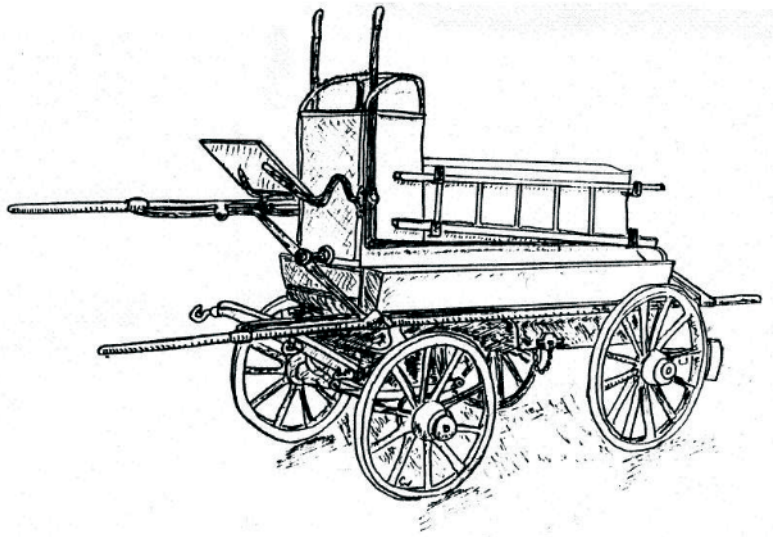
Some men such as Mr Peach had already gone to do what they could. The horses arrived from the farmers who leant us them and with some difficulty were hitched onto the strange harness. I was about ten years old at the time and they told me to climb on, hold the reins and pull the brakes on hard when they told me. We drew out of the shed and headed down the yard. But the brakes were big and stiff and I couldn't move them. The weight of the fire engine was beginnning to push the horses down the yard. Despite all my efforts the steering wouldn't move and the whole contraption was heading for the Spinning Room windows on the other side of the road.

At the last moment we stopped with the horses' heads and necks hard up against the window frames. The poor driver was much relieved I can tell you and reviled, but the men, who were coming in larger numbers, found that there was a locking pin in the steering ring under the front end and no-one had remembered to remove it. So amid many red faces the ten year old was absolved.

We set off at a trot past the mill dam and toiled up through Cowgate. A more experienced driver took us down through the smoke to the farm and immediately set up, uncoiled hoses and connected to the pond at the gate, above and near the farm. Men pulled the stack apart as the centre was burning from dampness and the resulting spontaneous combustion the bact erial activity had caused. There were never many flames but the smoke was dense and acrid. The heat of the interior became ever greater, but after many hours the stack was spread about and doused.

The labour of each turn of duty on the pump bars on the side of the machine was very tiring for the men working them up and down and the jet was rather feeble. As the water in the pond went down attempts were made to connect up with Lea Brook itself but the height the water had to be pulled up was too difficult for much success.

About 11 o'clock my family made me go home and by morning the excitement was over, the fire engine put to sleep again in its humble shed and the event forgotten. Except that is by one small boy who drove the fire engine when he was just ten!



Fire Engine

Holloway Post Office

Life at Holloway Post Office Miss Ann Jones

I suppose it is a little unusual that I have lived 66 years of my life at the Post Office, not always in the same building though because the post office has moved about. For forty eight years, since I was sixteen, I was in fact working there. My parents took over from Aaron Bunting's widow in 1901. Mr Bunting was the second sub-postmaster and he started in 1881. My father's first office was in the house now called Jasmine Cottage, just by Robin Maycock's shop. My eldest brother was born there, but the family moved to Post Office Cottage, just beyond the butcher's, where two other brothers and I were born. I was the youngest and we lived there until I was seven. Both the houses, like most along there, were owned by Mr Yeoman whose father had worked as agent for Lea Hurst estate.

Although my father was post master, in fact he worked as a joiner at Dawbarns at Whatstandwell before it was burnt down and it was my mother who looked after the shop. It was run in our front room, people came up the front of the house and through the door into the room, and we just went on playing on the floor in the other room, hardly noticing. The post office has changed since then. At first it was mainly just post; it's much more than that now, dealing with pensions and allowances, and somewhere you can get passports, driving licences, government bonds and pay your bills. The first change I can think of was the Savings Bank. We used to collect one penny savings stamps to stick on a card until it had twelve when we could put it in the bank. Mind you we quickly drew them out when we wanted sweets from Amat's shop or Mrs Worthy's, aniseed balls in a cone of paper.

When I was about seven we moved to Mill Lane, the last cottage as you go towards Lea Bridge, which my father named 'Cartref'. In my teens I started to train for a couple of years as a student teacher, just a bit younger than Minnie Redfern, but I had to stop at sixteen. My mother was ill and I had to stay at home, doing the house work and helping in the office with parcels and stamps, and we sold a bit of stationery, picture post cards I remember. I took over more and more, especially when my grandma broke her leg and she never got going about again, so my mother had to see to her while she was living with us for a number of years.

