

1. Mike's Verses

Number 69 was very popular

50 YEARS YOUNG.
(HADDENHAM Y.F.C.)

It all started 50 years ago
With Norman, Hammence & Waddelow
The founding of Haddenham Y.F.C.
The village's first marriage agency

Everyone thought it was really tops
An ideal opportunity to "view the crops"
Go judging all day at the county show
To ~~prove~~ how much about cattle you know.

Who went with whom, will never know.
You see it all happened so long ago
And tonight they'll have time to reminisce
Why they're Mrs as opposed to Miss.

They're meeting tonight at Ardentall
My word, I'll bet they'll have a ball
With memories of Robert acting the fool
Where 40 years earlier he went to school

David Fairchild is sure to be there
Of Y.F.C. affairs he's had his fair share
With Pat and Edna - I had to warn her
With all those old men - keep an eye on Lorna!

I'm sure the evening will have been really fine
With everyone having a super time
But I hope you've spared a thought for your men
Lonely Eddie + Mike and hard at work Ken.

IMMIGRANTS - ONE YEAR ON

Now I've been here one whole year –things not working out, I fear.

Haven't got big house so far, in hotel, only a four-star.

DSS give me free phone so every hour I now phone home.

Wives here, I now have three, all claim benefits for me!

Back home I have children, numbering four; tell DSS, they say
claim more.

Where I work there is much dirt, I tell them, they supply new shirt.

At work I certainly do the least; take prayer mat regularly and face
East

Getting to work is very far – so DSS provide me new car.

If I do crime, and someone tell – no problem, no prison, no empty
cell.

.My brother he get taken back via Spain; one week, and he is here
again.

They give him money when he go; that's the fourth time (they
don't know!)

I've got to meet more family in Dover; go to RJ's, buy new
RANGE ROVER!

A Wartime Childhood

From my mother a protective hug,
Overhead the rumble of a "doddlebug";
On her face, fear when the engine stopped.
I can't even recall now where it dropped.

doodle

From the RAF Hospital, in bandages swathed
Came airmen, the signs of bombing raids braved.
The clanking train as it went over the river*
Pulling truck-loads of bombs for more airmen to deliver

results

Over the fields by the stickleback stream**

Were ~~The~~ men behind barbed wire ~~were~~ prisoners it would seem.
"B" for banana in my alphabet book;
I was ten when my first bite I took.

Another thing, I thought it was funny,
That "coupons" appeared more important than money...
"When the war is over, Daddy will come home"-
....But he didn't.

- the Great Ouse
- **now Ely City Golf Course

Casting Bread upon Frozen Waters

Richard Jefferies once wrote that 'Woods and fields lose half their interest without a gun - I like the power to shoot even though I may not use it'. It was with similar thoughts that I set out into the misty damp fens, so disliked by those who do not understand them, on a cold winter's afternoon. I walked with my small Labrador along the frozen muddy drove. Each wheeling of the tractors filled with ice and looking like some complicated irrigation system reflecting the setting sun.

The drove along which we walked leads eventually to the river - that meandering portion of the Great Ouse River known as the Old West. These droves are very wide, a requirement of days gone by when the heavy horses, pulling the large wheeled Tumbrill carts would move to another track on the drove when the one they were using became too churned up and the cart would 'bottom out'. I pondered on this thought and smiled to myself. What is so new about three lane motorways? the speed was less I suppose.

My attention was drawn to what appeared to be a large flashing light in the sky. No, UFO this, only the sun reflecting on the white breasts of a large flock of Lapwings as they wheeled and tumbled in unison. Nature can be so spectacular. The silence was shattered by the roosting call of an old cock Pheasant and before he could croak the second note of his call, he was joined in a chorus of sound by all the other cocks sheltering in the reedy ditches of the fen, away from that lazy bitter wind. Why lazy? Because as they say in these parts 'It goes through you, not round you'

I was startled by a Snipe as it sprung from the ditch by my side, no doubt trying to find some mud into which it could probe with its long bill in search of food. I did not shoot as I still have enough feathers to tie that lovely fly of fast running waters, the 'Snipe and Purple'. I watched the bird as it 'Zigzagged' away into the setting sun. By now I had reached the river bank and climbed to the top. Fenland rivers have these large banks that run their full length to contain the winter floods. Without them all the fertile fen land would be flooded in winter and 'Old Captain Flood', as the fenman used to call the winter deluge, would win the day.

The frost of the previous night had been much harder than I, and the 'Met' Office, had thought. The river was frozen right over and as dogs and ice covered rivers don't mix I called the dog to heel, an achievement in itself, and put my gun away in its slip.

There is something strange about a frozen river, not least of which is the noise it makes as the ice cracks and bangs, due to the changes in the water level. So to round off this pleasant walk I set off along the water's, or rather the ice's edge, appreciative of the fact that I had such opportunities to enjoy being close to nature.

Rounding a bend in the river there was a pitiful sight. Five swans, the parents and their three offspring, had become trapped in the ice in the middle of the river. They could not fly off, they require a long 'Runway', they could not break the ice to reach the bank, nor could they get enough momentum to break off any of the ice around the edge of their few square metres of water, kept clear by their paddling. Purdey the Labrador stared at the swans then at me. Never before had she been so close, the swans hissed their disapproval.

With no prospect of a thaw in sight, it presented a situation which required urgent attention. Yes I did have an appointment at 5.30, but if I hurried I would have time to go home, pick up some bread and at least provide the birds with their supper. Once home, dog was put in the kennel, you can't give food to anything or anybody without 'little black dustbin' wanting a major share of it, even if it meant walking on ice.

