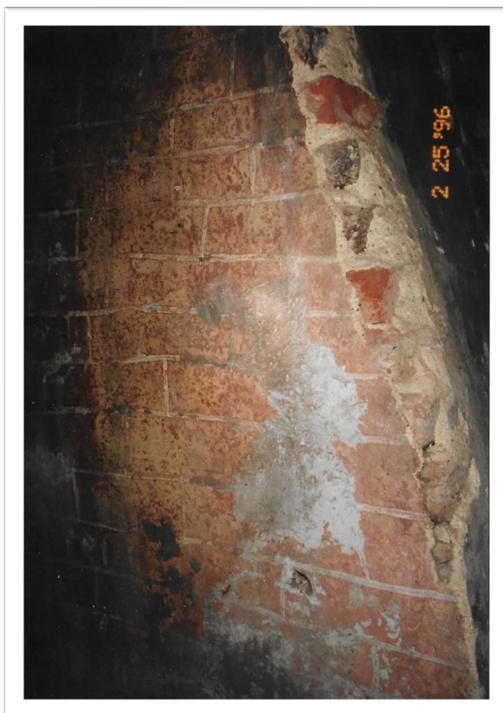


School minutes from 1987 to 1903

- 1897 Those elected to serve on the board are Edward Archer, Rev Henry Cooper is chairman, Will Sam Coe is clerk, John Gage, Joseph Luckey Martin with Roger Kerrison of Barclays Bank the treasurer, eleven days later the Rev Eld is asked if would sell the old school and house.
- 1898 The Education Dept. require plans of the school showing alterations, a Mr Stephens of Hadleigh has his tender accepted and the cost of alterations and desks is £160. On the 16th July a mortgage of £187 and a lease made between the board and Rev Eld for twenty one years at £4 per year. There follows a dispute in what was hired, it is decided that the schoolhouse, garden, and pathway is included. An advert placed for a mistress at £55 per year, one month later the rent goes up to £8 per year.
- 1899 In January Miss Allum appointed as mistress at £60 yearly, in February the Board School opens for thirty-six children, it is now a public elementary school.
- 1900 Miss Allum resigns, “not having got on with them”, five months later she resigns again, in April Miss Allum still on salary and Mr Green is given notice to quit the schoolhouse. The mistress stays in the rectory until the schoolhouse is vacant and furnished by the board for her use.
- 1901 The Cosford Union write to ask if the Union children could be accommodated at the school with no luck. No children under the age of five may be admitted and it appears at this time attendance is full and teachers are changing often.
- 1919 It is noted in Hadleigh School records that Semer children arrive late in bad snow conditions. In the Schbloch documents it states that the school was empty on 14 October 1921 and the SCC do not wish to reopen it.



Pictured above: Reference page 59 – Reddel is the repainting of original brickwork to make it appear better.

Mills

Granville Bendall has mentioned his father often saying “at the end of the road where the mill stood” that would mean from Sayers Green to Tudor Cottage. Trudi Kelly also says that on some mornings one can still see the outlines of foundations in the ground behind her cottage. A track used to run down from the savage bend at Gate Farm to the mere at the bottom of Watsons Hill, this is the bend where residents of the properties there had to cross the road to use the outside toilet. The tythe map shows that the road from the mill going down Tugwoods or Watsons Hill was numbered 284 and was once an acre of pasture, another farmer stated his family said the road ended where the mill stood, not forgetting that post mills could be moved from place to place.

Two broken mill stones are buried in the bank at the top of the hill, and I wondered why and how they got there, the Suffolk Mills Group were uninterested, and I finally managed to get Jack Clover to visit, and we lifted them up saw the unused stone faces and took photographs. The conical shape seemed wrong the quartz grit looked right, and the two pieces appeared to have a hole in the centre, they do not match so I think we have two stones that do not look like ones used in a post mill. They are too heavy to turn over and dangerous to do so on the bend in the road. Jack thought at best they would have been a bottom stone and likely to be old, I have no documentary evidence for a post mill in Semer but to have stones and ground disturbance, Semer had a post mill.