The office got busier as new jobs like pensions came to us. We never dealt with telegrams. They came from Lea Bridge, a busier office with all the work, parcels and so on, for Smedleys. They brought piles of them to us on Saturdays when Lea Bridge was closed. The letters came to us from Matlock which was our main office. We sorted them here and our postman, Mr Holmes from Cromford, took them round.

The evacuees during the war increased the work; they had money to draw. We had a phone in a box set in the counter and they came in to make phone calls. They expected to use it even when we were shut and we had to re-open so they could ring home. Eventually they put the

phone box by the Yew Tree. In 1954 I took over as sub post master, I suppose I had grown into it. The work was becoming more like it is now. We were paying army pensions and allowances. Widows at Tuesday, army pensions for the injured at Wednesday, old age pensions on Thursday. When they moved old age pensions to Monday and Thursday, there was only Friday left!

Every so often we had auditors in to check the books my father had done. It was a big job then before these modern gadgets. It was always a bit of a worry although we never had any problem. The men came from Matlock. We always had good dealings with Matlock, later we worked with Derby.

I loved the job, and really it was only the worry made me retire (I was 66). I had got nervous. The Post Office was the last house in the village and there was no street light near by, and in the dark days before Christmas I felt vulnerable. We were open until six when they collected the mail. It was very quiet by that time.

One afternoon the electricity had gone off and I was just walking in with a candle to put on the counter when this man came in. He jumped over the counter and said he wanted the money. I couldn't believe it. I shouted for Reg next door, mind you I don't think he heard me. I got out some coins, the notes were well hidden. I picked up the big black seven pound iron weight we used for parcels, (we didn't have automatic scales then). I am not sure I would have thrown it but it seemed to do the trick and he didn't stop to pick up the silver which was all over the floor. Next door's little boy had seen this chap get into the car, was suspicious and called his father. There was a lot of fuss then. There was only one photograph the police brought who looked anything like, he was a weedy bloke. The accountants came out that night to check up, but nothing had gone. They gave me a reward, I bought a watch!

Cartref

Deliveries Bert Yeomans

Transferring the pre-packed shopping from the supermarket trolley to the boot of the car the other day took my thoughts back to the Lea and Holloway Co-operative Society of the days of World War one and after.

Our family was 143 on the list of members and our £2 share gave us full rights to dividends, to the election of committee members, to grouse about the running of our village emporium and to rejoice when the 'divi' went to half-a-crown in the pound.

My hero and mentor at that time was Frank Else of Lea Bridge Farm. Whenever Frank allowed me, I would accompany him and his horses carrying coal from the wharf to Lea Mills, lead from the Lead Works to the wharf and house coal in one ton 'jags' to village homesteads - even up the precipitous Hillside at Holloway where even two horses found the road almost impossible and often frightened me as their heaving muscles had to accept defeat and we dropped stone chocks under the wheels behind.

But on Fridays a cleaner, quieter and more placid work occupied us as we hitched one horse to the dray and went up to "t'co-op" to load boxes of orders for delivery. I can still smell the butter, cheese, bacon, soaps, paraffin oil and all the loose groceries which had to be cut, weighed, measured, handled and wrapped as the boxes of orders were prepared.

Our journey on those Friday evenings took us round Lea Bridge, Lea Wood, Bow Wood, Castle Top, down Dark Lane and even as far as Cromford Bridge before we trotted back home by the dark Derwent along the level road.

At that time it was possible to reach Bow Wood with the dray from the entrance at Lea Bridge and emerge just below Castle Top. This route saved Frank a lot of time and carrying by hand so he used it regularly. I have memories of the two candle-lit carriage lamps at either side of the dray, and of the tipping, jolting and rocking of the boxes as the horse made its sure-footed way over huge boulders which protruded from the rutted lane.

As we entered Bow Wood proper another gate had to be opened and by the dim light of the lamp there could be seen on the flat-topped stones of the wall by the gate, clusters of empty hazel-nut shells left by squirrels and damaged snail shells where birds had fed. The road then took us up a narrow cutting at the side of a large rectangular area which had been cleared and ploughed - a strange sight in the middle of a wood. After that we went along a level, sandier stretch where grand beeches and soft grasses thrived.

The final gate let us out onto a grassy lane where Jack Millward did a little farming and kept pigs. Down on our left the lovely hamlet of Bow Wood and Albert Millward's substantial farm were situated. We did our deliveries and went to Castle Top, the home of the Taylors, since immortalised by Alison Uttley. She was a contemporary in school at Lea with my mother and has described this route in one of her books better than I ever could.

I like to think, however, that Frank and young Bert were probably among the last who used the road as a public right of way for deliveries by vehicle, I can't imagine a car, homeward bound from a soul-less supermarket, will ever pass that way and I can thank God for the host of happy memories the old track has bequeathed to me.

The Homestead

Annie Jones

Nellie Yeomans and Fred Fletcher in ‘She Stoops to Conquer’