I grabbed five bread rolls and hurried back the mile or so to the river, where my captive birds still paddled round their tiny pond. Was it frustration or perhaps an awareness of what the result would be if they stopped?. Having made swan like noises, which didn't appear to help one little bit, I slid the first bread roll across the ice, it 'plopped' into their little pond. In fear they rushed to the far side and in so doing, broke a little of the ice, thus making their swimming area a little larger. Some of the bread I broke into small pieces and managed to get these to come to rest on the edge of the ice, in reach of the swans with their long graceful necks

They ate none of the bread, in fact they didn't even look at it while I was there, perhaps they did when I had gone. I hurried off into the near darkness, back along the river bank to the drove. As I reached the drove I tripped on a frozen clod of earth and sprawled full length along the frozen mud and grass. Thank goodness I had left the dog at home, she would have found a way to laugh. As I picked myself up and brushed off the ice and mud, a thought came to me, 'I'm sure Her Majesty is not aware that I am risking limb, if not life, to feed her birds, and probably my efforts will be in vain and the sodden bread will sink to the bottom before the swans gain enough courage to eat it. Oh well, not to worry. If my five small loaves do sink to the bottom, perhaps they will feed two small fishes.'

Thursday or Friday the walk was planned,
And carefully the 'phone I manned.
Steph couldn't make it after all,
She was down in Windsor on a duty call.
But later, much to my delight,
A walk we arranged on Friday night;
And no matter if it should be wet or fine,
Steph would be here at half past nine.
She arrived to the minute, spot on time;
A beautiful morning, sunny and fine.
We were to do the three churches walk,
A chance to look and laugh and talk.
When the Pack-horse bridge we had seen,
We parked the car by Moulton's stream;
And though now well clear of the fens,
We felt at home with ducks and moorhens.
Then up the steep path by the side of the church,
Through leafy wood of Oak and Birch,
And in the churchyard, sombre Yew;
To emerge from the wood to a splendid view.
We paused and just soaked in the scene,
Such mornings are so like a dream:
Only the sound of the wind in the corn,
Not even a discordant motor horn.
The path cut across a sugar beet field,
A heavy crop it will certainly yield.
All over the field large flintstones laid,
Of which our forbears tools were made.
Then down the road for a little way,
The arrow down the path pointed out the way,
A house and garden full of charm,
Belongs to the owner of the stud farm.
And so to Gazeley, through the churchyard,
The view like that on a picture postcard.
Across the road, along the path,
Sometimes serious, sometimes a laugh.

We walked along on the field edge,
We had to walk close because of the hedge.
Well, that's my excuse anyway,
Oh I was having a super day.

The beauty in the woods was quite incredible,
An image in the mind remains indelible,
With pigeons crashing out of the trees,
A world of sunshine, shadows and ^{leaves} trees.

Some logs left in the oak tree's shade,
A suitable resting place they made.
I took the bark end, gave the smooth to you;
But with a squeeze there was room for two.

Then on to Dalham, the village of thatch;
For sheer beauty, it is hard to match.
A perfect village, a photographer's dream,
But turn a blind eye on the dried up stream.

Much used in this area is the Kissing gate,
What they are used for I won't relate,
But memories of them I keep in store,
And wish that there were dozens more.

A pub lunch at the Afflick Arms,
Just like the village, full of charms;
We sat at a little table, but all too soon,
We moved to a large one in the dining room.

Back towards Moulton by the dried up stream,
Was this all happening or just a dream?
We paused, and of the scene took stock;
Oh how I wished I could stop the clock.

But all good things must come to an end,
I am lucky to have such a lovely young friend
With whom to spend such a memorable day;
I'd love to repeat it if I may?

So when after your travels you get home,
Please Steph, pick up the telephone
And give me a call, and have a talk,
And more important, LET'S FIX A WALK.

PLANES AND BIRDS

The "Game Book" used by shooters in the early part of the last century has now often been replaced by the "Country Sportsman's Record Book and Journal" in which much space is provided to record events of a particular day. In my book the entry for the 20th.January, 2001 shows the bag as nil. The "Remarks" entry fills most of the page with the following observation:

Walking down Hoghill Drove (what a fascinating name!) on my way to the Old West, I noticed a male Hen Harrier (sounds a contradictory term), flying slowly at about two metre high above a field of stubble. I paused, concealing myself behind one of the few bushes which has been allowed to survive in the fen, and watched the superb slow-flying ability of the bird.

Suddenly it climbed very quickly and I looked to find the reason for the sudden ascent: flying above, at a height of about 60metre, was a bird which later turned out to be a Fieldfare, being pursued by a Sparrow Hawk. The Harrier joined the Hawk in the dog-fight (three Royal Air force names in one sentence!) I watched amazed for about five minutes as the battle continued, during which time the Hawk must have made about fifty attacks on the Fieldfare: all, surprise, surprise, with no contact whatsoever.

It attacked from above, below and occasionally flew off as though it had lost interest only to turn and race in again, the Harrier trying all the time to join in. It was rather like a bomber versus a fighter in Royal air Force terms

By this time I was willing the Fieldfare to escape after seeing its avoiding tactics. The drama came to a sudden close and unexpected ending: the Fieldfare swooped down in to a willow tree closely followed by the Sparrowhawk. The outcome I will never know as in the gathering dusk and being some way from the tree, I was unable to see. I would like to think the Fieldfare escaped – it certainly deserved to survive.

Although we are very brave on top,
There lurks there underneath,
With every single one of us
A terrible fear of teeth.

