

Semer Wood

Every village had its own woodland around forty acres in size and in some ways, it was the core of the village, ours is now twenty-six, it would originally be split into four sections and, grown and harvested in rotation. There are many documents about our woodlands for when there is money involved it is usually recorded, the best way to understand how a woodland works is to visit Bradfield Woods, not so far to walk round and understand how it all works.

The lord had first use of wood until the trees were pollarded when villagers could then have a right to the timber. When coppiced the thatchers used hazel for their broaches to hold down straw on the roof, hazel again used to make wattle between oak studs and the studwork itself used from young trees or lopped branches. If oak was in short supply other hardwood species were used, it is interesting to note that when Bridge Farm was being renovated Bruce Andrews made sure that he replaced the decayed timbers with the same species that he took out, this included black poplar, not easy to do but Bruce wanted it right.

Wood used just as it grew was a lot stronger than modern processed timber for it does not have to be square or straight but could be riven at an early date, then adzed, later on the log would be laid over a hole with a lad down below and sawyer above and then the cut timber would be known as pit sawn, when researching timber frame buildings identifying the saw or adze marks on the wood can help date the build. One saw pit is shown on land near to the Manor. It was never wise to pay sawyers up front for it was thirsty work and once down the pub not easy to get them back.

A great book, if you can access it, is the Wheelwright's Shop by George Sturt, Cambridge University Press, it even explains parts of his local woodland where the best trees grew, and it covers the trades using local grown timber. In our village ash grew in abundance and in my papers, I have a tally of ash on the back of the reverends wine list, he describes the logs as poles and is selling to Seth Hagger. Firstly, he gives each log a number, the next is length then girth, he calculates in Hoppus measure, the last column is in cubic feet. He does this by squaring the girth, multiply by the length and divide by 144, not quite accurate and has caused disputes over the years. We now have the cubic measurement of the saw log in cubic feet, in this case it is sold at 1/6d per foot, the total is 625 feet cubed, the transaction is on 22nd July 1870 costing £46 17 0d. My firm is a rarity, we still purchase logs from France and Pennsylvania though in metric measure, to add to the confusion we have them sawn on a band mill, kilned and the measurement is taken after the cutting and drying, so for a finished kilned thickness of 27mm the plank will have started as 33mm thick, my son tells me that we actually end up by paying for only sixty to seventy per cent of the original log. Strangely our American supplier sells in the same measure as the Europeans whereas most of his fellow lumber companies do it in foot board measure. Underwood was tithable whilst timber was not, underwood is income and standing wood is capitol.

In Ash Street we had the blacksmith, wheelwright and at one time a carriage maker, they all needed the timber grown in our ancient wood. Apart from ash, oak, elm, hornbeam for carts, the blacksmith needed wooden tool handles, men were employed to extract timber, it shows how much our village relied on woodworking and woodland skills.

The skill in managing the wood was either pollard it, that is lopping off the mature branches for timber or to coppice the newly grown shoots. For baskets use osier (willow) and hazel, handles for rakes and the like use ash, our osier ground was by the mere in front of the school and land opposite the workhouse. Rotate the crop into say five, seven or twelve years to produce the right material. Also, they had to decide whether to keep deer in or out for if coppicing new growth, the deer needed to be outside with a deep ditch, a steep bank with a pale on the top protecting the crop, in an area with pollarded trees grazing animals could have access.

In the medieval period, the only way to obtain deer was to be acquainted with the king for only he had the right to give them away and, only he could permit the landowner to have a warren, the right to keep and hunt game. Semer had both in the 13th C, I do not know where exactly, I would suggest Semer Lodge is about right, firstly it is called a "lodge" necessary for the ladies to watch the hunt, it is also up high with a good view over the land falling away towards Whatfield, Parke Field also gives an indication.

Walk around the village and one can still see evidence of embankments and ditches, the pales have long gone, unlike the picket fence of today the point would have been in the ground and a single rail holding it together at the top. Parks were introduced by the Normans, private land on which a licence for imparking was required from the king, they also introduced fallow deer, pheasants and rabbits, red deer was native.

I have not found any old documents for our wood but have traced that Rev Eld from Polstead disposing of his assets including the wood in 1911 when the Manor and Sayers Farm were sold for £7000, firstly to Salmon then Mansfield then on 27 February 1914 a man called Schbloch from Dresden purchased these properties and put his son Anton in charge. Very bad timing for WW1 was about to start and a family from Germany had just made a big investment in the UK.

The locals in the village were in uproar with stories of pigeons taking secret messages from Semer to Germany, meanwhile Anton disappeared back to his home country, re-joined his old regiment, and fought on the other side. Anton's story appears in a different section; I never knew of a man with a more complicated existence.

