

They would go around to the farms to buy the broody hens, and very often they would have a problem as a broody hen would not always sit right away in a strange nest. So for the first day or two they would sit her on china eggs to see if she would sit tight. Then if all was well they would sit her on real eggs. She would be taken off the nest each day for a brief spell to feed and drink then set back on the eggs again.

After hatching, the chicks would be put in a wire run with their broody hen foster mother. Their daily feed would be meal mixed with rabbit meat. This meant the rabbits had to be caught for this. At about eight weeks old the hen coops with the pheasant chicks all shut inside of the coops would be loaded on to a cart about eight coops each time and taken by horse and cart into the main woods for rearing on till the autumn shoots.

The main woods for rearing the pheasants were in two areas. Shorley and Westlodge woods were one lot and Golden Valley and New Bridge the other. Harry Shapland the eldest of the three sons was responsible for Shorley and Westlodge area while Jack looked after Golden Valley and New Bridge. Bob being the youngest son worked with them and helped father.

After the young growing birds had been put into the wild environment of the woods they would be fed on mixed corn chiefly, feeding the birds twice a day at regular times. You can imagine that 2000 young pheasants set down in the woods are bound to stray about a bit exploring the woods and scratching among the leaves and undergrowth. When they went to feed them they would "whistle them in", as he called it. If the keeper whistled to the small birds as they were growing up they would get used to the whistle and realize it was feed time. As you went into the feed area of the wood you may only see about half a dozen pheasants but, as soon as you started to whistle they would fly in from all directions. Some would fly in from almost half a mile away once they heard the whistling. Jack said it was a lovely sight to see at feeding time as up to five hundred birds would come flying in to the feeding area. You should have seen Jack's face light up as he told me this, bearing in mind that he was now 87 years old. I could see it was really bringing back some lovely old memories of pheasant rearing days.

The keepers kept black Labrador dogs to work as gun dogs. Sometimes a group of pheasants anything up to 50 birds would stray away from the main crowd, sometimes going as far as a mile away having been disturbed by a fox or frightened by something. So often in the autumn may be twice a week these birds would have to be walked back to the fold with dogs. The biggest worry regarding the pheasants were vermin, foxes, stoats, weasels, carrying crows, magpies and of course not forgetting the odd poacher.

The pheasant shooting season opened on October 1st and closed on February 1st. So during those months there would be organized shooting parties. At a shoot there would probably be 8 -12 guns, each gun holder paying a fee for his days shoot.