When you are only a tiny tot,
They hurt you when they come.
It feels like the Rock of Gibraltar
Fighting its way through your gum
When you get a little older,
Occasionally you're given a sweet.
But when you then go to the dentists,
The problems are blamed on your treat.

You lie in the chair staring upwards,
And 'OUCH', he starts the drilling.
You thought he referred to cream in a sponge,
When he said you needed a filling

And when you're a little older,
He says you need one out.

'Its only a little milk tooth'
But it still causes you to shout.

And then you get your second teeth,
Oh dear, you need an extraction.
Like an iceberg protruding from water,
7/8ths in the gum is the fraction.

The only ~~red~~redeming factor,
When you go to the dentist again,
That it makes the journey far easier,
If you're going to relieve the pain.

But when he says they must come out,
Before they've been seen by you,
You look at the forthcoming visit
With an entirely different view.

However the visits now over,
And though I'm sure you're in pain
There is one big consolation
The B-GGERS can't hurt you again.

AN ODE TO FIVE LADIES

For a man with five ladies in his life
And that number doesn't include my wife
St. Valentine's Day – to ignore would be hard
So I thought I would send a communal card.

KATE, she was first upon the scene
Working together five years we have been.
As curator, her job is to steer the ship-
On workdays- you should see the whip!!

ANN, I have known for many a year
Can't see her for dust when I have an idea!
Each week she cheerily plays her part:
Education Department and graphic art.

Next lady to mention- her name is JEAN.
Quietly she works behind the scene
Writing to companies to see what they make.
An archivist is important, make no mistake.

GLYNIS arrived and soon made her mark
(In the panto, I believe, she is totally stark).
She helps with maintenance and new construction:
If the workshop's untidy, there's a major eruption.

The latest to join the team is POLLY
A great sense of humour and always jolly.
About the collections she wants to learn more:
Teaching's a job I simply adore.

And so on every Wednesday alike
I wake and think "you're so lucky, Mike"
To work with ladies numbering five....
Wow! It's good to be alive.

Also with fond memories of Isabel, Carol, Felicity, May, Janet,
Viv, Charlotte, Two Sarahs, Gabrielle, Maureen and the Big Blond
from Sheffield. Love ,

MY MATE POLLY

Polly is a lovely gal

An she dew loike my rhymes.

Um a gooin to see 'er next Tuesday

So I think I'll wroite a few lines.

I uster go to the Farmland evry Wednesday-

Now I only go once in a while.

It's different now, there ain't no Polly

Fewer laughs, and to greet me, no smile

Now Polly is a sensible gal

And her advice is allus sound

She say, "Mike, when you're standin on the ladda

For God's sake, keep alookin at the ground!"

She reckons if ever I looked up

And these are facts, not rumours,

I'd be "put off" for the rest of my life

If I caught but a glimpse of those bloomers!

Polly wore trousers when she went up,

In fairness, that orta be said;

The reason I blushed, weren't wot I saw

It was her comment that turned my face red.

"I'd like to learn about the Fens"

She say to me one day

And bein a mean ole Fenman

I forgot my wallet and she 'ad to pay.

We ate muffins tigheter on one day out-

It was way down in Upware Fen.

Just like my epitaph, "Naughty but nice"

It's knowd as Muffin Corner, since then.

We've had some great times in the Past-

We'd allus get a smoile when we could

An' the other thing I used t' enjoy,

Was making her things outa wood.

I understand why she left the museum.

Bein selfish, I didn't think she oughta

But I hope she don't goo too far away

Dew LD and I will loose our daughter!

~~DON - I PHONED HIM.~~

Lorna decided to enter the show,
It's the sort of thing she likes you know
She entered some pictures, a ^{loaf} cake & a duck.
after all - you never know your luck.

She went round this morning - everyone was busy
And no need to mention - in charge was busy Lizzy
I hope she wins with her bread and the cake
But not Barlotta's picture, for goodness sake!!

But a word of warning - I think it's scary
When you stalked round there by a certain CAREY
You're safer with Lonie, with sad tales of his wife
But the village show shows all facets of life
The shelf in the lounge is rather high up
So I'll give it a dust before putting your cup
On display for all to admire
Barlotta's photo? - Just don't enquire.

This case took 10 mins.
Kev phoned - is O.K.

love you MXX

DIGGING THE RIVERS

The Yellow Bellies had no wellies
When they dug the rivers.
All they had were barrows and spades,
Sweat , wet feet and the Shivers!
They dug them straight so it would seem,
Without the help of a laser beam.
Cornelius showed them how it was done
But digging rivers was never much fun.

(Yellow bellies – name for a fen dweller: Shivers – the ague : Cornelius - Vermuyden)

THE ALARM

All was quiet - we were ready for bed
When it started going, enough to split your head.
Such a rush and panic you've never seen
But let's be honest - it WAS 11.15.

I grabbed the key and the alarm-unit stopper
Rushed out of the door: nearly came a cropper.
I pressed the stop button with all my might -
The stupid.....thing wasn't worth a light.

In spite of my efforts it continued to go
While I rushed frantically to and fro
I unlocked the workshop to find a tool
To try and stop it - I felt a fool.

Then suddenly it stopped of its own accord
Peace at last! Oh thank the Lord!
No chance to count our blessings, that was plain:
Two minutes later it started again.

I fell into the vehicle and turned the key.
It took not a blind bit of notice of me.
The noise it was really causing me pain
Then all of a sudden it stopped again

I lifted the bonnet and looked inside
Like looking in a monster with its mouth open wide.
I held the door open with the help of a chair
And we thought we had stopped it: what a naive pair!