Pictured above: One of the mill stones still in the roadside bank at the top of Watsons Hill

There is some possibility that the debris resurfaced from deeper ploughing in the 1950's may have been farmer Watsons house and that these two heavy objects only made it as far as the roadside. They are still there and no going to move easily, if the highways department shown signs of moving them, they should be put by the village sign.

The other mill was driven by water, is well documented and was noted in the Domesday Book, it lasts till around the middle 19th C when from Rev Cooke's accounts it tells of the mill being in distress. There is a covenant on the 17th May 1549 between Kings College and John Smith of Semer for the rebuilding of Hocking Mill. In the 13th C Nesta daughter of Adam of Cockfield held Semer Manor under the patronage of the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds, containing 421 acres of “earable”

land, 9 acres of meadow, 26 acres of pasture, 40 acres of wood and a water mill. It is at this time that it is mentioned that the village had a warren.

In 1385 John Calle the Prior of Kersey was given a date for the repair of one pyss “weighing scale” at the mill pond of Semer (Manor Court 24th May 1385). It is called Hucking Mill from the church terrier of 1627, in 1634 Anne Smith, a widow, leaves in her will, a mill in Semer to her son in law, Thomas Smith and called it Hocking Mill, she appeared to have purchased it from Kings College in Cambridge. In 1733 the rector agrees with Joh. Betts for his mill and other small tythes eighteen shillings, in 1743 received of Betts, Cobbin and B Green eighteen shillings.

From 1743 to 1746 Thomas Cobbing paid for Oaking Mill and ye meadows £1 1 0d tythe and it is at this date that Sam Cutton takes over the mill. In 1750 from Rev Thomas’s account book, it states that he has purchased the mill for £180, its likely to be Semer but not mentioned. In 1802 its back to Hocking Mill when Jas Scott, an apprentice, remembers 50 years back “a little mill standing by the flood gate hole, since pulled down”, I think that possibly refers to a summer mill for when the water was too low for the larger one to operate. James Young Cooke’s account book is charging Miller Cutten £45 per year from 1826 to 1833. In 1828 the carpenters bill was £8 1 10d and the bricklayer £8 0 10d.

Three years later Cooke paid for the following expenses.

	£	s	d
Bricklayer	10	0	0
Bricks	6	5	0
Carry materials	1	4	0
Mill weigh	65	17	0
College rent	10	16	0
Carpenter	9	7	6
The total	103	9	6
In 1830 to repair the floodgate	2	0	0
College rent	10	3	9

It seems odd that so much money is spent from 1829 and that it appears to be falling 10 years later. In White’s directory of 1844 there is no mention of Wm. Cutten the corn miller and no mention of milling a year later, so why did the sexton pay ten shillings land tax on 23rd January 1871 and why is it the sexton paying? Something is odd.

Until 1996 Len Green lived here and in his later years cared for by Ethel Drury, he tells of a complete restoration of the property in 1912 and urgent repairs in 1973 after a thunderbolt hit the house. The tythe map shows the mill was joined to the house on the side nearest the river, the pond has gone and is difficult to differentiate mill timbers from house, the frame is obviously old, wallpaper covers the studs and jowl posts. There is a mullion window with four mullion each 33” long, a shutter groove runs along the plate. A tie beam is pit sawn and will have been inserted later, I like to think that what I could see on being shown around that I was seeing a hall house with an inserted floor and chimney, but we must wait for another restoration to at least get to the roof to know more, the rear addition and conversion on the first floor belong to building work in 1913.

Gravel was extracted in 1930’s and forties with the Americans taking much in 1942 for the new runway at Wattisham, I believe this work changed the shape of the river and makes it a little harder to work out the position of the pond, water race and wheel, the real answer would be some intensive archology, I have tried to get more help from mill groups without success.

