TALES FROM THE HILLS
(Ashmansworth and Crux Easton)

Percy Bendle was born in 1903 and lived at The City in Crux Easton. He attended the village school before the Great War and then joined his father working on the farm. At that time, The City then consisted of five dwellings, and was sending no fewer than 22 children to the school.

He recalled a rumour that the Golden Calf of the Old Testament lay buried next to the school in Well Meadow, and that crowds came flocking to dig for it. He didn't think anybody had found it.

Well Meadow was riddled with underground brick tunnels. The schoolchildren used to go rabbiting along them and, as a child, Percy could run underneath the meadow almost upright. The tunnels were far more extensive than they are today.

His first job was to tend a paraffin engine which pumped up water for the farm. This was long before mains water reached the parishes. The engine was on wheels and could be towed to the farm to slice animal feed and chop chaff. The historic wind pump had, by then, been abandoned.

After the Great War he became a tractor driver. One day, Geoff Webb from Hook Farm, Woodcott, who attended the school, was crushed to death under a heavy roller in Well Meadow. He had run out from the adjoining schoolhouse during a break in lessons and had tried to ride on the drawbar. Percy was driving the tractor and had the unenviable task of taking Geoff's body back to his mother. Many years later, come harvest time when the fields used to be much busier, the children of Crux Easton were still trying to ride on drawbars.

On one occasion during the last war, a mystery crater opened behind Percy's tractor. He described it as thirty feet deep, smooth and round as if it had been bored out, and big enough to swallow a double-decker bus. "Where was it?" I asked. "Just by your house," he said!

Percy later worked on a farm in Ashmansworth; even after retirement, with his mechanical skills, he could still fix his own car. He died in 1988 and lies in Ashmansworth churchyard.

Agricola