We contacted Pymore: craig had no ideas:
That didn't help, it increased our fears
That by daylight the village would be at the gate
Shouting "CAR alarms we hate, hate, hate!".

So we tried the vodaphone to South Africa no less
Anything's reasonable when you're in such a mess.
"The phone is switched off" is all we got:
There's a bugger here I bet you could not!

We went inside for a cup of tes -
By now it was 11. fifty three
And thoughts were creeping into my head
Perhaps it is safe to go to bed.

Though the bed was cold it would not have mattered
'Cause all of a sudden the silence was shattered.
The alarm had started with a mind of its own
All I could do was to sware and groan.

A thought, then a panic entered my head:
Alwyn is often called from his bed
And being a good friend, I knew I could ask
And he would help me with this formidable task.

When he arrived it had stopped again.
Was I pleased to see him all the same!
Like a bomb-disposal expert he started to work
Whilst the fear of it starting in the background did lurk.

He removed the unit in silence with great care
That it could start any minutewe were well aware.
Meanwhile I had embarked on a caper
A sound-proof box out of towels and newspaper.

As we pulled the plug out, off it went again:
The noise was so great it caused one pain.
Into the box and the lid closed tight
That at last would reduce the fright.

The unit in the box continued to scream
Whilst Alwyn amusingly could be seen
Running down the garden, with box held high
All. I could do was to heave a sigh.

Alwyn's profession may have influenced his idea
If we bury it, it will quieten it, that's quite clear.
When it's quiet the unit we will then exhume=
A Home Office Certificate is required I presume?

We had a very short debate
As by now it was very late:
In the "NEW BUILDING" it had to go
Where it could scream its head off and no one know.

We locked it in and came up to the house
The locality at last as quiet as a mouse
Where a strong cup of tea we did all partake
Together with a wedge of Date and Walnut cake.

At 01. 30 we bade Alwyn a "Goodnight"
And off he went with his now fading light.
And I went to bed with a thought on my mind
What it is to have friends who are oh, so kind.

SEQUEL

Just before we went to bed
A thought at last came into my head
And after a search I found the key
To switch the THING off- you'd better blame ME.

THE EARITH GHOST (a true story)

The apparition appeared without any warning
I remember it well, that cold foggy morning.
I arrived at Earith before it was light
And went onto the Washes for morning flight.

For that's what it's called when the duck begin to fly-
As the first light appears in the Eastern sky.
I stood there motionless, enveloped in fog:
Not a sound, save the bark of a distant farm dog.

The silence was shattered by a call close behind-
A pheasant prowling to see what he could find.
It startled me: I turned and what did I see?
A figure standing there, ten yards from me.

No, it can't be- that's quite absurd....
Its approach through water I would have heard:
It appeared to be a figure with a hood and cloak,
But what was more terrifying, it exuded smoke!

Close by is an earthwork, the bulwark its name;
I wondered if this figure from that site came.
The hair on my neck, it stood out quite straight.
Do I stay rooted to the spot? Or make a dash for the gate?

Just then the sun broke through the cloud;
I stared and stared then laughed aloud!
Because what had appeared in the mist to me
Was the smouldering trunk of a burned willow tree!

MEMORIES OF WICKEN FEN

I first went to Wicken Fen
Over fifty years ago.
Pedalling on my bike from Ely
Arriving with cheeks aglow

I reported to the Keeper's House
Mrs. Barnes would greet me with a smile;
An ice-cold drink from the old hand pump
Which required pumping for quite a while!

Then to the Fen by the low-roofed cottages,
At the hand-gates would stand old men
Enveloped in a cloud of tobacco smoke
Reminiscing of times when.....

There was no building for Doctor Thorpe
And I didn't realise then
It was he who wrote the encouraging letter
With my permit to collect in the Fen!

As a boy, and in my early teens
I was very proud of my permit
And with the enthusiasm of youth
I vowed to be a "Naturalist Hermit".

There was the decaying remains of a reed boat –
Not unlike the modern one now there.
Many years previous it had carried its last load,
Now a home for bugs and beetles to share!

The wildfowl arrived and took up residence
On the New Mere which had reached completion.
Nowadays, alas, many cormorants come-
Coastal birds intent on fish-depletion.

THE OUSE (or HUNDRED FOOT) WASHES

For three hundred years the Washes have been there
Safe in the graziers' and wildfowlers' care
The wigeon would come, fifty thousand some seasons.
Now only a third of them: what are the reasons?

It's a Ramsar site, an SPA and also an SSSI.
The birds are well protected, RSPB's standing by.
All Winter by the WWT each day the birds are fed
Spectacular, but unnatural, I feel it could be said.

There were studies done on disturbance of birds
But that didn't include Quad-bikes, shepherding herds.
In nearby rivers one hundred thousand fish are dead-
Someone from Environment Agency should be losing their head!

Among the dead fish were bream, rudd and roach
And even that most rare of fish, the little spined loach.
So as more care and protection is organised each year
The whole situation is just worsening I fear.

Perhaps the real answer is to turn back the clock
And let the water be controlled by the keeper of the lock
And seek the opinions of those who remember when
The decisions were made by those who understood the Fen!

I think the design is rather poor,
When it self converts from five to four door.
And I can assure you it's quite a relief,
That you have an expert on hand in the form of Keith.

I've pushed from the side, I've pushed underneath,
But it won't come undone, its beyond belief.
Now I find it impossible to undo,
So there we go Keith, it's over to you.