When George Bendall from Rattlesdon rents Sayers Farm and in 1932 Mr Fox purchases the wood from Schbloch, the wood is 26 acres, reduced from its possible 40 acres in years past, I did not see any evidence of it being a traditional working wood in this period. A Mrs Mutty purchases the wood in 1957 for £3000 and later passes it on to her son Tim. The present owner Norman Warren takes over 1987 and starts to put the wood back into order. During the previous owner's time pigs were allowed to forage all though the trees and consequently much damage was done, for example the ringbarking of mature oaks. Presently the ash trees are suffering from die back but beech and oak fare much better, the old gamekeeper's cottage is greatly improved, and the original structure has several well- done additions.

It is appropriate to now include this verse thought to have been on a headstone in our church yard, I am not too sure this is true but have always liked the comments of a worker on the hazards of the timber trade, we no longer use horse drawn wagons.

*I was on my journey returning home,
And little thought what was to be my doom,
So as the rolling jim did me control,
The Lord have mercy on my sole.*

*Short was my stay, the longer my rest,
God took me hence because he thought it best,
Therefore, dear friends lament for me no more,
I am not lost but gone a while before.*

Also, it is time to dedicate my Record of Semer to Jill, my wife of almost sixty years, who gave encouragement at trying times and did much field walking. Sadly, she passed away in the summer of this year and buried in this church yard.



*Pictured Top: Jill wine tasting.
 Pictured bottom left Jill enjoying Italian food in Guernsey.
 Pictured bottom right: Jill talking plants with Tony Norman.*

Species list in Semer Wood 26th October 1987, surveyed by the Semer Women's Institute.

Key		
D	dominant	L local
A	abundant	e edge of wood
F	frequent	r ride
O	occasional	g garden
R	rare	p pond

English	Latin	Abundance
Small teasel	<i>Dipsacus pilosus</i>	LF
Red fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>	LD
Herb Robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	R
Wood avens	<i>Geum urbanum</i>	A
Ground ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	AD
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	O r
Hairy St Johns wort	<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>	O Fr
Soft rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Or
Dogs mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	FA
Creeping Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	F
Barren strawberry	<i>P. sterilis</i>	LF
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgare</i>	F
Selfheal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Fr
Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	R
Blackberry	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	F
Water figwort	<i>Scrophularia aquatica</i>	O
Common figwort	<i>S. nodosa</i>	R
Red campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	LF e
Hedge roundwort	<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>	Or
Black bindweed	<i>Tamus communis</i>	Re
Upright hedge parsley	<i>Torilis japonica</i>	Fr
Stinging nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	LA
Violet	<i>Viola sp</i>	LF
Sedge	<i>Carex sp</i>	R
Greater plantain	<i>Planago major</i>	Fr
Creeping buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	LA e
Asparagus	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>	R
Bristly ox-tongue	<i>Picris echioides</i>	LF e
Teasel	<i>Dipsacus fullonum</i>	Re
Wood brome	<i>Bromus ramosus</i>	Re
Common toadflax	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	Rg
Hard rush	<i>Juncus inflexus</i>	Rp
White campion	<i>Silene alba</i>	Re
Vetch	<i>Vicia sp</i>	LA

Field maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>	F
Sycamore	<i>A. pseudoplatanus</i>	R
Horse chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	O
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	R
Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	R
Sweet chestnut	<i>Castanea sativa</i>	R
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	D
Common hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	F
Midland hawthorn	<i>C. oxycantha</i>	O
Spindle	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	F
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	R
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	A
Larch	<i>Larix sp</i>	R
Apple	<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	O
Scots pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	R
Wild cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>	R
Sloe	<i>P spinosa</i>	O
Pendunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>	O
Goat willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>	R
Crack willow	<i>S. fragilis</i>	R
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	F
Small leaved lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>	F
Cypress	<i>Cupressus sp</i>	OF
Snowberry ornamental)	<i>Symphoricarpos</i>	R
Hedgerow elm	<i>Ulmus sp</i>	F
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	O-LFe
Lombardy poplar	<i>Populus nigra Italica</i>	R
Bugle	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	LF
Lesser burdock	<i>Arctium minus</i>	Oe
False oat grass	<i>Arrhenathrum elatius</i>	Re
Wood false brome	<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	F
White bryony	<i>Bryonia dioica</i>	O-Fe
Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	R
Spurge laurel	<i>Daphne laureola</i>	LF
Tufted hair grass	<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	F

Enclosures

To enclose land, permission should be given, in Semer I am not too sure what happened. Several generations of the Cooke family who were rectors must have had a tremendous influence on the village's development and I wonder if they went about these matters quietly. Tithe maps were often produced when there were no maps of enclosure.

The hedges that were planted around enclosures were of ash, briar, blackthorn and in the Tudor period maple and dogwood, pre-Tudor, hazel, and spindle. The older fields are those with irregular shapes and unusual names whilst the straight four-sided ones were more likely to be Victorian with the popular names of those times, not always the correct acreage. There are several names which give an indication of early large open fields in which people had their own strips.

