

Memories of hop picking at Park Farm, Bodiam

Brian Noakes

My family came to Bodiam each year from about 1953 to 1960. I came with my Mother, 'Peg', and my sisters Christine and Janet to pick hops for Mr John Levett at Park Farm, Junction Road, Bodiam (not part of Guinness Hop Farms).

We came from Southend-on-Sea, not London as most of the other 'Hoppers' did.

I remember great times (especially in the Oast House) with the other kids, including the Farmer's two daughters (boarding school girls who seemed very 'posh' to us).

Other names from memory are June Palmer and Eileen -----.

George the Cowman let us help ?? with the milking. He lived in one of the Cottages on the other side of Junction Road opposite Park Farm entrance.

Our Hopper's Hut was in the field to the west of the main Hut site (separated by a small wood) and comprised of one corrugated iron row of about six units, also an open fronted fire shed, and a movable "loo" with sacking door (in the wood !!).

We were collected from 'Junction Halt' by various meansTractor & trailer, Station Wagon and once with the Governess Cart (what a treat !!)

Our beds consisted of straw bales, topped with hay and Hop filled pillow cases.

'Health & Safety' would have a fit nowadays ... using 'eight hour' candles and paraffin lamps. (resting on the wooden framework).

We kids, left the Hop gardens a bit ahead of Mum, in order to get the fire started and collect water (from a tap on the Farm Building wall)

Most Sundays we would walk to Bodiam Castle for a picnic and on the way back pick apples and berries for Mum to cook a pie, in the tin oven over the fire embers (delicious wood smoke !!)

'Google maps' show that the old farm buildings are as I remember them (the Oast excepted !!) It would be great to look around again, especially where our Hut was sited ('Wickham Brook' field in the 'Bodiam Castle Estates' 1917 sales Catalogue)

Karen Levett (now Scofield) has replied to Colin's Memories.

I was very interested to read Brian's memories and see the photos, it brought such a lot back to me.

I was one of the "posh girls"!! certainly didn't consider myself posh. I went to a grammar school and only just scraped in!! I always hated going back to school whilst hop picking was going on. It was a time I absolutely loved.

According to my mother, the first time I went into a hop garden was when I was three months old,

because she had to go to a funeral. Shouldn't think I did much picking! After that I have very happy memories of sitting on the end of the bin to pick. Warm September days were the best, the ones that started with a mist which then burnt off to reveal a beautiful day. The rainy days were not so good, when pulling the bines down left you soaking wet.

Lunch was very often a cheese and marmite sandwich, eaten with green/ black fingers from the hops.

I remember my father's shout around the hop garden ..."Hops ready". At that point every one would start to clear their bins of leaves. Dad could be quite critical! He would come with the basket measure, record the numbers on their card and in his book and put the hops in the poke, to be loaded on the trailer and taken to the oast.

At the end of the day, about four, I think. We would head off home and then our (the posh girls!) jobs would begin.

First, collect the eggs, before they disappeared!! Then we were on milk duty. Mum would stand by the scullery door and fill containers with milk for the hop pickers. We would sometimes be called upon to subtly rinse out one that wasn't too clean and would have spoilt the milk. Finally, supper time. I can only remember slicing runner beans, but I'm sure we must have had something else!

Washing up done, we would sneak down to the oast to enjoy a bit of social time, although I was quite shy. I don't remember Brian, the names that stick in my mind are the Cackets, Joanie Plumber and two elderly ladies called Rose and Lyd. Those two had one of the very posh brick built hopper huts.

That really was one of the happiest times of my life.

Karen Levett,
Park Farm

These are the photos Brian can find of our time at Park Farm.



Brian, Robert and Unknown



Janet and Christine



Mum and Christine



Mum and Christine (left hand bin) 1960



Mum, Janet, Christine and Brian



Unknown, Christine, Robert, Brian, Unknown and Janet