What will I do if it won't come undone ?
Getting into the back is going to be fun.
I can see myself getting madder and madder,
Climbing over the back seat with the aid of a ladder.

It's something I'm sure I could not hack,
Carrying a ladder roped to a roof rack,
Getting over the back seat, one needs to be small,
I might manage O.K. if I weren't so tall.

Another way the problem I could overcome,
Is to get the help of Craig, my son.
He could sit in the back in the little side seat,
And pass me my fishing tackle - Oh what a treat.

There is another way round it I believe,
I could make my dog the objects retrieve.
But I think the onlookers would think it funny
When I started to train it by throwing a dummy.

They would comment that I would do better by far,
If I trained her in a field, not the back of a car.
No, that method's not the best of ideas,
This problem is worse than my very worst fears.

If I put in the back a sloping floor,
The objects would slide away from the door,
And end up close behind the back seat
But going up hill they would all retreat.

A TRUE FENMAN (MD)

I think that I'm a true Fenman-
For most of the criteria I meet:
With the exception of one that is,
In that I haven't got webbed feet!
In order to come here with Vermuyden
Great(times eight) Grandad left home.
He and his brother helped Cornelius
Drain the lovely Isle of Axeholme.
I was born at King's Lynn, at the mouth of the Ouse
And lived there until I was three –
Then moved to Ely for twenty one years:
I couldn't leave the river, you see!
Haddenham next, where the village lies
Just a mile from the River Old West
And now, right close to the Bedford Rivers
In Mepal, the place I like best.
And so the Fens mean so much to me
In Summer, or Winter's flood:
I think the reason's plain to see –
I've got rivers in my blood!

FEN WATERWAY NAMES

The rivers have strange names you know –

Take for example, Popham's Eau. - UPPER CASE

After a Bishop it would seem

There is one called MORTON'S LEAM

BEDFORD NEW and BEDFORD OLD

Named after the Duke so I am told.

The Rivers OUSE both LITTLE and GREAT

These two the Drainers did not create!

The WELL CREEK, WISSEY, LARK and NENE

(The latter pronounced to rhyme with "when")

Of unusual names we have a great wealth -

The FORTY and SIXTEEN FEET, a few LODGES and the DELPH.

But I love one above all the rest,

The slow, meandering RIVER OLD WEST.

MEPAL BRIDGE

Often on Mepal's Old Bridge "I stand
And stare" out over the rivers and land.
Birdwatchers, fishermen and shooters meet there;
All kindred spirits, in Nature we share.

Along the banks booted walkers go,
Map on chest, swinging to and fro –
They go in groups, stragglers at the back;
Normally those with the largest back-pack.

Here is the chance to feast your eyes
On the broad and ever-changing skies.
I go to the bridge for many reasons –
Not least of all, to observe the Seasons.

Spring; and on the Washes, water's often still there,
And the nesting waders, they begin to pair:
And there appears each day a changing scene
As the once-brown landscape slowly turns to green.

In summer, through the shimmering haze
A "Constable" scene where the cattle graze;
Beneath the bridge many house-martins nest
Flying dawn 'til dusk, seeming never to rest!

As Summer turns to Autumn, over every reed bed
Swallows catch "insect energy" for the journey ahead.
The flora now changes from green to brown –
The time is approaching for the Winter's Drown.

It's time now to get the cattle away.
From the Washes that were cut, they've carted the hay.
We've picked the blackberries and altered the clock,
At Earith the flood-water starts to come through the lock.

The Bewicks, the Whoopers and the wigeon arrive;
Suddenly the Washes all come alive.
Water bank to bank, no sign of any land,
And so, once again, on Mepal Bridge I'll stand.



THOUGHTS OF THE PAPER BOY (OLD MAN)

Do I deserve a Christmas bonus I ask?
Fetching the paper for you is a pleasurable task.
I've done the job for so short a time you see
Yet am rewarded like the Director of the BBC.

I'm pleased the paper's content your interest feeds
As well as the comments on THE football club, LEEDS.

On Saturdays, I admit, I often fumble
Trying to get through the letter box such a bundle.

But the most significant thing about my card
Is the poetry, written by such an obvious bard.
It appears to flow freely from Number 2
First from Michela and now from you!

Wilton Gardens Poetry society is the next step
We'd get verses from Dave and Kirt I bet;
No, perhaps not such a good idea
They'd be about Harleys or very sombre I fear.

So....we'll make it exclusive to Numbers 1 and 2...
You write to me, and I'll write to you.

ALAN IN MEPAL

Before he moved in, neighbour Mike he met
Who instantly thought, we'll get on, I bet!
At that time the Police Force was his job
(still is for two sons, Dave and Rob)
Then came the time from the police to retire-
No longer a uniform for Lorna to admire.
He felt he could not sit at home all week,
Another job he must surely seek
With Sanctuary.Housing, his next job was to be
(He's EXCELLENT dealing with people you see).
Meanwhile, Lesley found sanctuary at home, retired;
No longer by Building Society hassle inspired.
Alan from St Mary's Street to Witchford then moved;
Distance travelled to work, obviously improved.
Another thing about Alan we like,
Is, of course, his choice of motor bike.
Quietness, being a major factor,
No way do TRIUMPHS sound like a tractor!
A triumph his latest project has been
The weight loss achieved, can be readily seen.
With that achievement this verse I'll end
And with it, Birthday Greetings we send.

COLOUR FACTORS FOR PAINTING TRACTORS

The John Deere tractor is painted GREEN,
The predominant colour in the Countryside Scene.