Other than the anomaly of our Caughton common enclosures, East Anglia usually enclosed at an early date. One man seriously objected to gates going up in Semer, for in 1760 Mr Pocklington of Chelsworth, was very angry and gave Reverend Thomas Cooke a full broadside stating that he is going to take the gates down not as a magistrate but as a private inhabitant, this gives an indication of when enclosures were happening around our common. Sixty years later another Rev Cook is busy enclosing for in 1826 his accounts state that 100 quick cost eleven shillings, 25 rod of new ditching twenty-five shillings, 6 score bushes at £2 0 0d. In 1829 amongst many building payments, fencing and quicks are £4 10 0d.

In 1837 expenses are for fir timber, quicks and bushes, three years later oaks and quicks were £6 11 7d. 1840 is a year after the tythe map is drawn up and in the absence of documentation from Parliament these payments go to show how privately it happened in Semer, quicks are young hedging plants. James Young Cooke was seriously wealthy and spent much money in improving and building in the village, I have not seen if there is any connection between him and Mr Matthews who owned the brick works by Ravens Hall. He also lent big sums of money to important people and always at 5%.

To show how angry Pocklington became, here follows his letter written on 8th January 1760.

Sir, when you called me on the Saturday before we removed to London, you brought me a case relating to the two gates on Semer Common which had been stated by you and Mr Brooke for the opinion of council together with Mr De Gray's opinion thereon.

When I had read them, I told you that I neither liked the Facts of the case, nor the law of the Answer, But that I was still of the opinion as I had told you all along, that they were Nuisances and Injurious to the public; and that I had determined to have the Affair Settled one way or the other before we left the country (which I Intended to do the Tuesday or Wednesday following) that I would therefore take them down the Monday morning as a private inhabitant and not as a magistrate and that I would do it in a public Manner, that you might bring an Action Against Me, in order to try the Right if you thought fit. To which you made the Answer that all persons concerned with you in putting up the Gates would dine with you, together with the rest of your parishioners a few Days after Christmas According to Annual Custom; and that you would take that opportunity of advising them all to Consent to take down those Gates without any further trouble. And that you would most earnestly assure them that it was your own will and desire that they should be taken down; And that you will immediately acquaint me with the result of that Advice and you therefore desired that I would forbear taking them down in the meantime.

At this conversation at my house was on Saturday the 14th of December and the meeting at your House was to be soon afterwards I did for the sake of peace consent to forbear taking down the Gate till that time in full confidence that you and they would have consented to take them down from

being convinced that they had been unlawfully erected and were the cause of Great Trouble and Danger to all his Majesty's subjects travelling on the Kings Highway in a road very much frequented and lying between several great Market Towns. But I was much disappointed when I received your Letter dated the 3rd Instant in which you are pleased to say.

Your Parishioners Dined with you on Friday last according to Custom when you mentioned to them that everything that had passed between us relating to the two Gates on the Road between Bildeston and Hadleigh which after some remonstrance with them they have consented to pull up again purely to Oblige Me. They desired you to petition me to give leave for them to stand till this second week in June by which time all the Clover is to be ffd off the Common saved for seed, And that they canat that time of year better repair the Broaches that must necessarily be made in the Roads by taking up such large posts. This I assure you was the request of them all, and that as they have complied with you I hope you will oblige them in theirs.

In Answer to this civility of your partners, I can readily say that I have never thought it beneath me to receive or pay civilities to my Neighbour in all proper cases; But I never desire Any Man to give up his right out of civility to me, nor can I ever think of Accepting of such civility ----- And the true source of your letter to the best of my comprehension is this ---That they are of opinion that they had a right To Erect those Gates, And that they have a right to support them, But that they are willing to pill them up again, sometime or other, if I will acknowledge my self to lye under an obligation to them for so doing----I say sometime or other because the Reason they give for continuing them till the second week in June when the clover is to be ffd off will hold equally strong for continuing them till about Michaelmas when the seed clover be Cutt, And the same reason will hold stronger in every succeeding year for preserving the Corn upon the ground.

As therefore the appearance of Consent is Given upon such Terms and in such a manner, as they well know that I can neither Consent to, or approve of, I therefore cannot consider it as a Consent to pull down these Gates, but as a Refusal to do so. And I cannot help being displeased at the selfishness of those Men who are only considering how to preserve their own Clover Grass without having any regard to the Obstructions they give to all his Majesty's Subjects who travel that Road, or to the Hazard or Danger which They, their Servants, Cattle and Carriages constantly incur from these Unlawful Gates. I must make one more observation upon your letter which surprises me more than all the rest which is---- That through the whole course of it, you speak in the third person only and for bear to join yourself with them, or to declare you own Opinion or Intention either singly or as connected with them, as if you either thought yourself unconcerned in the question, or that you reserved yourself for some future opportunity of declaring yourself either one way or the other just as you should think fit. But as it is known to everybody, that you are in principle, if not the sole Author of this Scheme. I must consider you as the person from whom the public is to expect redress and satisfaction. The pains that I have taken both in conversation with and by Letters to you are sufficient to show my great desire to preserve the peace of the Neighbourhood and to Avoid having any dispute with you but the return that you make by this Letter, is so much the reverse of the candour with which I have treated you, that it is impossible for me to hold any further Correspondence with you upon this Subject and therefore I give you this fair Notice, That I will endeavour to Obtain the best Redress I can by Law, for the sake of the public against those Nuisance.

