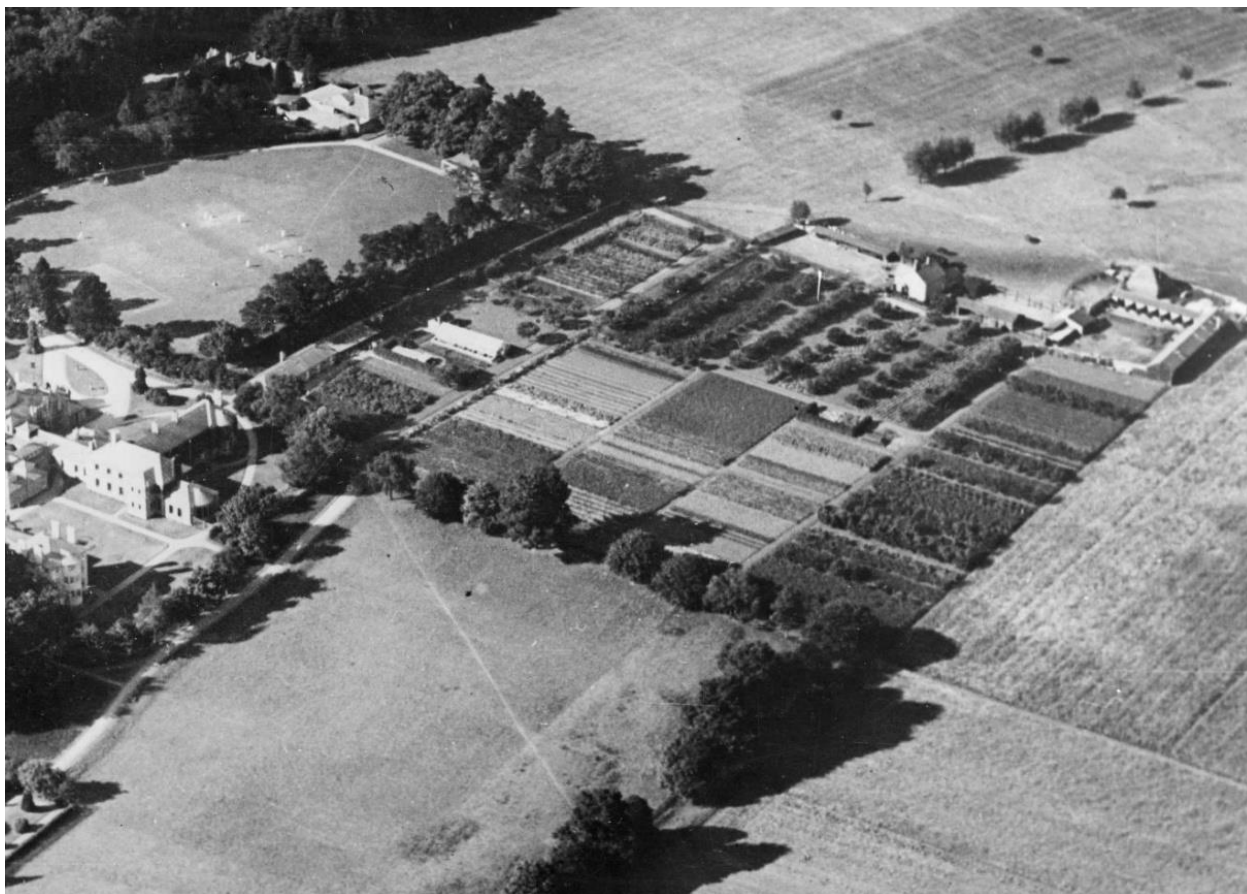


Warneford Hospital Farm, Headington, Oxford

The Warneford Hospital Farm operated from about 1918 until its closure in the early 1960s. My father was the Farm Manager from 1944 until 1957. He lived with his wife, Amy and three sons Andrew (b.1939), Mervyn (b.1941) and Roger (b.1949) in 'Farm Cottage', as it was known, but more recently re-named 'The Farmhouse'.

The aerial photograph below taken in 1928 shows the surrounding area before the houses bordering Gypsy Lane, Old Road, Valentia Road, and London Road were built. It also illustrates well the kitchen garden of the Warneford. Farm Cottage, which can be seen with farm buildings in the top right of the photograph. Farm Cottage stood on the drive which led from Warneford Lodge to the farm buildings.



