

SWINESHEAD : BIOGRAPHY – SMITH, ROBERT

Transcript of an article in

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CATTLE WERE BOB'S ROAD  
PALS – BY THE  
HUNDRED!

[Article accompanied by a portrait photograph]

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To walk from Swineshead to Boston and back, to Sleaford and back and to Spalding and back, is not everyone's idea of a good job these days, especially with a starting pay of a mere five shillings a week. Yet that is what Mr. Robert Smith, of Drayton Road, Swineshead, did week in, week out, all his working life.

But that isn't the half of it. Mr. Smith, eighty a few days ago, always had company – a dog and thirty or forty cattle or as many as 150 sheep! Thousands upon thousands of miles has he walked with hundred upon hundred of beast in procession before him, yet in all those years he lost only a couple of sheep!

Bob lowered his eyes sadly at the recollection. "A good few years ago it was", he explained.

"I was coming out of Boston with about 150 sheep and my dog, through Kirton instead of along the Ramper as I usually went. And somehow or other two of the things disappeared around Kirton End; never saw 'em again, I didn't".

And that's the end of Bob's painful confession! The rest of his working life, all fifty-seven years of it, was an example of patience, steadiness and achievement, with never another stray animal to worry him and always his dogs to bolster his confidence.

He was born at Swineshead and went to school there. Straight after leaving school he joined Mr. Charles Wright the cattle dealer, later working with his son Mr. Robert Wright, and finally retiring thirteen years ago and settling in a pleasant bungalow.

Bob looked back over the years as briefly as this: "I used to walk cattle and pigs and sheep on the road from wherever Mr. Wright bought them to market at Boston or Sleaford or Spalding".

That was all there was to it as far as he was concerned. Did he walk far in all those years? “As far as anyone in the parish, I suppose”, he admitted.

### *His dogs*

By himself? “Certainly. Except for my dog, of course”. And the recollection of his dog brought a new light to the eyes of Bob (not more than 65, you’d swear, looking at his clear face and swept-back hair).

“He was Scots-bred and I called him Bob”, he said. “I’d sooner have him than half-a-dozen men: I could tell him to do anything and know for sure he’d do it every time. I trained him myself and he’d never go with anyone else.

“His eyes were blue, he was pigeon-coloured, and he had a bob-tail. Not very big, but he knew every turn and every gate on every road. I had him for twelve years.

“My other dog was Gerry, a half-breed Scots collie. I could always send him over a hedge if I saw a gate open ahead, and he’d know it was his job to stand in that gate ‘till the cattle were gone”.

### *His wounds*

Many a time Bob was gathering his charges in some dark field at two o’clock in the morning, though it was usually about 6.30 am that he would begin the march to the market of the day.

Traffic? “If there was any I’d make it pull up, but often I used to help it if there was room on the road”, he said.

“It was a good life, and it kept me healthy all through. The only time I was ever in trouble was when I was in the Army in the first war”.

There he served in France and Belgium. He was a machine gunner and one day, in a burst of shrapnel, he found the gun’s metal guard blown to pieces, two of his pals dead, and himself wounded in the right side, leg and arm.

“I spent some time in hospital after that, and then tetanus developed”, he said.

### *His life*

Bob has lived alone since he lost his wife eleven years ago. Quietly and without fuss, enjoying his pipe and his radio.

“Don’t have television: don’t want it. I’ve seen it and I wouldn’t sit up at night watching it : best place is bed”, he declared emphatically.

Bob has one son, Mr. Jack Smith, of Cowley's Close, Swinehead, a railway carpenter at Boston. He has two brothers, Mr. Charles Smith of Hospital Bridge, Boston, and Mr. Walter Smith, of Freiston Road, Boston; and three sisters, Mrs. Martha Sharp, of Abbey Road, Swineshead, Mrs. Jack Stanwell, of Woodville Road, Boston, and Mrs. J. R. Stanwell, of Morton, near Hill.

“Aye”, he said, “it’s been a good life, and if I had my time over again I’d do the same. Not so much walking to do towards the end, of course, because cattle began to go in trucks. A cycle to help? It wouldn’t have been any use. It would have been in the way”.

Bob showed me to the door. A striped butcher’s apron fluttered round his legs. “I like it”, he said with a grin. “It keeps my knees warm!”

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