In other Respects as a Neighbour I shall not be wanting in all reasonable Civilities. For the sake of Candour I will still make on Observation to you is this. That in the case which Mr Brooke and you stated for Mr de Grey's Opinion and in which you assert the following facts.

- 1 That these Gates have Stood Time out of mind at or near the several places where they now stand.*
- 2 Without interruption*
- 3 Till about 16 or 17 years ago*

4 Since which time they have been down purely by decay and without any Compulsion

You have made so many Mistakes (I chuse to call them so) For I can most undoubtably that no one of those four Assertions agreeable to fact and Truth

You will probably think me a severe Animadverter, but if you consider in a right light, you may perhaps think yourself much obliged to Me. I mean if you are not too late in thinking rightly.

*Mrs (blank space on document) joins with me in Compliments to yourself and Littleones I am Sir,
Your very Humble Servant.*

8th January 1760



Pictured Above: Willm (William) Elford on horse back



Pictured above: Just back from Hadleigh show. Pictured in background top right the pound and to the left Ivy Cottage which was demolished.

Medieval Sports

The name camping close is a rarity but in Semer we have our own, it is based on the Anglo Saxon word campaign meaning to fight, it became campen in Middle English leaning towards fight, contend or strive, ours was situated at the far end of Dairy Farm Lane adjoining Ash Street opposite Corner Cottage. Two and a half acres which lay in Semer and another almost two acres which lay in Whatfield. Size nor shape mattered, by comparison with others Semer's was a good size, it appears that only a small number of sites lay away from the centre or settlements but both Whatfield and ours did, they were often freehold, private or copyhold property which at appropriate times were let for recreational use.

Thomas Tusser in the early 16th C wrote "In meadow or pasture, to grow the more fine, let campers be camping in any of thine" meaning lot of trampling and movement could improve the grass. Their heyday was between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The two villages could have shared the land for other recreational purposes i.e., for the maypole, playing on or archery, I note that in 1838 Camping Close in Semer was of 2 acres 2 roods and fifteen perches, it was owned by Joseph Archer and rented by Benjamin Smith.

I have not known another where a river crossed the middle of the pitch. Camping was an illegal game and had been banned in the City of London in 1314, in 1409 labourers and servants were banned from playing handball or football and they were likely to imprisoned for six days. I have often wondered if our Guildhall was situated in Ash Street opposite Bridge Farm. Interestingly David Dymond suggests that authority felt unsuitable or disorderly activities taking place near to the church would be better held elsewhere and that church houses and guildhalls were better built to house these events. On an early map I have seen there certainly appears to be property built opposite Bridge Farm with Camping Close laying behind it which would help to prove his point. I have not yet found any documents mentioning a Guild in Semer, I am sure there was one, for I notice the Subsidy Return for 1524 states "The stock of the Guild £3 the sum of 1s 6d." By the time of the Reformation, it was often played in an acknowledged place and part of the life of the community, it certainly meant that the game included a ball but quite how it was used is not certain. It would be interesting to go back in time and listen to pre match tactics rather like today's village cricket.

The word camping and football both meant the same thing in Essex the word football is more used; the game was more often played in East Anglia. However, we can be sure, that this was a violent game, often an opportunity to sort out grievances, many were injured and killed with spectators festering disorder. It is recorded that in Diss in the late 18th C up to three hundred players took part with Suffolk versus Norfolk and that Suffolk won after twelve to fourteen hours, apart from the many injuries there were nine deaths.

In 1830 we are told that the ball could be carried, kicked or thrown, at Boxford a strong gallery was built, and spectators charged 6d each. At a later period, rugby would appear a better name for the game, it rather depended which size and type of ball was chosen and how they chose to tackle, in addition American colleges developed the game in the late 19th C. David Dymond is one of my favourite Suffolk historians and I have borrowed some of this data from him.

Semer Manor

On the 28th Oct 1826 David Davy during his tour of churches and walking the river footpath from Chelsworth to Semer notes a good looking farm with young plantations around it and notes nothing of antiquity. This must have been the newly built Semer Manor, sometime during in the early 1800 hundreds.

