

## REMINISCENCES OF MRS.MAUD PLAYFORD

Maud Playford was the youngest surviving child in a family of thirteen and a sister of Ernest Plowright whose memoir is above. Her mother, Susan Plowright had her first child at the age of eighteen and went on to have on average one baby every two years until she was forty-five. All survived except for the last little boy. Maud was born in 1897 and was 77 years old when she wrote this memoir in 1974. She was married to Frederick Playford. She was also the aunt of Miss Joan Plowright who still lives in Castle Rising and describes her aunt as being great fun but as never having quite grown up! Maud's memories are of a more personal nature than her brother's but never-the-less give a taste of life in Castle Rising at the time of her childhood. She describes a time when children provided an important contribution to the work of the family and indeed of the village. Farming was the lifeblood of the village but even then Castle Rising was visited by some tourists. The children obviously took great pleasure in small treats, picnics in the fields, butter on the bread and even rice pudding if it was made with cream! People lived fairly frugally yet there is evidence of a sort of benevolent patronage from the wealthier families in the community, even from the King himself.

*I was born in Castle Rising, the thirteenth child of the family. We lived in a three-bedroomed cottage with brick floors in the front room and the kitchen and when I was old enough I had to scrub them every Saturday morning. My brother was supposed to help me after he had cleaned the shoes and the knives and forks. There was a big family next door and we played together in the field next to the house. Their mother used to do the washing for the young ladies at the Rectory<sup>1</sup>. Their dresses were all frills and laces and she had to gofer the frills with gofer irons. She had a big box mangle.*

*On Good Fridays we had to gather primroses and daffodils from the roundabout at the bottom of the field we played in to decorate the church for Easter. Then, at Easter the Sunday School children had to wear cream cashmere cloaks and white straw hats with a red band around. In winter they wore red cloaks.*

*The lady at the shop (Miss Rosemary Ewer) was in charge of the Sunday School. When she went to church she always wore a big cloak with a hood and the boys used to put all sorts of things in her hood. She also wore a dress with a long train and when she walked the dust used to fly. As we went back to school after dinner time she would be scrubbing the shop doorstep and if we could walk over that for a ha'pennyworth of sweets, we would.*

*We had a donkey cart and my mother used it to go to Lynn to do her shopping. She took me with her most times because if she left me at home my brothers used to play me up and then there were always tears. If she did leave me, the boys would play shove-ha'penny and threaten me that if I told mother about it they would put me down the closet hole!*

*The children in the village were given three treats every year. First was the summer trip to the sea-side at Hunstanton. Forms were put in a farm wagon for us to ride in. Next was the Sunday School treat in the Rectory meadow where we had games and races and a good tea provided by the Rector and his wife (Rev. and Mrs. Thursby). The Christmas treat was given to us by Lady Farquhar from the Hall. We were each given a present and there was a Christmas tree and a real Father Christmas. There was always a lovely tea with real butter on bread, with jam, fancy cakes, jellies and crackers.*

*The lady in the big house opposite to ours used to give us a big box of oranges at Christmas and a big pork pie, as big as a dinner plate.<sup>2</sup> Another lady used to give us a plum pudding. On Christmas Eve we used to hang up our stockings and in the morning we would find an orange, nuts, a date and some other little things. The rest of the week we had sticky stockings to wear.*

*In the holidays Mother used to pack our tea and send us off to the castle to play. The policeman and his wife, (Mr and Mrs Claxton)<sup>3</sup> lived there and the wife would boil a kettle for any visitors that wanted it. We had great fun rolling down the hills, but sometimes got it wrong and rolled in cow dirt and then got home 'well plastered'.*

*Harvest time used to be lovely as Mother would cook the dinner for my father and brothers and us. She would put it all in the donkey cart and then we would go to the harvest field. It was fun having our dinner in the field. After dinner we would go home and help Mother to wash up and then it would be time to start packing the 'fourses' and out we would go again. After tea we stayed and had rides in the wagon. When the men came home we would sometimes be given a rabbit.*

*I remember King Edward VII opening the King Edward Grammar School in King's Lynn. We school children had to go to the top end of the playground and wave to him as he passed in one of the fast cars. He had a little round hat with a feather at the side and a big tweed cloak. In the shooting season he stayed at the Hall for three days. He always came to the school while we were out to play and threw pennies at us. If anyone caught more than one the teacher made them share them out.*

*My brother and I used to carry the milk from the farm to the Hall every morning. We liked that job as the cook always gave us something nice to eat. My favourite was milk pudding with a lot of cream in it: ours at home used to be made with skimmed milk.*

*The Lynn mart was a treat for us. For weeks we looked forward to it as on Grand Saturday night, Mother and Father would take us in the donkey cart. The older boys would walk or bike – more likely walk as the bikes often broke down on the way as they were largely held together with string.*

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Clamp and her niece Alice Raines were documented in the 1901 Census as ‘Laundress at home’. They lived in Cottage 17, Lower Road with their husbands and Alice’s eight children.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson and Halena Valentine were living in the farmhouse of Home Farm in the 1991 census. He was a civil engineer, aged 40, born in Cheshire. They had a domestic servant and a cook and seem to be the first professional couple to move into the village. The farm buildings continued to be in use but the farm house was purely residential from that date.

<sup>3</sup> According to the census returns, James Claxton, police constable, lived in the castle with his wife, Sarah, and three young children in 1881. In 1891, Sarah is head of the household and caretaker of the castle. She lives there with her aunt and four children as well as their lodger, a young police constable. In the next census Sarah and one daughter are recorded living there with another young policeman as their lodger.