With lettering and the occasional stripe
YELLOW, to match the harvest when ripe.

The most-common tractor, I dare say,
Is the little "Fergie", painted GREY
But nowadays Masseys are painted RED
To match the farmers' bank account instead.

I hear you ask: "Why are Fords BLUE?"
It's how the farmers feel with the CAP Review
And David Browns were ORANGE and WHITE
Before they became a rather rare sight.

JCB's? Bamford's a clever fellow,
Make your machinery seen, so paint it YELLOW!
And was it the bright ORANGE of Allis Chalmers
That brought them to the attention of so many
farmers?

ODE TO MICHAELA

Tonight I went out for a walk
Although I have no dogs.
And there in the darkness, down the lane,
I fortunately received two "snogs".

To claim two is perhaps over the top
'Cos the first was only rated "nearly"
So what I need, it's plain to see
Is much more practice – quite clearly.

So obviously what I have to do
To remove "nearly" from my rating
Is to see if I can find anything on the net
-But alas, there's only computer dating!

I could find no "snogging" evening classes
I've searched to no avail.
The other thing which worries me
-It may steam up my glasses.

So what are the skills that are required
To steer me in the right direction?
I'll look it up in the dictionary
Perhaps THAT will guide me to perfection.

Now I know where I went wrong;
The definition is "a kiss AND a cuddle"
And with that very sound advice,
In future I won't get in a muddle.

That cuddle was difficult to achieve,
With you holding a plant in your hand
And so with that full explanation
My poor rating, I hope, you'll understand!

See you soon, Mike D

Subject: RE: ODE TO MICHAELA

This poem is incorrect my dear
The first kiss was not 'just near'
In my memory this all quite clear....

I got out my car which had just been parked
With a plant in my hand
I struggled through the dark

At the side of the road stood a man with a light
I recognised him
Thinking that looks like mike!!

I walked over to him for a for a kiss and a cuddle
With the plant in my hand (you're right)
I was in a muddle

We had a quick chat and a lovely first kiss
You went in for another
I thought "I could get used to this"

After this greeting you guided us to the door
Next time we meet.....I'm hoping for more!!

Thanks for the lovely poem, so cheeky mike!!

x Michaela x

A MEPAL WALK

Every one of the Mepal walks I like
Especially by the Pickerels (a name for young pike)
It goes through the cluster of ancient elm trees
Resistant, thankfully, to Dutch elm disease.
It's to these trees scores of rooks come
Black-silhouetted against the evening sun
Back to their nests in every tree top
The height forecasting whether gales or not.
Beneath the elms many rabbits you see:
Alas, myxomatosis their destiny!
As you emerge from the elms, the church appears-
St. Mary's has been there for eight hundred years.
On Sundays you hear the single bell's note;
It hangs on the west wall in a double bell-cote.
In the grave yard opposite, find if you can,
The grtavestone of mister Waters, Mepal's last ferryman.
Across "earthworked" meDOWS, A Victorian Farm.
Mepal's a village just so full of charm
And when you go out on a walk
Most people speak; some stop to talk.

ARTIST (AB)

Ann was born in Cambridge
And educated at "The Perse"
But decided it wasn't for her
A life in business or commerce.
To develop, further her obvious skills
It was on to the Cambridge School of Art
Where she studied her favourite subject
Which in her life plays a major part.
And still she paints and teaches others
How to work with brush or pen;
Her love of birds, inspired by her parents
Taking her bird watching in Wicken Fen
In 1975 with husband Andy
She became a museum volunteer
And has, over the years, devoted so much time
She has hardly time for her career!

ARCHIVES

Their lives, now gone, we can share
The future, for the past, should care
Hard they toiled, little did they care
But from their memories, we can learn

They knew both times of peace + strife
They lived a very simple life
But they made the world that now we see
~~Handed~~ handed down to you + to me.

THE KINGFISHER (LUCK OR JUDGEMENT?)

The Wildfowler's reward, and with this I agree
Is not duck in the bag, it's what you hear and see.
Concealed in the reeds, I sat awaiting the duck
As is so often the case, I was out of luck!

When suddenly from the corner of my eye
I saw a kingfisher flashing by:
With back of iridescent blue
And orange breast of tropical hue.

He returned, and much to my delight,
On a nearby reed decided to alight.
I watched this reed start slowly to bend
And the kingfisher with it slowly descend.

He had chosen this reed as the appropriate perch
From where, for his next meal, he could search.
I thought: "It must break, into the water he'll drop"
But no! an inch above the water it came to a stop.

What made the bird choose that particular reed
That so precisely fulfilled his need?
Was it just luck or did he comprehend
With his weight on it, how far it would bend?

DESTROYING OUR HISTORY

We used to live in the Isle of Ely-
A name of which we were proud.
But in '74 the Boundaries Commission
Said the name was no longer allowed.

Huntingdonshire, that nearby county,
Also had to go that year
Together with the Soke of Peterborough
To make the enlarged Cambridgeshire.

When tourism and history matter so much
It makes one question when
A handful of faceless bureaucrats
Change it all with the stroke of the pen.

Would our hero Hereward
Take all this lying down?
No! he'd be fighting for our cause
While all we do is frown!

So what does this mean to us living here-
Do we benefit from the change?
Big isn't always beautiful
And to many, County Hall's "out of range"

The County of Rutland was treated the same
And so lost its identity.
But they fought, and eventually got it back -
Is that a lesson for you and me?