The Cosford half hundred in the Domesday Book states that St. Edmunds held before 1066 as a Manor; always 3 and a half carucates of land there. Meadow 11 acres, 6 villagers (villeins), 13 smallholders (borders), 1 slave (serf), always 3 ploughs in lordship (demesne), 2 men's ploughs, 1 mill, 2 cobs, 16 cattle, 24 pigs, 97 sheep. Value £5 in Saxon Times, now £6, this is at the time of the survey. In the same there is a church with 30 acres of land. Meadow 1 acre. Always 1 plough belonging to the church. This village has 9 furlongs in length and 7 in in width and pays 2 and a half pence in tax (geld) but others hold here. At the time of Richard, the 1st, Sampson settled the manor on Adam, son of Robert de Cokefield, it is passed on to Nesta de Cokefield, his daughter. She dies without issue and the estate was settled on three aunts whose representatives in 1285, bought a writ against the abbot for this and other manors. On this matter, one of the last duels in the country was fought, the abbots champion being worsted. In 1329 the manor or part of it was vested in Henry de Percy, the king's kinsman. Finally resting with the abbey until dissolution, the manor then granted to Sir Clement Higham, Chief Baron of the Exchequer in Queen Mary's reign and then to the Brand family. I note elsewhere it states that it cost Sir Clement £340.

Until the 11th C the Lord was the cellarer of the Abbey. Adam de Cockfield then Nesta, then stated to being his sister, c1190. In 1329 Henry de Percy followed by the cellarer and in 1385 John de Saxham. Dom John Brentford in 1514, followed in 1517 by Master Thomas Ryngsted, also a prior. Dom Thomas Hessel from 1523 to 1528 and in 1531 Dom Thomas Gnatsall with Ryngsted again in 1533 to 1535. At this point Courts were held in May or June, changing to October from 1540. The first court of Henry the 8th on 19th October 1541. Sir Clement held his first court on 4th October 1543, he was also speaker of the House of Commons, he died 9th March 1570.



Pictured above: Semer Manor in the 1920's. A Shooting Party, Charles Elford second from the right.

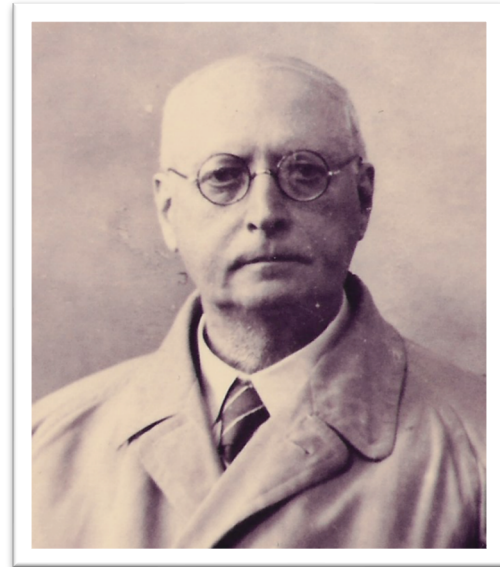
From 1575 to 1604 Sir John Higham is Lord, dying on 21st October 1626, followed by Benjamin Bronde, gent in 1610 to 1636. John Brand, gent 1638 to 1640. Joseph Band 1671, and again 1681 to 1708. The name Cooke appears, from Aldham in Essex and is here from 1711 to 1714, followed by his brother of Great Waldingfield 1723 to 1744. The name Cooke appears again with Daniel from 1746 to 1749. Then Mary Cooke a widow becomes Lady of the Manor from 1751 to 1757, then Daniels brother Rev Thomas Cooke from 1759 to 1793. For

the first time I find "the site of the Manor of Semer" in 1777. Thomas's wife takes over in 1793 and she dies 1804. At that date Rev Thomas Cooke of Bildeston, Thomas's son and on his death to Thomas William Cooke of Polstead Hall. For the first time it is recorded "and that a new erected capitol messuage now called Semer Hall." In 1825 Mary Anne Cooke, wife of the above remarries Charles Tyrell, in 1849 Mary Anne dies and passes the manor to James Young Cooke, he dies in 1875. He has an idiot son, Arthur who is cared for in the cottage at the top of Tugwood/Watsons Hill. Charles Cooke, the last of the Cooke dynasty follows in that year and dies 1892, whereas James Y Cooke was a very astute man, sadly his son Charles gets into financial problems.

The last Lord of Semer

Johan David Joseph Franz Schobloch born on the 16th May 1887 of Czechoslovakian nationality, he came to Semer in 1913, he disappeared for the period of WW1, some documents show he returned to the village in 1921, the estate being managed by his solicitors from 1914 to 1922.

The Home Office for a while refused to grant him British nationality because "of his recent military service against this country," a letter from a friend mentions his old regiment also a visiting card giving his title as Dipt Agr. A Schobloch Feldaubitz Regiment "Kaiser" Nr 8 Prague. Another card from 1918 gives his name with the title "k.u.k. Hauptmann d. R." Does this mean head of the reserves? A newspaper cutting of the time reads; "As an incident of this danger, I hear that during the weekend the matron of the Semer Workhouse received a visit from two pigeons, which flew through one of the windows and noticing that one was carrying a parchment with a message round its leg, she endeavoured to obtain possession but was pecked savagely and compelled her to let go, thus escaping. It is believed that its flight was in the direction of Semer Hall, the previous residence of Lieut. Schbloch an Austrian officer and we can easily surmise its object is to carry useful information to the enemy." The writer was Dora Phillips. Anton and his son Bobby were released from Czech citizenship in November 1929.