*Aerial photograph of 1928 showing farm and kitchen gardens
(The nurses' home adjacent to Old Road had yet to be built).
(Photo: Oxfordshire History Centre)*



Farm Cottage c.1976. Later to be renamed The Farmhouse, and the only part of the farm still in existence. Now in Roosevelt Drive



Warren Cottages c.1976. These were two farm workers' cottages (now demolished)

Warren Cottages were purchased as part of the farm in 1918. They had no electricity, and Charles Waldron, who lived in No. 2, carried an accumulator to the farm each day to be charged, and returned with it in the evening. I imagine this power supply was supplemented by hurricane lamps as the accumulator was not large. I presume a similar arrangement applied to No. 2 Cottage. The location of the cottages was where the No. 1 Car Park of the Churchill Hospital now exists.

The Warneford Hospital Farm was purchased from the remnants of Southfield Farm in 1918. Southfield Farm had been a substantial holding of some 340 acres in 1851. It included the land that was to become Southfield Golf Club, and extended to St Clements and included South Park, Divinity Road, Southfield Road, and Hill Top Road. These roads were all built around the end of the nineteenth century. With the building of the surrounding estates, it is difficult to imagine what a rural area it all was.

The size of Warneford Farm was only about 100 acres. It was a mixed farm producing potatoes, milk, eggs, chickens, and turkeys for the Warneford and two nearby hospitals, the Park and the Wingfield (now called the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre). There were about twenty milking cows producing about 40–45 gallons per day. Cows were milked twice daily. Pigs were reared and normally sold to Walls for sausages. Wheat and barley were grown and sold at Oxford Market. Hay was grown to provide feed and bedding. Hay was also used in the production of silage. This was used to feed cattle during the winter, made by adding molasses to the hay, which was allowed to ferment in an airtight earth clamp. The main purpose of the farm, apart from food for the nearby hospitals, was providing occupational therapy to the hospital patients. The number of patients working on the farm varied according to the season.



*Harvesting wheat c 1953. Notice the height of the wheat.
Tractor driven by Peter Smith
with Charlie Waldron on the binder*