Workhouse/Union

The workhouse finally sold for £1373 19 10d in 1921 and demolished in 1926, any paupers at the finish were transferred to Tattingsstone. It had a slightly odd end, for when advertised for sale the adverts were inserted in the Newcastle Chronicle, Yorkshire Post and Liverpool Daily Post. What was going on? When transported, as to the colonies, the paupers went by cart at eighteen shillings a head to the new manufacturing areas, baggage allowance was 4cwt each family, and at the destination an agent checked if they had enough belongings to look after themselves, earlier they had nothing sometimes not even shoes.

Go round our local area today and bits and pieces of the workhouse appear in odd places, I took slate skirting out of Drakestone when making improvements in 1986 and folk over the years have shown me all sorts of oddities that they inherited. There are any many opinions of how good or bad workhouse conditions were, Rev Calvert sums it up very well by stating in 1834 "that the labourers themselves do not like the regularity of life required by domestic servants". When I talk to people about conditions of the paupers very few people seem to know about the enormous out relief that was carried out, apart from "caring" for the paupers in the house.

On the 22nd December 1779 the Rev Thomas Cooke sold 13 acres 3 roods 2 perches of land including Hadleigh Broom Field and Little Field to Sir Thomas Thorrowgood of Sampsons Hall and others for £408 16 6d, it was to be for the use of the Guardians of the Poor of Cosford. An agreement in 1780 between the Guardians in the Cosford Hundred except for Hadleigh, and Polstead in the Babergh Hundred and with Isaac Strutt of Boxford a carpenter.

One building to serve as a hospital for the reception of aged and infirm persons.

One building for young children not able to work.

One building for poor persons able to work.

One building for the reception of the sick.

One building for lunatics.

One interesting clause is that "if any hurt or damage should be occasioned by the Superiour force or any mob or number of people, loss and damage will be bourne by the Directors and Guardians." I assume that Isaac is a wily bird and covering his back is essential in those times, the future inmates were not happy. The price for the job came to £2751 2 9d, the Guardians to supply sand at 6d per load, insured for £4000 in 1836 and stated in Whites Directory to have cost £8000 in 1844. The cellar heights were to be 6ft 6ins, first floor 10ft 0ins, rooms in the wings 11ft 0ins, Chamber throughout 9ft 6ins and Garretts 7ft 6ins. When incorporated in 1779 under the Gilberts Act there were eighteen parishes in the Cosford Hundred. Later in 1835 it was much improved to meet the requirements of the new Poor Law Act and it served another ten parishes in the Babergh Hundred, covering in all eighty square miles with a population of eighteen thousand people.

The building underwent big alterations and with the new regulations and unrest in the country it is no wonder that there was considerable disruption in the Union at this time. When a meeting of the Directors and acting Guardians was held in Bildeston amongst their resolutions was one that stated that at their future quarterly meeting a pint of wine be on the table for each person, the bill be settled immediately after dinner. One of the disappointments in reading through the workhouse papers is that we get to know a lot about the rules and regulations but not so much about the paupers themselves, that is until they misbehave, and it all gets written down.

We must also remember that that though Semer Workhouse goes through a very bad time in the mid 1830's it did so elsewhere as well. The Governor of Semer House reporting to the Directors at the Crown Inn in March 1835 states that the paupers are in a state of rebellion, they have broken up and burnt the floors of their rooms, they have smashed the windows, removed a door separating two of their wards and opened a partition separating male and female paupers. The Governor

himself has been illtreated and had brickbats thrown at him whilst serving food in their dining hall and assaulted him on other occasions. Constables from other parishes were paid £9 10 0d in addition to their board to keep order in the house over the past few weeks and nineteen commitments have been made to Bury Gaol in the last quarter. Though there is very little evidence of severe discipline in the documents I believe the Union to have been a house of correction, for in 1834 the treadmill was offered to the county of Essex with no success and no luck when advertised nine months later, it was later broken up for scrap, I can see no reason of a treadmill other than punishment.

