

LAST TRAIN OF THE DAY FROM GRIMSBY

I was born in a small house on the corner of Brigg rd Barton-on-Humber Lincolnshire England on the 23/5/21.

Wyatt Earp died in 1929.

But while still an infant our family moved to a remote farm cottage near Thornton Abbey about eight miles from Barton. I lived in a farm labourer's cottage with my parents and sisters, total of five kids, also we had a lodger and we called him Uncle Jack .and like my Mother he was a Geordie.

My Father was a Lincolnshire man.

Uncle Jack Rickerby worked on the farm with Dad and the other labourers. We had another lodger called Big Tom and he worked in the signal box down at the railway station.

I suppose everyone in the house called him Big Tom because my name was also Tom and I was referred to as little Tom.

I was also grateful for the fact my Mother had not called me Richard.

Our address was N0 2 Station road, probably that was because the road led from the railway station to the village of Thornton Curtis, in Lincolnshire, England.

N01 station road was where the farmer lived, down near the station and on the opposite side of the road.

Our nearest neighbour was the farmer, his name was John Davey.

His son Michael and I would often play together in the farmyard to the amusement of some of the workers.

One day it rained all day but the next day was sunny so the men in the farmyard took off a huge tarpaulin that covered a half built straw stack and began adding more sheaves of straw from a wagon standing nearby.

Next to the straw stack was a huge puddle of water so Mike and I got a zinc bathtub from the barn and put it in the puddle of water.

I got a brush shaft and tied string to it and secured it to the two handles of the bath, then got a towel and we had a sail.

Unfortunately with two boys sitting in it mouthing "yo ho ho" the bath just sat there in the mud while the bloke building the stack were nudging each other and having a good old laugh at our expense, as the towel flapped listless in the breeze.

About a quarter of a mile away from the station in the opposite direction to our house was Thornton Abbey supposed to have been burnt down by Henry the Eighth.

In 1927 or thereabouts the land was flooded between the Abbey and the railway station.

Some of the old people in Thornton village said they could not remember it ever being flooded before and there was no record of it being so and I don't think it ever happened again.

Normally there was never anyone near the Abbey but on that particular Sunday it was different.

Most of the village people had walked the mile and a quarter from the village to look at the water that was between the Abbey and the railway station.

They were gathered at the edge of the water.

I remembered thinking "I wonder if they are all waiting for an arm to poke out of the water holding aloft a bright shining sword?"

Comments like "app'n wiv ed more raa-en 'an usual Fred" (perhaps we have had more rain than usual)

And Fred taking out his pipe, spat, just as a bumble bee was passing, and replied, "yis"

The bumble bee, having taken evasive action, and with it's drone now back to normal after having revved up to evade the wet missile flew on as if nothing had happened.

Near a tussock of grass an old lady was carefully laying out a tablecloth, patting it where the taller grass was causing bumps in the cloth.

Then calling to some children who were paddling in the water she poured lemonade into two small cups and brought forth a packet of biscuits from the basket on the grass near her.

Two youths were kicking a rubber ball about the same size as a football and the old lady told them in no uncertain terms what would happen should the ball fall on her nice clean table cloth.

They moved further away and everyone was at peace again sitting there watching the water while munching on their sandwiches.

I pondered the situation and wondered why so many people had nothing better to do than sit and watch a body of still water stagnating in a field.

Perhaps they thought Jesus might suddenly appear and walk on the water for them just to prove he could do it. 'Nah' I thought he won't have a road map, fat chance of him finding this place wi' out one.

About three hundred yards away was the railway station.

When the three o'clock Grimsby to New Holland train pulled into the station Fred pulled out a fat silver pocket watch from his waistcoat pocket and said to George, "e's near on foive minits layet".

George not to be outdone plucked his watch out and scrutinised it "aw dunno, ah mek it three an' a 'aef app'n".

To cap it all a young bloke stood nearby pushed back his sleeve with a delicate gesture of his forefinger and read the time from his wrist watch, then said to both blokes, "actually you are both wrong, the train is one minute early."

Then sauntered off with his nose in the air

George looked at Fred who was now red faced and puffed up, "cheeky young bugger" he snarled.

In front of our house we had a small garden usually full of flowers, and along the front of the house close to the wall there were lots of wallflowers and sweet peas, the hawthorn hedge stretched as far as the eye could see in either direction along the road.

Across the road was a small pond containing newts, tadpoles and stickleback fish.

At the back of the pond was a collection of bushes about seven feet tall.

Usually at five of the clock in the morning a pony and trap could be heard clipperty clopping past the house as it ran to catch the milk train to Grimsby, but in winter the noise would be muffled by snow.