Stooks of wheat drying in fine weather

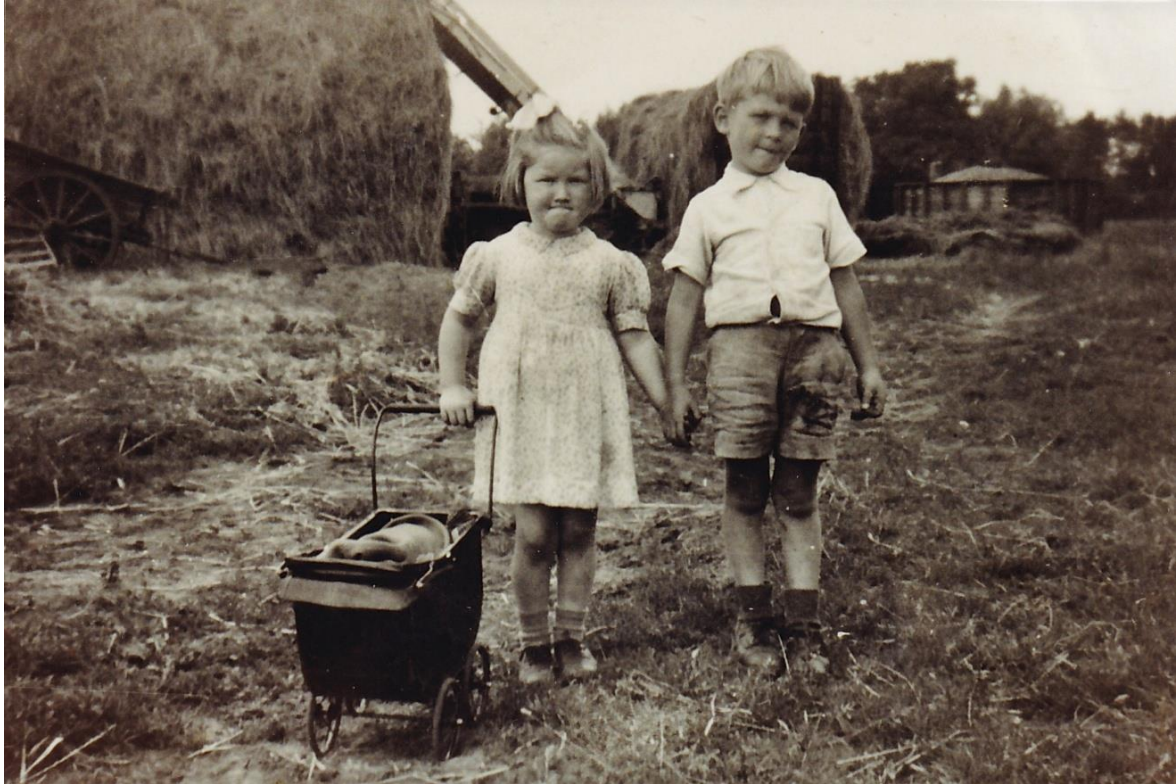


*Hay harvest c.1947 with Fordson tractor in Hill Top Field.
(Photo: Karl Hughes)*

When my father was appointed, the farm was not in good condition, and a lot of fencing had to be erected or repaired. The farm equipment was old, but funds were short so replacements had not happened. I suspect, but I have no evidence, that much of the equipment came from Southfield Farm following its sale.

Cows were hand milked. Power was provided by two horses and an old Fordson 'N' from about 1930. Ripened wheat was cut using a very old binder which bound the wheat using coarse string and then ejected it as stooks. I remember this piece of equipment was constantly breaking down, usually as a result of the string breaking. The stooks were then left to dry out while the weather was kind. An early twentieth-century threshing machine was used to separate the wheat from the straw. This was a very common traditional machine painted cream and a faded red. Power was provided by a stationary engine fired by coal. I have looked at numerous photographs of these

old engines but have not yet seen one that matches my memory. The straw was then baled and stored in the barn close by.



The Rickyard

I shudder to think what I might have been getting up to with this little girl. Talk about a roll in the hay, it appears to be something going on the manure heap! However, the importance of this photograph is to show the haystack in the rick yard. Haystacks were thatched by Charles Waldron when completed to protect from adverse weather. You can see the trailer ready to be unloaded into the elevator. Unfortunately, the stationary engine that would have powered the elevator and the threshing machine is not in view. What is just visible is one of the two carts pulled by the two horses. On the right you can see one of the doctor's houses occupied at the time by a Dr Beggs.



Harvesting approximately 1955



*Two horses and a Fordson tractor:
the only means of power inherited in 1944*



Harvesting hay c. 1947, the old hen houses visible in the background. (Photo: Karl Hughes)



Harvesting hay c. 1947 in Hill Top Field. The allotments in the background are now the practice ground for Oxford City Golf Club. (Photo: Karl Hughes)



Ferguson diesel tractor c.1955 ploughing the field adjacent to Old Road and east of Boundary Brook



The Cowshed (milking parlour), c.1955



*Potato planting in heavy ground east of Boundary Brook c.1950.
The tractor driver is a contractor, Stanley Holliday and Cyril Amore planting*

I spent much of my free time helping on the farm. This could be with my elder brother Andrew, feeding cows in the field with mangolds thrown from the horse and cart and later from the Fergy, with one of us driving, and the other throwing mangolds. Other tasks were cleaning the yard after the cows had finished milking, helping Dad collect swill from the Warneford, Park, and Wingfield Hospitals to feed the pigs, and putting sheets of cow cake through a grinder which turned them into 'nuts' for animal feed. Harvest was always busy and good fun. If the weather was very hot Dad would purchase a small barrel of cider as refreshment for the workers.

The area that now forms the Warneford Meadow was a good source of mushrooms in September and October. I would get up at about 6 am and collect them in a cardboard box and enjoy them with our cooked breakfast.

By the early 1950s the two horses had been replaced by a Ferguson T20 petrol tractor. Petrol was obtained from a hand-cranked pump located in the gardens complex. Also, a Fulwood electric milking machine was purchased to replace hand milking. Many fences were updated. My father built a basic open-sided barn in the farmyard in which to house the two tractors and other machinery.

Chickens, which had been housed in a number of hen houses, were rehoused in a 'deep litter' facility in a barn adjoining the main farm buildings. This resulted in improved efficiency and lower cost.

In about 1954 a second Ferguson was purchased and the old Fordson was disposed of.

In 1957 my father obtained the post of Farm Manager at a larger hospital farm in Hertfordshire. He retired in 1978 and died in 2001.

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