In this period the Capt. Swing riots were spreading across the country. Swing himself did not exist but the unhappiness and poverty did. It became a lot easier to set light to stack or barn for the Lucifer had become available and far easier than carrying a lit candle across the field.

The paupers worked in agriculture given the opportunity otherwise they spun wool which they then washed and combed; the result sold in Norwich. Arthur Young praises the Rev Thomas Cooke's management of the Union making it the most productive in the county. Young wrote his book entitled General View of Agriculture in Suffolk in 1813, the average number of poor in residence at that time was around 180 and on average burials at 26 per year. Young comments that a greater number died in the earlier years; this attributed to the meat diet which paupers were unaccustomed to. The house was free from disease the inoculations being successful at a time when there was smallpox in the county. The wool, purchased from Lincolnshire being better quality than that from Suffolk sheep, this appears to be so from the Middle Ages, but I have never seen anywhere that Suffolk's is better for eating.

In 1806 Bishop Henry of Norwich was approached asking for a burial ground for the Union as there were too many burials for Semer churchyard and it was agreed that half an acre owned by Rev Chas Cooke would be used, another piece of land of the same size would be added later. Richard Keens and the writer have worked over the past few years to make sure that this one-acre burial ground will be saved for the future and under the care of the parish council. Some years back I had made and erected a sign in the burial ground showing details of the union, more village folk visit this site than did so in the past.

From around 1835 the meetings take place in the Union and on the 13th October of that year it is chaired by Rev Fred Calvert of Whatfield. It is agreed that the governor Mr Cubitt be paid £54 per annum, his wife as matron £26 per annum and the woman Pittock, nurse to the sick be paid £3 per annum, to provide her own clothes and have no prerequisites whatsoever.

This would now be the first of many requests asking for guidance on new laws from the Poor Law Commissioners, a new broom is sweeping through the workhouse. In this year Mr Ansel and Mr Kersey, on behalf of the parishioners of Hadleigh, visit the new manufacturing districts in Manchester, Liverpool, Wigan and Birmingham and report on the possibilities of local poor people emigrating to these areas to gain better employment. The visit took twelve days, and they covered six hundred miles, they took two labourers with them to check the truth of the reports, many workers were interviewed who were happy with their situation and the increased wages they received. The prospects were so good that one of the labourers, Thomas Rand stayed up there and asked for his family to join him, he requests that they are sent with good shoes on their feet.

A carrier from Hitcham is paid £17 for conveying the family of William Knock to Yorkshire, in March 1836 he is in a destitute position, a child sick, without funds for food and furniture, the Union send a cheque for £2 10 0d saying they had already spent £3 14 0d on clothing.

In November 1835 plans were submitted for the stabling of forty horses, they wish to approve the costs the following week so there appears to be some urgency, it would seem because of the unrest the authorities thought it wise to have a military presence at the workhouse, the stables are erected the following year for the sum of £564. Mr Kersey is reimbursed 15 0d for the five broadswords he sent to the workhouse.

In December 1835 Thomas Rand must have got to Manchester for Mr Muggeridge of the Poor Law Commission is asking for money to buy the family some furniture, £2 was sent.

More security for the boardroom windows both up and down stairs are to be arranged and Mr Carter, the inspector of police has £60 in advance until his expenses can be ascertained. At this time there were 194 people in the House for that quarter, five from Semer, the cost of maintaining them all was £287 3 8, the five from Semer cost £6 5 7d. Time is taken by the board into looking into grievances such as those who have not received their flour from the miller or that coffins being made under contract several parishes away are not available when needed. Decisions were made with the best intent, but logistics sometimes failed.