It is rather strange that during the second world war Anton spent his time as assistant cowman for the County Borough of Ipswich and had a TGWU card from 1941 to 1947, at this time he lived in Ipswich. His father from Dresden had found life financially difficult, he needed at least £200 per year to be able to live in a reasonable style, he needed funds from the Semer Hall estate which led to the sale of land to Mr Turner in 1923. The wood and Sayers Farm with the cottages around Sayers Green were retained and Anton and his wife Gabriella moved to the gamekeeper's cottage in Semer Wood that year. Sayers Farm was rented to Charles Elford in February 1923.

Gabriella born in 1881 was the daughter of Baron Leonhardi and she and Anton appeared to have married in 1918 she had studied at the Dresden School of Music, the violin being her chosen instrument. Her mother owned an estate in Sarfia, Slovakia of around a thousand acres, including a spirit factory. The Schobloch's had difficulty in trying to get compensation for her share of the estate some of which was confiscated due to the "peasants need for land," it would be useful if Anton became British to help her negotiations.

Anton committed everything to paper and it is quite apparent that his wife was living beyond her means and that the couple were in serious financial difficulties, and he was concerned if people chased him for more debts, he would be bankrupt. They lived apart from September 1933. The land which had cost £20 an acre in 1913 had halved in value within twenty years, in 1930 they had tried many schemes to raise funds including raising chickens in Semer wood. He would complain to suppliers as to the quality of chicks and when they died would have post-mortems done, a very strong reply from Eastman Brothers of Hadleigh points out that they are not kept in the best conditions. He decides to take a count of his chickens, there were 705 in all including one in the kennel and one sitting in the woodshed.

Life was not good and in a letter to a friend, that it would have been worse if it had not been the local folk in Semer being kind to him, George Bendall for one lent him money. When one reads his

letters, it is easy to see why they unintentionally upset people, the cultural gap must have been huge. Charles Elford writes "I am returning cheque as I want what I am entitled to, I have always been fair with you but you seem very smart with me." Strangely his son Bobby was of a more practical nature, having served in the army in India he came home to study engineering but was happier working on the shop floor with an East End engineering company, he was voted in as an AEU shop steward but declined the position. I feel that the son was treated harshly, and things may have improved if he had some control. Bobby was a captain in the British army and his cousin a captain in the German army, it somehow sums this strange family up.

One sentence that I picked out from a letter to a family member is "It seems rather queer that not a single member of our family has made a success in life. Maybe we found life too easy in our youth. On the other hand, we seem to be too anstandig to push our way through the hardships of the world". So perhaps he did at one stage realise where it all went wrong. Anton aged seventy-two years dies in 1959 and is reunited with Gabriela in Semer churchyard.

The Rectory/ Semer House

A beautiful old building with a long history, very much enlarged in the early 19th C, a boy's prep school in the early 20th C and burnt down in 1953, this was the time of the appalling East Coast floods, the fire brigade had just returned from pumping out property's and found their pipes were still partly blocked and weren't able to get enough water pressure. Several elderly ladies who talked with me and had been maids there were almost in tears and disgusted the way it had happened. In the 1841 census it shows that six domestic servants were employed here.

On the twelfth of June 1550 Peter Barron the rector was buried, and it states in the church register that he built the hall and parlour of this parsonage house, again on first April 1663 it states that John Brunning "Clark" was buried and that he built the kitchen of this parsonage house. J Y Cooke must have doubled the size of the rectory around the 1830's and it was only when a lady from Santa Barbara in California turned up one day with quality photographs of a gorgeous property which she could not identify that I was able to understand the impact this building had on Semer, her father was Boris Karloff.

Five generations of the Cooke's had lived here until 1892, the photo showed the front façade of the rectory which had been placed in front of the late medieval structure, there appear to be a few years of legal entanglements and the property became a prep school. Records show that Rev Henry Cooper is a sub tenant of W S Coe in one of the cottages beside the rectory in 1896. From the Hadleigh Charge Book on the 20th January 1911 an Olaf R Clouston Gentleman was summoned by Insp. Sinden of Brighton for killing game without a licence, he was aged nineteen years and his address was given as the rectory, case dismissed. Chas M Wright, College Master of United Services College, Windsor aged 29 years, he was summoned by Chas Baugham, Warrant Officer, Windsor, fined 10/0d, costs 8/6d. The post mistress believed that the head of the school was a man named Clouston and from Kelly's 1912 it states that John William Clouston of Semer House School, a preparatory school for boys, the name of the property changed at this time.

The comings and goings get a little tangled for a while, but the Dr Styles lived here till 1921 then rented Semer Lodge from Mr Letts before moving on to East House in Hadleigh, it then seems that Rev Donkin moved to the rectory for a while then the Church Commissioners sold the property for £2000 to Mr William Maxwell and his wife Ethel, the date of the transaction being 30th July 1925. Maxwell spent many years as a tea planter in Assam, his wife being the daughter of W C Hume of Queensland, he died on 5th February 1935 and his wife continued to live here till 1950.

The Sandals purchase Semer House for £3000 and from then on, the older ways of running the house were over. Vic Ainger lost his job having worked for the Maxwells for 25 years and at four o'clock on a morning in February 1953 it caught fire, so quick was the conflagration that father and son had to escape from first floor windows using bed sheets, the house was a total loss.



Pictured above: This is the photograph of Semer House bought back from California by Boris Karloff's daughter.

Biggs Wall the civil engineers take over the site of the old rectory and they laid on water and sewerage over the area around Semer. Loadwells a haulage company came after the civil engineers and there was conflict between the local people and the company's owner, resulting in a planning enquiry in 1981 and a hearing by the Transport Licensing Authority in 1989.

A Mr Roy Good purchased the site in 1996, he is the man who gave consent to erect the village sign beside the river crossing. It was whilst talking with Terry Gaskin that I am made aware of the breakdown in the relationship between recent owners of the site and local folk and in 2005 an attempt is being made to clear the site a little. A year later the property and buildings left over by Biggs Wall are auctioned and Mr Frank Kaufhold owner of United Technology Europe Ltd buys the lot for £650,000.



Pictured above: The Old Rectory c1900.

Church

All Saints structure dates from the 14th C and a great deal of restoration work was done in the late 19th C., not forgetting that at 1086 the church is mentioned and endowed with 30 acres of land.

The Rev Donkin adds to the Terrier of 1914 that although this is the present dedication the former was to St Mary the Virgin, I have not found this mentioned elsewhere. For full detail of the church and pastors refer to the impressive up to date church guide. Other houses of worship will have been the chapel in Ash Street another earlier chapel on at the bottom of Cooke's Hill near the bridge and a later one erected at the Semer Union.

Our church sits in a curious landscape and cannot help pondering about our forebears who also enclosed their buildings on the bends of a river, mainly for defensive reasons.



Pictured above: Semer Church yard, at the War Memorial – taken in the early 1920's

Interesting pieces taken from the Overseers Book 1834.

Presented £5 to Mr Growse (the Doctor) for vaccinating in the parish partly paid by Rev Cooke. Payments were made for; No work, infirm, aid of wages, bastardy, partially disabled, idiot, very lame, rent, unwell, ill, lost time and wife confined, partially employed, towards funeral, husband absconded, fatherless. Allowances around £7 to £8 per week for this year.

Proclamation for the Queen 2s 0d.

Joseph Simpson tolling the bell for gleaning 3s 6d.

To whiting the church 1s 0d.

Mr Kersey for bell rope 9s 0d.

To chalk and gravel and carting same £1 5 0d.

To cleaning church after whitewashing 6s 0d.

1840 new lock for pound 3s 0d.

One quarter pay to Bradstreet as pounds man 13s 0d (repeats).

1841 To stubbing and repairing church path and laying chalk round the church and assisting whitewashing to the church 15s 0d.

For parish map and tithe apportionment 2 3d (this will be the church copy of tithe map now in Bury Records office).

Vince the blacksmiths bill 10s 3d.

1843 Old Pew stuff fetched 10s 0d.

1847 Four loads chalk 3s 0d.

1849 Mr Clayden for subscription to Hadleigh Fire Engine for one year ending 1849 £1 1 0d.

1853 Rate at 2d in the pound for 1836 collects £11 2 9 and half penny.

1883 Deaths bill for repairs to the roof £10 19 5d.

Relaying lead on roof £2 10 0d.

1899 Organ blower 14s 0d.

Hadleigh Police Charge Book

Charles Peacock and George Woolard stole two ferrets from G Thorpe, a dealer, valued at six shillings, all from Hadleigh. Both were seventeen years old were fined five shillings each and six shillings costs on 28th December 1896. The two ferrets were given up to the prosecutor.

George and John Woolard trespassed in search of game on the 11th January were charged by Edward Chaplin. Witness was PC Henry Ransome, all from Nedging. The offence was day poaching, fined ten shillings with six shillings costs. Three rabbit nets were ordered to be destroyed.

Frank Stow of Semer a dealer. Unlawfully moved nine store pigs without a licence within an infected area on 15th March 1900. Fined four shillings and sixpence, costs thirteen shillings and six pence on 29th March 1900. He was aged 40 years, 5' 6" high with brown hair, brown eyes and pale complexion.

Richard Thurman of Semer a farmer, he owned a bullock with anthrax on 18th July 1900 at Semer and did not give notice to the police, case dismissed. He also moved the bullocks carcass on the same day and the manure as well, this was also dismissed. He was aged 50 years 5' 9", dark hair, brown eyes, dark complexion.

Albert Holder of Semer a labourer with George Keeble, Edgar Jarvis of Kersey and George Carter of Hadleigh were all involved in an affray at Hadleigh on 16th March 1901. Each was bound over in the sum of £5 with 16/6d each costs. Albert was aged twenty-one and 5' 7" tall.

Frank Stowe a dealer from Semer furiously drove a horse on the highway of Hadleigh on the 6th May 1901. A £1 fine and 7/6d costs. This time is described as swarthy, aged 38 with dark hair and eyes, the height the same as before.

Silas Honeywell a surgeon from Bildeston was drunk in charge of a horse and cart on July 1901, fined £2.

Thos. Warren MP did build a cottage without a certificate from the local authority.

Susannah Holder of Semer, a widow assaulted by Walter Burman of Bildeston on 28th September 1903. He received two months hard labour.

Aubrey H Lindsey of Semer Rectory a student for having a gun without a licence. Was eighteen years old, 5' 3" fined 10s 0d with 7/6d costs.

Rev. James Young Cooke

He was installed as rector in the village in 1838 and in a religious census of 1851 it noted that he owned one third of the village, I think it could be more, and was well known for his farm buildings. It is likely that he put up the property in the lane leading to the manor opposite the mere, one of which is known as the Reading Room, Semer Institute or the Mission Room. The building was used for village activities before the village hall came into use in 1923. Mary Maybee told me that her mother could remember bread being distributed here out of the poor rates, most likely to have been the annual gift of John Goodale going back to 1607.

He had Betsy Leman look after his idiot son Arthur at the Old Cottage at the top of Tugwoods Hill, she was paid £2 5 0d monthly and it must have been convenient for him to visit his son, Rebecca Leman takes over in 1871. His old servant Tugwood lived in the other half of the cottage and was paid four shillings a week.

He seems to sell a lot of wheat, barley, butter, pigs and timber, purchasing a lot of beans, peas and maize. The larger part of his income came from rent.

I have his domestic accounts from 1867 to 1875, there is too much-repeated information to include in this record but will highlight some of the interesting items. An enormous amount of money is spent on paying carpenters, masons, brick layers, sawyers, thatcher's, glaziers, blacksmiths and for carriage thus showing the amount of building work he is doing in the village and surrounding area. One man who is frequently mentioned is Grimsey who often presents his "bills," he seems to receive the largest sums of money.

His account is split as the weeks go by into paid and received. Pettit is a supplier of building materials, Ruch & Co supply his rum, Ellen gets sums of £2 10 0d for the Sunday school, Rosser Bros give him an invoice for £72 12 9d for three dozen brandy and £1 10 6d is spent on stockings for the Sunday school which I believe he funded for many years. He contributes to the Muriel Rifle Corps and towards the Boxers. Mrs Grimsey may be his housekeeper for she receives heavy sums of money each year. One large payment is £140 for hay and stover to Chas Gage, he spends £5 on the French Peasant Fund and £2 12 0d on Payne's schooling.

He notes that on 14th May 1872 he began building the chancel, he must have played a large part in the Oxford Movement which had strong roots in the Hadleigh area. Payments are mentioned for hand tools, oak and a Porritt stove for the church, Grimsey seems to be paid around twelve hundred pounds in 1872 and apart from about five hundred in the following year, disappears. Sadly, one of the last entries I find is to Payne, the parish clerk for assisting at funerals, without digging, of James Young Cooke and Arthur Cooke, 15s 0d. The father dies on 20th March 1875 and his son who the Lemons had looked after for so long passes away on the 8th April, three weeks later.

Schools

There was a church school, one for the union, a prep school and a private school after the village school closed. The village school was built in 1871, by the rector for forty children. Whites agrees but states that only twenty attend.

Rowland Lamb was master, his wife Harriet the mistress and at this time seems to be a private church school, it was to become a parochial building in 1896, it later had fifty pupils with an average attendance of thirty-five. The vestry accounts of 1894 state that the school should be closed for a time owing to insufficient accommodation to meet government requirements.

The Rev Eld, Lord of the Manor is the owner at that time of both school and schoolhouse and in July 1898 the property was leased from him for twenty-one years at a rent of £4 per year. In 1896 Jeffery Hugh Green the rural postmaster has an annual tenancy of the house. Len Green describing the school said that the house was to the right for the teacher, an office to the left of this accommodation, the passageway allowing infants and girls access to the rear yard, the door on the left going into the schoolroom and the right hand one to the office. The boys would have entered the schoolroom through a porch on the left of the building, their yard on the left at the rear separated from the girls.

The lease for the school would have expired in 1918, Len was twelve when the school then closed and he transferred to Hadleigh, the school then becomes Merelands, a private school run by a Mr and Mrs Schlinger, she cooked the children's meals and was a daughter of Mr Martin from the hall. At that time around twenty children attended including Alan Green, Sunny Waller, Kenneth Fairweather, Kenneth Nunn, Dorothy Green and Tom Morely.

The school and house are now private property, opposite the building is around an acre of meadow, once the osier ground which goes down to the mere.



Pictured above: Headmaster and Mistress with students of Merelands School.