TROUSERS

There are objects it would seem
That can inspire the sweetest of dreams
But there are others I declare
That can result in a dreadful nightmare
The latter was the effect I must ~~declare~~^{say}
When I saw Lornas trousers hanging ~~yesterday~~
They hung in the bedroom in the half light
Enough to give the stoutest of men an awful fright
I know you go out with the Trousers ~~brigade~~^{lot}
But looking good in them you certainly do NOT.
And so I end with a heart felt plea
Do, ^{please} wear shirts - just for ME

PUMPING WATER

Controlling flood water is now "high tec"
But it hasn't always been so,
No computers, telemetry or electric pumps
Three hundred years ago.

On early paintings of the Fens
Windmill-like structures abound.
They're wind pumps, powering scoop wheels:
The first method the draining men found

They worked fairly well, that is,
Until the wind ceased to blow
And then what to do with the water,
The authorities didn't really know.,

Then the whole picture quickly changed
To an entirely different scene.
Not wind pumps, but engine-houses they built,
Heralding the arrival of steam.

Beam engines, not sails, were used for power
Which improved the situation a lot.
For now they could pump both day and night
No worry if the wind blew, or not!

The steam engine successfully did its job
For a hundred years or so
But the arrival of diesel engines and rotary pumps
Meant the steam engines, alas, had to go.

Fortunately not all the engines were scrapped-
As "museum pieces" some have survived.
Like the one at Stretham, which from dereliction
The electrical apprentices revived.

Diesel engines as in Prickwillow Museum
Eventually became obsolete.
Now electric motors power the pumps
Electronically-controlled while we sleep.

THE EARITH GHOST (a true story)

The apparition appeared without any warning
I remember it well, that cold foggy morning
I arrived at Earith before it was light
And went onto the Washes for morning flight.

For that's what it's called when the duck begin to fly-
As the first light appears in the Eastern sky.
I stood there motionless, enveloped in fog:
Not a sound, save the bark of a distant farm dog.

The silence was shattered by a call close behind-
A pheasant prowling to see what he could find.
It startled me: I turned and what did I see?
A figure standing there, ten yards from me.

No, it can't be- that's quite absurd....
Its approach through water I would have heard:
It appeared to be a figure with a hood and cloak,
But what was more terrifying, it exuded smoke!

Close by is an earthwork, the bulwark its name;
I wondered if this figure from that site came.
The hair on my neck, it stood out quite straight.
Do I stay rooted to the spot? Or make a dash for the gate?

Just then the sun broke through the cloud;
I stared and stared then laughed aloud!
Because what had appeared in the mist to me
Was the smouldering trunk of a burned willow tree!

THE TYRES

The tyres, originally donated by 'Fudge'
Are still in the garage, they just wont budge.
Alan, fetch them-you really must
Before they disappear, buried in dust.

You're a man who's really far braver than me,
To ignore for so long the request of L.D.
I was told 'Big H' was having a word
He either forgot, or you never heard.

If you and 'Big H' bought a pair of shorts,
It could be a new event at the Haddenham sports,
Tyre racing, the length of Aldreth Road,
Mind Robert's gate, he's coming out with a load.

Such a race would cause quite a flurry
And to a certain 'G.M.' considerable worry.
So Alan, please tell us if your interest's dead.
And we'll pass them on to 'FredtheTread'.

But surely Alan you can use these four tyres,
If only on the farm, for starting bonfires.
In them is left quite a lot of milage,
If only for weights to cover the silage.

L.D.'s agreed to keep them for one more week,
So this poem is written your help to seek
So please pick them up as soon as you have time
Which would justify me writing this little rhyme.

THE DAY OUT.....August 29th. 2000

The instant I saw that minidress
My day was made – I must confess.
To detect real beauty – my eye is trained.
I wouldn't have cared if all day it rained!

But it didn't: so off and up with the lark
To the beautiful trees in Nowton Park
Where together we did a two-mile walk
Enjoyed the trees, the sun ,the talk.

Then off again down the A146
Getting delightfully "out in the sticks"
For coffee, taken at the Scole Inn
Anne and Mike thought the atmosphere grim.

That beautiful barn on the Common at Hales
Even Paston to insignificance pales.
Then one at Waxham – barns galore
It could be described as a Special Barn Tour.

Then to Reedham – with ferry pulled by chain
Three adventurers crossing the Spanish Main.
Not all three, but only two
Desperately needed the Acle Loo!

Lunch at Potter Heigham on the church seat
Where Lorna another old man did meet.
Anne and Mike found it funny, I must say
But Lorna could have talked with him all day.

Though some old men she gives a hug
No way was she buying a 7.50 mug.
Had she known at that point Eric was out
He could have been in with a chance no doubt.

The Wind Generators at Winterton on Sea
All ready seen by Lorna and me

YOUNG PEOPLE OF MEPAL

When I first came to live in the village of Mepal
I was quickly made welcome by all the young people.
Not everyone spoke to them – which is very sad
And when I did I was christened "GRANDAD".

There were more of them then, I must say,
And several have gradually moved away.
NATASHA, the first I met, and Damian her brother,
Moved away from the village along with their mother.

LEWIS, on his motorbike, accident-prone,
Moved, and made Witcham his new home
They told him he really shouldn't ride
He told them it was for him to decide!

Others from time to time come and go.
LISA, LITTLE VICKI and some I don't know.
But there are the "regulars" I often meet
At the bus shelter or sitting on the seat.

First there is TARA – full of fun
Introduced me as "GRANDAD" to her Mum.
With her I often have a talk
When in the village, out on a walk.

Then MARK, or WORZEL, as he's best known-
He'll often round the village roam
Or on his bike, ride at alarming pace
He could win any cycle race.