In 1836 Groton and Lavenham wish to sell their workhouses and in that year Wm Grimwood of Semer is offered work in the coal pits by Mr Muggeridge at Manchester, at the same time Mr and Mrs Carver appointed schoolmaster and mistress for £25 per year, flour supplied in out relief amounted to 240.25 stones, costing £20 1 3d. In 1843 half a ton of flour was delivered in Hadleigh each week. Half a ton of oakum is purchased to keep idle refractory characters employed; it is later decided that during regular hours 3 lbs should be picked. Dr Kay of the Poor Law Commission recommends that the Guardians promote the introduction of an industrial system of education and infirm men have a system of recreation, the iron spikes embedded in the top wall are to be removed. The schoolteachers come and go with surprising regularity, they seem not to teach in the working day but from 6.30 to 8.00 in the evenings. One school mistress refuses to birch a girl as instructed by a guardian, and due to repeated differences between the school master and the governor Mr and Mrs Rogers are dismissed, it is agreed that the children of the labouring poor be vaccinated. Coffins at this period cost 9/6d and 6/0d for the smaller ones and a supply to be kept at Lavenham. A letter from Dr Kay holding Rev Calvert in great esteem and mentions that Semer Union has a larger amount of success than most others in England and Wales.

It is from 1835 when the Poor Law Commission are running the care of paupers nationally that it is obvious that many areas have sharpened up, the politicians needed to cut costs and it is working. There is much more I could include in these records, but it would then be a record of the Union rather than of the village. In 1838 it is resolved that friends of paupers dying in the workhouse be permitted to remove them from the workhouse whether a coffin had been supplied or not, a sign of cost cutting is when parishes are required to pay for coffins, shrouds, burial and registration and that there will be no need to supply a hearse when the friends of the deceased could borrow a tumbril for the occasion.

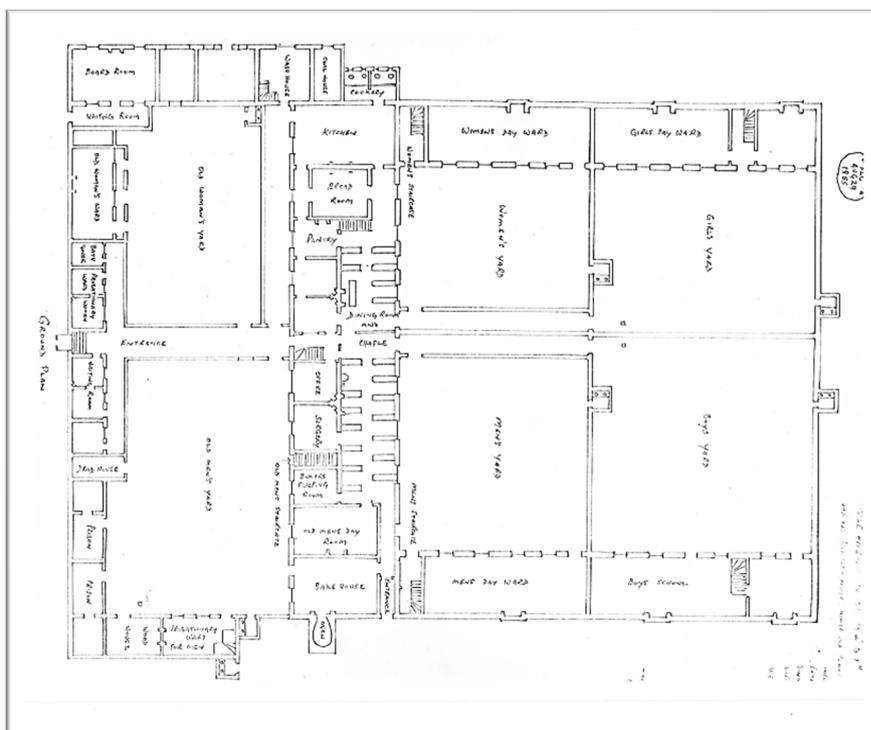
In 1844 a chapel is to be erected by voluntary subscription near or in the workhouse, and in 1847 another burial ground is to be added to the existing one. It is decided that wayfarers need to be searched by the governor before admission. Bob Spraggon said that lads in the village had to be careful in the lanes around the union as they had chance of being mugged by the vagrants. German prisoners of war held at the workhouse in WW1 were used as farm labourers and taken daily out to the fields around Semer.

