

JULY

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**Interview -  
 Adrian  
 Bell**



"You must blame the mammon of industrialism, that has rotted the old forms and put nothing in their place." Jotted down years ago by Adrian Bell, recent economic and environmental events have confirmed this, as they have so many of his earlier feelings. "I welcome the economic slide. Not the actual process, because that's agonising and therefore I hope it's over quickly, but the collapse of the present order. Then perhaps we can get somewhere."

Reflecting on our troubles, Bell is scathing about what he sees as the faults of modern industrial society — the neglect of agriculture until, too late, people realise its real value; the endless production of consumer goods; class relations deliberately aggravated by politicians for their own personal ends; and the great mass of people confined in towns — surrounded by artificial machine-made surfaces, reared on the wrong sort of education, their senses still further dulled by factory work and routine. He is equally critical of much of modern agriculture.

"The land now seems to be used solely to hold plant and fertiliser in contact with one another. The soil is ill-treated, and is being compacted by the heavy-wheeled tractor. The machinery drowns the sounds of nature and is ugly. When I began farming, the things you worked with were so beautiful. And the horses, you know, were a magnificent spectacle. The horsemen took such a pride in the state of their coats, and knew exactly how they moved."

Many Clarion readers will know Adrian Bell from his regular feature in Saturday's Eastern Daily Press. Hopefully some will have read 'Corduroy,' his account of his 'apprenticeship' with a West Suffolk farmer at the very end of the traditional era, and its successors 'Cherry Tree' and 'Silver Ley.' For the lazy reader, much of this and his thinking is condensed in 'My Own

Master.' But in a way 'Apple Acre' is the best; based on notes jotted down in 1940, the sense of impending doom seems to heighten his already acute perception.

I asked him what life meant in the 20's and 30's. "Hard work — but when you're handling things and weights it's not muscle that counts but rhythm. My senses had all been dulled by book-learning, and I had to learn how to use my body properly. And no money — in 1925 labourers earned 25 shillings a week, and many farmers got less than that."

What if he were starting today? "I'm sure I could not afford the equivalent of the £500 I paid for my first house. I'd have to live in a caravan somewhere. But I'd live on the land, somehow. And simply. People must return to a state of wantlessness. Education must make people appreciate the good, simple, life. Have you noticed that people can't wait these days? They can't bear to be alone with their own minds. I can stop thinking, or I pray in the waste spaces — like Liverpool Street Station!"

What does Suffolk mean to Adrian Bell?

"I've spent all my working life in Suffolk. To me, patriotism is local. I like living exactly where I do — along this lane (from Barsham to Ilketshall St. Andrew). My next book is about this lane. When I want to travel...other people's Majorcas...I go over the main road into the Saints."

And the future?

"Oh, I enjoy every day. Each day is a bonus when you're 73. And I'm writing all the time. Communication is so important, particularly in breaking down the old order."

"That's why I hope things like your Waveley Clarion are the first blades of an alternative society springing up — between the paving stones. But really, I just want other people to see that I see, because it's so interesting."

DON MATHEW