I can remember one winter the snow was so high, well I was five or six years old and it was over my head so I would guess it to have been four to five feet high.

Anyway it stopped everyone doing what they normally did, outside that is.

Mind you in those days 1925—26—27 there was hardly any traffic except for the farmer's small car a bicycle or two and the rest were horse and trap or wagons.

Some days we got no traffic at all past our house except for the milk float at five in the morning.

Those were the days when Mum would put a house brick in the oven and when it was bedtime in winter she would wrap it up in a bit of flannel and we would put it in the bottom of the bed and put our feet on it.

Sometimes an iron oven shelf was used.

If the cloth had been rubbed off and you put your feet on it the following morning it would be icy cold and you pulled your feet up quick smart.

Sometimes a bloke would come round with a horse and dray, a flat cart with a metal loop over the top and a green canvas sort of tent draped over it. He would be selling tea sugar and coffee, oranges, bananas, cotton, buttons, and lots of other stuff you would not find on a farm in Lincolnshire.

Most other foodstuff was obtained from the farm, but the man with the cart was always welcome to us kids because we got the odd mint humbug or whatever.

One day I was in the back garden and I thought I heard a horn blowing.

Suddenly over our back hedge came a pack of hounds followed by red coated people on horse back who galloped across our veggie patch smashing down the canes holding up the beans and other greens.

Dad was furious when he got home after work and saw the destruction but like everything else you learned to live with it.

I used to go into the barn, which was a large brick place at the side of the house and I would turn the handle of the butter churn so mum could have a rest from it.

I would watch fascinated by my Mothers deft hands as she shaped and patted the butter in to an oblong shape, and the boards not unlike the ping pong bats of today.

If my mother turned a bat over and patted the butter, the bat would leave a square netting pattern on the surface of the butter.

The walls of the barn had the odd nail here and there and hanging from these some times would be pelts from rabbits or a fox.

The pantry was a place where food was kept, and was on a lower level to the rest of the house.

I think it was the coolest place in the house, inside were two long benches of brick and someone had skimmed the tops of these with a mixture of sand cement and lime to make what looked like a grey slab of marble on each.

One could usually find sides of bacon encrusted with salt curing on these two side benches.

There were also shelves held to the wall by iron brackets.

On the shelves would be stacks of bottles containing preserved meats and brawns.

Also dozens jars of home made jams and marmalade.

Jars containing pickled onions, pickled red cabbage, plums in heavy syrup, greengages in syrup, strawberries in syrup, the list goes on.

If it grew in our garden one could find it in our pantry.

That is if us kids didn't get them first.

In the living room oak beams supported the ceiling

Heavy-duty hooks had been screwed into the wood beams and from these hooks hung numerous hams salted and encased in snow white pillow cases

The centre of the ceiling had a hook with an ornate brass kerosene lamp hanging from it.

This lamp had two wicks and the glass had to be cleaned and the wicks trimmed about once a week.

The same kind of lamp adorned the front room ceiling. Anywhere else in the house at night was illuminated by candlelight.

So all in all we were more or less isolated in those days, little traffic, no radio, no phones, nearest phone was down at the railway booking office, and that was usually closed.

Only time it opened was when a train was due.

In the summer time and warmer days I would roam for miles on my own and would find every little nook and cranny to hide in should some irate farmer chase me.

If I saw a nice red apple and I was hungry I would climb the tree and take it.

Later I found out that the trees belonged to someone and I was in fact stealing, so I learned the hard way.

By that I mean because the irate farmer's dog had ripped a hole in the seat of my pants and mum had extra work sewing another patch on, so I got a clip on the ear.

It occurred to me I had three choices, one was to learn to run faster than the farmer's dog.

Two was to stop taking apples that belonged to someone else.

And three was to watch which hand my mum raised when one and two failed.

As winter approached and the days got colder I would go down to the signal box and keep big Tom company.

If few trains were coming, and that was usually Sunday, and with nothing better to do we would stoke up the stove in the old railway box car that doubled as a lobby.

Some times big Tom would read the newspaper and dose off to sleep while sitting near the warm stove.

I had a stack of old comics I would constantly go back to.

One day we were sitting there and all was quiet except an odd snore from big Tom when a little mouse poked its head out between two stacks of old office files stacked up in one corner.

I watched as he got a little bolder and began to explore a little further out, every now and then the mouse would rear up and the little nose was twitching sampling the air.

I touched big Tom on his arm and with a grunt he mumbled “wasser marrer?”