In 1923 “Clerk reported that as the cemetery will be reserved to the board on the sale of the institution, a small gateway would be required to be made at the south side of the meadow below the institution”. The sum of £1373 19 10d was realised for the workhouse at auction keeping the right of way to the cemetery. The auction was held on the 22nd March 1923 at the Great White Horse Hotel at 2.30, a modern laundry, kitchen, chapel and hospital on ten and a half acres. It contained sixty rooms, those on the ground floor and a few upstairs were steam heated, the drainage led to a vast septic tank. Included in the sale were the farmery, garden and land. Lot two was the brick and slated hospital with grass land in all amounting to 2 acres 0 rods 31 perches it had been erected in 1869, replacing the various pest houses that preceded the building.

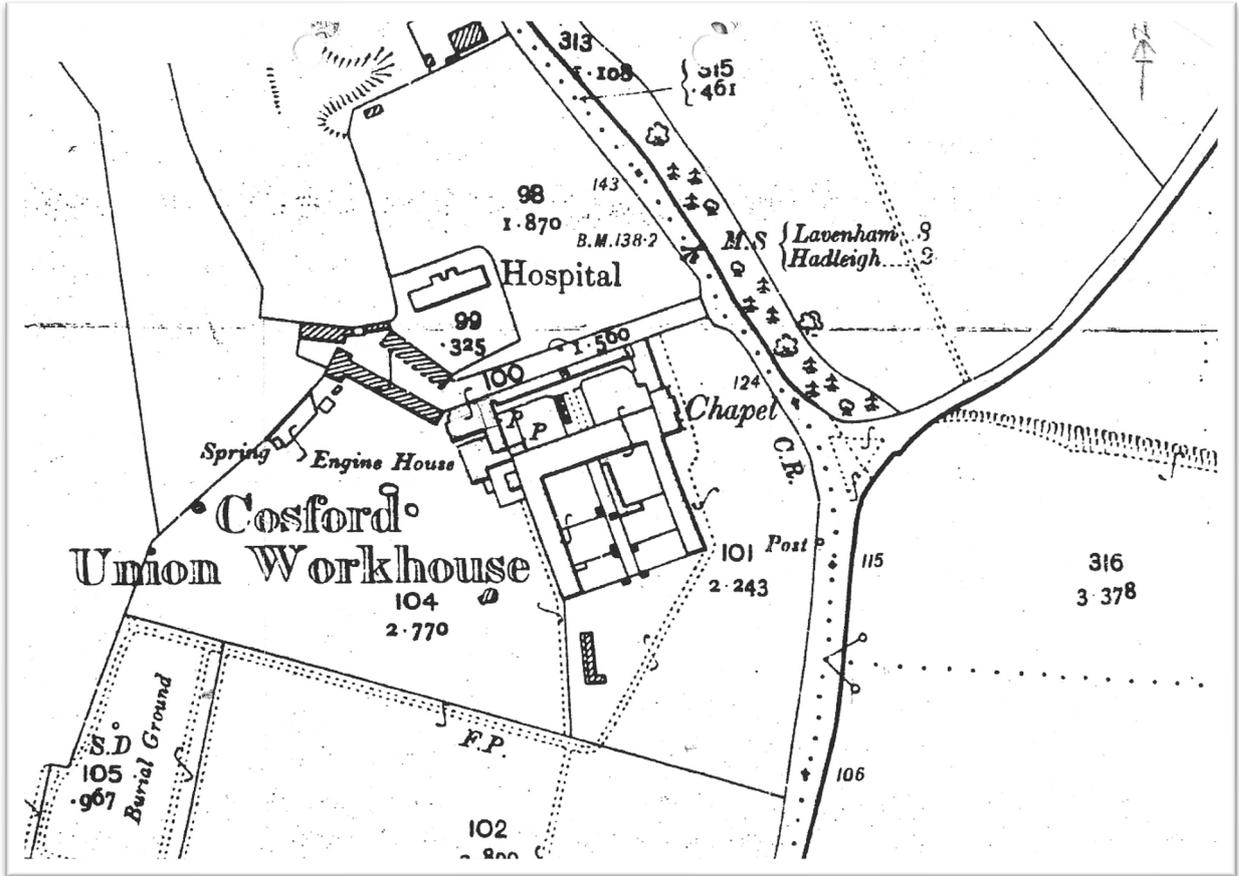
I first visited the cemetery in January 1994 and was very impressed at the magnificent crop of snowdrops showing, stones had been collected and placed together, there seemed to be no order in this arrangement but on subsequent visits worked out that the deceased relatives themselves very poor had piled worked flint to represent a triangular headstone and these over many years had fallen and spread around in an odd formation, they have a round cobbled shape. On one headstone for Ebenezer Ward of Bildeston who died 18th September 1862, I found on his stone,

