

Trewetha Farm

Turnips, Cabbage

by James Platt

Most people grew their own staple vegetables just after the war, but for those who did not or could not or couldn't be bothered, all was far from being lost.



Every Saturday morning during the season of availability, one or other of the two Blake brothers from Trewetha Farm, ably assisted by Bill Masters, made a tour of Port Isaac with a horse and cart, the latter being piled improbably high with a mixture of firm-hearted round cabbage and big turnips pulled directly from the field with great gobs of soil still clinging to them.

One of their turnip fields in season, when the turnip leaves were long and greenly bobbing in a breeze and the turnips purple topped and golden bottomed, was a sight to behold. The best of the crop went for sale, the least were left to sheep to chomp down to hollows in which the rain pooled.

The Blake brothers' horse was a big shire whose massive shod hooves chunked ponderously on the road metal. He must have enjoyed being between the hafts of the two wheeled wooden cart as a welcome break from his other duties of dragging done or another implement of heavy farm machinery across soggy fields.

The wheels on the cart were fine examples of the wheelwright's art, wooden spoked and bound with steel on the circumference. The cart crunched and rumbled over protrusions in the roads as the vegetable round proceeded.

The Blake brothers were twins, one named Sam and one named Will. When one appeared without the other it was difficult to know which of the two you might have the honour to be addressing. When they appeared together, then maybe there were subtle differences in their joint aspect which could be detected with care, but saying which was Sam and which was Will was never easy.

Their farmhouse was situated where the road out of Port Isaac towards Poltreworgey made the first bend of an 'S' curve through Trewetha hamlet. It always had a well-kept, clean and neat appearance. They were industrious, kindly men and, in contrast to many local farmers, were not averse to boys crossing their meadows with propriety.

The Blake brothers were both lean of body. When they walked they led the way with their jaws. Each had a ready grin which put you at your ease with them.

The dressed for convenience rather than style, a pair of sea boots on which a sizeable proportion of their soil was coated for safe keeping; coarse trousers held up with braces or failing

that by a length of hairy binder twine; an unmatching jacket, ripped for effect in at least two places, pockets sagging in memory of the fact that at one time the jacket had had pretensions to being new, but that time was not now; a collarless shirt with however, a collar stud generally in view; a waistcoat which related to neither trousers nor jacket to the regret of neither; and a flat cap, the exterior of which bore witness to the fact that the interior contained a sweat band.

Flat caps were as distinctive as personal fingerprints in the manner in which they were worn. A trusty cap of many years standing fit the head as perfectly as the hair that lay under it. The Blake brothers wore theirs at the level, square on the head with identical clearance over each ear. Bill Masters, who followed the cart with one or other of them on the Saturday vegetable round, wore his at a rather jaunty angle, slouched over one ear.

Bill Masters was short and rotund, with a rather quizzical look to his face. He was known as 'Bill Bumps'. A likeable character, Bill Bumps was known to have had a hard time in the Great War and was reputed to have a metal plate set in his head. Some said that the plate was visible when he took his cap off, but he never was seen in public without that item of half cocked apparel firmly in place and so his secret was secure. Attempts to get Bill Bumps to remove his cap never got very far.

Bill Bumps and Sam (or Will) Blake plodded their load of vegetables around the village keeping up a constant chant of 'TUR-nups CA-bbage, TUR-nups CA-bbage!' in tones which were as rich as they were loud, inducing clients to come out and purchase the said items.

The cart trailed a line of soil behind it, punctuated now and then by a steaming mound of horse manure. The soil remained on the road for the rain to wash away but the horse manure was rapidly gathered by someone or other before even the first fly had a chance to investigate it, being whipped away for spreading on a lucky sector of garden.

The 'TUR-nups CA-bbage!' street cry was infectious. Groups of boys frequently joined in the cavalcade, bawling the chant in unison with Bill Bumps and Sam (or Will) Blake. Bill Bumps would chase after the boys with swatting hands. But he never took off his cap to swat the boys and he never caught anyone that I know of.

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