

Ploughing The Land

When the Great War (1914-1918) broke out, there were more vacant plots of land than buildings and therefore the Government temporarily confiscated the unused land for growing crops.

The ground was very hard clay which went into great cracks in the summer and road sweepings from *London* were sent by train to *Benfleet Goods Yard* and then conveyed by tip cart (Messrs. Grubb) to the fields, where they were ploughed in. The carter used to fall asleep and the horses found their way of their own volition.

After a year or so steam Ploughing was introduced. If you want to know how 'twas done, read Pratt's "TRANSITION OF AGRICULTURE". A large steam engine stood at each end of a given field and a cable connected the two engines and to this was fastened a deep plough. To commence, engine (a) gave a toot of its whistle, whereupon engine (b) gave two toots indicating "ready". Steam was turned on and the plough started off on its journey across the field. You can see steam engines used for this purpose at *Bressingham Gardens, Norfolk*. In smaller plots or fields, horses were still used.

Tractors came in about the beginning of 1918. Harrows were used in order to break up the soil. Crops were alternately:- Potatoes, oats, barley, wheat. Twice yearly sowing. Basic slag was sometimes ploughed in.

When the Armistice was signed, no further crops were sown and when the spring harvest was gathered the land reverted to the former owners (when they could be found).

In 1920, the big seven acre field, situated from somewhere between where The Appleton Arms is now situated and nearly Cemetery Corner was still in agricultural use.

At this venue came a notable event a "Reaper and Binder" (the first ever to be seen in this country) was brought from *Canada* to assist in the harvest, if my memory is correct, it was pulled by four horses. Spectators came from many points around, including a few photographers.

This really marked the end of the agricultural era.