ASHLEY, a level-headed lad
Often heard calling "What-O, Grandad".
Whoever the group – he's around
Every gang includes ASHLEY, I bet a pound!

AN ODE TO FIVE LADIES

For a man with five ladies in his life
And that number doesn't include my wife
St. Valentine's Day – to ignore would be hard
So I thought I would send a communal card.

KATE, she was first upon the scene
Working together five years we have been.
As curator, her job is to steer the ship-
On workdays- you should see the whip!!

ANN, I have known for many a year
Can't see her for dust when I have an idea!
Each week she cheerily plays her part:
Education Department and graphic art.

Next lady to mention- her name is JEAN.
Quietly she works behind the scene
Writing to companies to see what they make.
An archivist is important, make no mistake.

GLYNIS arrived and soon made her mark
(In the panto, I believe, she is totally stark).
She helps with maintenance and new construction:
If the workshop's untidy, there's a major eruption.

The latest to join the team is POLLY
A great sense of humour and always jolly.
About the collections she wants to learn more:
Teaching's a job I simply adore.

And so on every Wednesday alike
I wake and think "you're so lucky, Mike"
To work with ladies numbering five....
Wow! It's good to be alive.

Also with fond memories of Isabel, Carol, Felicity, May, Janet,
Viv, Charlotte, Two Sarahs, Gabrielle, Maureen and the Big Blond
from Sheffield. Love ,

GRANDDAUGHTER.....

Elly's off to Glastonbury
A place renowned for mud.
But let us hope that on this occasion
It will be sunshine, not a flood!
However, the purpose of this rhyme
Is to say "Hope you have a super time"

Also we are talking still
Of the lovely evening at Houghton Mill.
That evening was just perfect I think –
The weather, scenery and of course, the drink.
Please come again when you have the time,
Videos if wet, a walk if it's fine.

Your offer to come to an Antiques Fair
Really means a lot to me;
And so, below, are the next event dates
To see, if on one, you are free.

August 5/6th Swinderby Airfield, less compact site, "bluebox" loos

August 7/8th Newark showground, more compact, good loos.

Any date is OK with me.

Mike (Granddad)

INSPIRED BY THE STORM

You've been in our thoughts many times, dear Polly:
Lorna and I are so very sorry,
When I was ill and life was hard
It cheered me so much to get your card

I thought at one time I'd write you a letter
But with my ability at writing I hadn't better.
What could I do that would be worthwhile?
Something to restore your lovely smile.

I was woken in the night by terrible rain
Like gravel being thrown at the window pane.
Thoughts what to do came back once more
Like flashes of lightning, the answer I saw!

Not letters, not cards there's one thing I could
Polly more than anyone, loves things made of wood.
What form should it take – the idea flashes to me:
A sculpture, her initial, the letter P

With ideas spinning now in my head
At 2am I leapt out of bed
With pencil, rubber and a piece of paper
I'd soon sketched something I could make her.

I could make the hole using that machine
Could cut that curve, although not very clean.
I could shape it there, and smooth that part
I all but got up to make a start!

My promise to RELAX I really should keep
So I went back to bed, eventually falling asleep.
Today I will sort out the piece of wood.....
The finished article I'd really like to look good.
That's the story behind your letter P
It comes with BEST WISHES for you from me.
So you didn't get a letter, nor yet a card-
Just a sculpture and poem, from your carver/bard

SWOPERTY No sale No worry contact SWOPERTY

www.swoperty.com or
email swoperty@ely.co.uk or
telephone 01353668914-920 or
fax 01353668921

“If you can’t sell, SWAP”.... as seen on TV

What the press says:

Greatest idea since men lived in caves – The Times

Keep “abreast” of the house sales – see Page 3 and advert for
Swoperty on Page 2 – The Sun

Estate Agents are closing at amazing rate – BUT there is an
alternative – The Observer

We have had “wife swap” on TV and numerous programmes on
buying and selling houses; Now a clever entrepreneur has com
bined the two –Daily Telegraph

The first prize for the winner of judging the baby competition will
be a FREE consultation with SWOPERTY – Ely Standard

Record Canal Boat Sales – thanks to Swoperty – Canals and Rivers

Want to move? Go full steam ahead to Swoperty – Bure Valley
Railway News

Swoperty is by far the BEST – Which Magazine

Have confidence: our MD has great experience

THE GAME FAIR '96

A brief note from his old Codgership,
To thank young Cobbett for a splendid trip.
The ticket you gave me from the CLA,
Resulted in my having a super day.

It's somewhere I always love to go,
I was there by 8-30 you know,
And wandered around till half past three,
Arriving home at 5-30 for tea.

There were both Gunmakers and Fishermans row
The main highlights of every show;
With Purdey, Holland & Holland and all, ✓
If I win the lottery I will give them a call.

Friends are there from near and far,
Gathering at the beer tent for a jar.
And over there the Shooting Times stand,
By friend John Hushpreys is being manned.

He stands well bronzed, with a welcoming smile,
You can recognise that face from half a mile.
And from his being there hangs around,
Calls to make almost any duck sound.

There are stalls for pictures and stalls for books,
And various girls with incredible locks, ✓
All trying to tempt you to spend some money
To buy anything from a hat to some honey.

There are hounds for hunting, and the beagles,
Jemima parry Jones in the ring flying Eagles. ✓
An amazing variety of dogs are there
With owners showing both training and care

One would hardly believe there was enough room,
Out of theering rises a hot air balloon. ✓
And this is only part of the fun,
In the distance the crack of the clay shooter's gun.