

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Pip Wright, Lucky is the Name – The story of a Suffolk farming family as told by Alf Burrows (1904-1969)

Pip Wright is a popular speaker at the Heritage Circle. He held the riveted attention of the group at its February meeting at Rickinghall Village Hall when he spoke about Lucky Burrows and his farming family. His talk was based upon a journal kept by Lucky's youngest son, Alf.

Lucky was born in 1858 and was given his father's name. Its origin was from a bet. Lucky's grandfather was wagered half a crown (12½p) that he would not call a child 'Lucky'.

Lucky grew up in poverty in the 1860s. Agriculture was experiencing a depression but the family was further impoverished by his father's drinking. He left school at 9 but had learned two lessons in his early life. Never work for someone else and do not waste money in pubs. He left Suffolk and went to Burton-on-Trent to work in brewing but found life there no better. He decided to return home and had a number of temporary jobs on his journey. The worst was fishing off the Norfolk coast as he was constantly sick!

Consequently, Lucky decided to join the army and signed up for seven years, serving in Ireland, India and Afghanistan. On enlisting, Lucky sent his fishy, damp clothes home but without a letter of explanation. His family thought that he had drowned. He only found this out sometime later when he met a man from his village. He quickly wrote home to explain his resurrection.

When Lucky returned to Suffolk and married Alice Peck. They rented a small holding of 26 acres. Hard work and thrift meant Lucky was able to rent Oak Farm at Wickham Skeith.

Alf was born in 1904, the eleventh child and sixth son. His journal describes aspects of life on their remote farm which had no electricity or sewage provision until the 1950s. For example, his mother used bake for the week in a brick oven on Fridays. She heated the oven with faggots and then skilfully placed her pies and bread in the oven using a peel or long shovel once fire had burned out.

The journal outlines Lucky's plan that his sons would initially work for him rather than attend school. Then he would set them up on their own rented farm supporting them for their first year. His daughters would act as housekeepers until the son married. He had no ambitions for the girls. Only Jack, the fifth son, rebelled against his father's wishes and emigrated to Canada.

Alf hardly attended school and had left in 1914 aged 11. He was more use on the land with so many men away at war. His journal bemoans the fact that his father never gave him or his siblings any encouragement or praise. He describes an innocent life where he never heard anyone swear as he just lived with the family. He mentions chasing on his bike after a burning Zeppelin which eventually crashed near Saxmundham.

During the 1920s, the family moved closer to Stowmarket. A weekly treat was to attend the Thursday market with his father. Eventually, Alf met Eva Bannister and married her after a long courtship. In 1929 they rented a 200 acre farm at Dagworth which had a dilapidated house. They struggled with a number of problems, including low prices for food and dying animals. They almost gave up but eventually found a winning formula, selling milk from tea urns in Stowmarket. They survived the depression and World War II and managed to buy their own farm in 1946. Eva died soon after but Alf remarried a younger woman and lived until 1969 but the journal entries finished about 1952. Pip Wright has spoken to people who knew Alf Burrows. They describe him as 'lovely', like a 'big child', but he was a typical farmer. He was never making any money!

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on Wednesday 25 March at The Village Hall, Rickinghall IP22 1HD when Brian Dyes will give a talk about industry in Ipswich since 600AD. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy