

MY FIRST JOB

The first job at which I earned money was picking up potatoes at Court Farm in Shrawley.

It was the autumn of 1942 and I was ten years old. Schoolchildren aged ten and over were encouraged to help with all harvesting during the war, and we were allowed a week's holiday from school which was in itself a great incentive.

The field was a long one and the potato rows were dug up one at a time, leaving the potatoes themselves like large stones higgledy piggledy in the rich red brown earth.

The potato pickers stood astride the row, one below the other, each with our own patch marked by a stick and a bucket at our side. Once the potatoes were exposed we moved up our row, filling the bucket and tipping them into trailers placed at convenient distances apart.

When the row had been picked clean, then the whole process started again.

There was a certain amount of chatter between us as we finished our own patch and waited for the next row, and I suppose our backs must have ached, though I have no recollection of it, or of any bad weather.

We must have had some, or perhaps it was just to protect my shoes from the soil, but I distinctly remember sitting on the huge mudguard over the back wheels with my legs stretched out in front of me as the farmer gave me a lift back up to the farm, and I was wearing wellingtons.

The sky was blue, the air was warm, the birds were singing and what was more I was earning money. The thrill when I received a whole pink ten shilling note all to myself remains with me to this day.

It's strange how memory fastens on the good bits of the past, the rain and the pain all forgotten.