The mouse as quick as a flash had disappeared.

I whispered “ watch the mouse come out of the papers”.

So we sat quiet and big Tom said “ yu sure yu seed a mouse?”

And I said “yis”

If I remember correctly there would be the milk train at five, another train at seven thirty, one about eleven o'clock, another at three o'clock, then one at six and the last train a ten o'clock. I hope some one does not write to me contradicting these times because I am writing this from memory and since this was some seventy odd years ago I cannot remember which train arrived on time and which train was late on a given day.

But I vividly remember how they used to shine in their green livery (paint) and brass work used to gleam also a big L.N.E.R. (London North Eastern Railways), was painted in gold letters on the side of the coal tender (that's the bit immediately behind the engine with the coal in it).

My father's name was Charles William Barker. I know what suddenly flashed through your mind, and yes I am a chip off the old block, a right Charlie.

Be that as it may, to continue with this illuminating bit of rubbish, my father was wont to go a hunting, albeit it was illegal to shoot certain game out of season.

But Dad had got into the habit of going out at night with his 12 gauge double barrelled shotgun, and he couldn't care less about 'you are not allowed to do this or that. Bear in mind there was no radio to listen to and no t/v and I didn't know there were policemen till later on in the piece.

Then Uncle Jack brought home a gramophone.

And yes you guessed it, “keep yer grubby ‘ands off of it” was the standard order as soon as we kids perused this latest invention.

Little hands and inquisitive minds were all agog as the needle was lowered onto that flat black shiny spinning disk, and little heads were doing a stirring motion as eyes tried to see what was on that red or blue spinning label in the middle.

Then gasps of awe as the music and singing burst forth from the trumpet shaped horn.

And Mum standing there with a huge smile on her face while nudging Dad with her elbow and beaming at us kids wallowing in this new sound of music.

And if we were to touch the shiny black 12inch discs where the song was recorded we would get a whack across the head and a verbal reprimand like “lerrem aloan”

Some of the tunes that spring to mind were ‘Carolina moon keep shining’.

Another was, ‘When the moon comes over the mountain’, and ‘If those eyes could only see, and those lips could only speak, another was ‘Wedding bells will ring so merrily’, and how about ‘ She was only a bird in a gilded cage.

Beautiful old tunes, and lyrics.

One day there was no one in the house and I had been craving to touch the gramophone, I wanted to know what made it go.

Having inspected most of it and could make no sense of it I found I could indeed turn the winding handle, so I wound it up when suddenly there was a twanging noise.

I released the brake lever but the green round turntable just sat there and would not go.

I got down off the chair a bit sharpish and took off for the woods to get as far as I could from the gramophone.

Later when I plucked up the courage to go home mum said "we wondered where you had got to".

I left it at that until Dad went to put a record on the gramophone and I was in the starting position to be off.

Actually I was reading a comic but looking past the page at my dad as he turned with a puzzled look and said "funny, it doesn't want to play"

That made my day, I actually knew something no one else did, I knew why it wouldn't play.

Uncle Jack said "harraway Charlie man, ah'l hae a look at it.

After the inspection by Uncle Jack a grave statement was issued pertaining to the demise of the spring.

Dad asked, "have any of you kids been"--- that was as far as he got because mum was up out of her chair and saying "now don't blame the kids for this, how could they, it must have broke on it's own".

Gawd, I loved my Mum.

I kept down behind my comic and when I was sure it was safe to surface I went outside to look at the moon and breath a sigh of relief.

All the next day I was sure my Dad kept looking at me a bit funny, and he did ask me why was I wearing sand shoes instead of the heavier boots I usually wore. Perhaps it was my guilty conscience.

About a week later the gramophone came back from the repair shop and the house once again was filled with the sound of happy music.

And I kept a good distance twixt the gramophone and me; I was taking no chances, I was more curious to see what being a year older would be like.

Not only that I did not want to miss out on my next birthday presents, to say nothing of Christmas.

However it was not long before Dad got a fly in the ointment so to speak because he came home from one of his forays and found mum in tears.

What happened was Dad went on his usual safari out the back door, and down the garden path, through all the fruit trees, past the little house out back with a crescent moon cut in the door, and the swing hanging from a big old tree.

The big moon was shining and Dad was whistling 'Carolina moon keep on shining',

And a dog that had wandered from the village on hearing the whistle came running.

Only to receive a quick boot up it's rear from my Dad's boot accompanied by a verbal "git'aht'ov'it ya flea ridden mongril" and the dog limped off, stopping now and then to inspect and lick it's reproductive gear and give Dad a reproachful look.

Having got over the style in the back hedge and into the shadow of the hedge he made his way along it until he was half way across a field, then he would squat or sit and wait for what ever came his way. He usually came home with a rabbit or hare, a treat would be a pheasant.

One night he came home a bit unhappy because usually he would bag a dinner with one shot.

On this occasion he grumbled "I seed this owd 'are (saw this old hare) an' ah let go at 'im, an ah couldn't believe ah'd missed 'im."

"Ah let go wi' 'tother barrill an' 'e still kept runnin'."

"Ah reloa-eded an' ah let 'im 'ave anuther an e kep' goin', so ah let go agin' an 'e went inter a stoop", (tuft of grass).

“ An’ ah ‘ad reloa-eded an’ ah put one inter th’ stoop and wai-eted and cos ‘e di’nt cum oot ah went and stamped on it wi’ me foot, an’ he wer’ theer, dee-ad, five bloody shots t’ git one dinner”.

But I think what aggravated him most was the next day when he went to skin it it was so full of lead shot it wasn’t worth the trouble. The only consolation was that he knew he was not losing his touch in that every shot had hit and to quote my dad” ‘e must ‘ave been a tough old bugger any ‘ow”

The next dinnertime we had corned beef for dinner.

Then Dad found out what was bothering Mum.

It seems she had put us to bed after dad had gone out on one of his evening sorties.

Later on in the night mum was pegging a rug.

In those days when clothing got to the stage where it was cheaper to buy new rather than repair the old, the old clothes would be washed, cut into strips and saved in bags until there was enough material to make a new rug or mat.

To make a mat you would select a hessian sack and cut it along the seam to open it out.

One or more persons would get round it and with a peg of wood would push through the hessian the strips of different coloured cloth to make a pleasing pattern.

When the pegging was finished another sack the same size would be cut open and sewn onto the now finished top and serves as a backing for the mat. It was not uncommon in those days for a big mat to take months to finish and neibours who dropped in for a chat would sit and peg over a cup of tea and a yarn.

Mum was pegging one of these rugs because she had put us to bed and Dad was out with his gun.

Sitting on your own can get a bit boring so mum passed the time sewing or making jam, but on this particular night she was rug making.

Then Mum heard a noise at the front window.

A funny eeeee aaaa eee eeeee kind of noise and at first she took no notice, she thought maybe the wind making the tree groan, but then it happened again and because it was moon light out side and the paraffin lamp was not equal to the moon mum thought she saw a shadow of head and shoulders on the blind of someone out side.

Realising Dad always came in through the back door she grabbed the poker and rushed upstairs to us kids and locked the bedroom door and stayed there petrified until she heard Dad come in the back door about an hour later.

Dad said he would stay home for a couple of nights to see if it happened again, and it didn’t until the following Thursday, then Dad was again greeted with tears, “it was worse than the last time “sobbed Mum.

Dad must have been sharp in the thinking department because he put the time together and the days together and came up with Thursdays last train from Grimsby.

Made sense he thought because no one would come a mile from the village just to rub on a window, and the farmer was not suspect he was the last person my Dad suspected.

Anyway Dad kept going out at night and the following Thursday mum implored him to stay home but dad said “yer ‘ave nothin’ to worry about just don’t go ootside if you hear anythin” and over the back style as usual went Dad.

To quote my father this is what happened.

“ah gor ower the style at bottum of oor gardin an worked ma wayer roond until ah wus a’hind t’ bushes in front o’t pond in’t front o’ oor ‘oose then ah got doon inter the bushes an ah waeited, an then ah eerd the last traen from Grimsby cum in an it weren’t long afore ah eerd footsteps cummin up’t road, then ah seed this shadder (shadow) in’t moonlight go inter oor front gardin then ah eerd ‘squeek squeek’ as ‘e rubbed ‘is finger up an’ doon winder, so ah gits up an shahts, “na then, what yer up ter” an this shadder is oot the front gaet(gate) an off up rooad like t’ devil is arter ‘im.

Ah waetid ‘till e were fur enough awaer then ah let ‘im ev both barrils an yu should ‘ave seen ‘im jump.”

About two years went by and my father got a piece of twig in his arm whilst hedging and he had to go to Barton to get it looked at by the doctor, and the doctor remarked “ we don’t normally get people in here from your part of the world, you must be a pretty healthy lot, let’s see the last chap we had from Thornton was,---- yes here it is,” and he had thumbed through a book on the desk and was now pointing at a name, “yes two years ago I remember that now , unusual in that he had a backside full of buck shot”

My Dad kept his mouth shut.

T.O.B. 1997©