*Farewell conflicting hopes and fears
Where lights and shades alternate dwell
How brightly unchanging morn appears
Farewell moonstant world farewell*

It is likely that Ebenezer died of smallpox in the hospital for infectious diseases above the Union building and that his relatives could afford a tombstone whereas those paupers buried many a year before paid their respects in knapped flint. There are only a few headstones left now but years back they totalled around fifty. Elsie Munson who worked in the private laundry said the burial ground was overgrown in 1921. I have found no burial register yet, I am sure one must have existed.



Pictured above: The ground floor plan in 1855



Pictured above: This plan shows a full-size burial ground.



Pictured above: The workhouse with the wings looking to Hadleigh

Roads

I have the survey of the roads for 1864 for the Lavenham Highway District, the total distance is 433 miles 4 furlongs 0 chains 0 links, Semer amounts to 6 miles 6 furlongs 8 chains 7 links. On several occasions when talking with local folk, Money Pits was mentioned but as it was often bawdy it did not get recorded however it is on Semer's Road survey and is on the right-hand side of the road to Kersey from the common, just past Drakestone Lane. It is recorded as Money Hole, and I would expect it to be a sand or stone pit by the road which someone fortunately found. The fun of local history is that something said in a jocular way by several people was there a century and a half before. Interestingly the survey mentions the common a few times as though it was still there.

The survey was done by Mr F Sexton a surveyor and estate agent from Kersey, it consists of fifty-eight pages and covers an area bounded by Bures, Acton, Gedding and Whatfield to the east. It is not easy to understand in our modern context the marker stones and trees which used to point the way and are no longer there and the many changes to the parish boundaries that have taken place at Drakestone Green and Ash Street since.

I would like to speculate that the Romans passed through our village. There is evidence of a Roman encampment by the bend in the river at Stone Street, the word stone has a Roman connection. At the very top of the hill on the right just before the turn off to Lavenham, every year there is a huge crop of Alexanders by the road verge, itself another pointer to Roman activity for the plant was used in their cooking and the seed quite often fell of the carts and left its mark. Going onwards in the Bildeston direction the road meets with the major route that lays under Wattisham airstrip which connects Long Melford and Coddanham.

Another pointer is the find made by Mark Self in 2007, in the area we know as Bendall's Corner, it is a part of a Roman harness fitting, fully described as a loop terret. I know that Roman roads were as straight as possible, but one must consider the impact of Anglo-Saxon farmers when turning their ploughs, pulled by oxen at the end of a strip and making big sweeping bends on the headland which still cause us difficulty in driving on our local roads today. Look at a map with known Roman activity take a rule to join up interesting spots, try Stratford St Mary to Stanton. Suffolk Roman roads were built of gravel, the surface being rammed with small stones and are more likely to disintegrate sooner than those in the national network, so the Anglo Saxons would have no trouble in making their imprint.

Two thousand years after the Romans came, the village decided to put itself firmly on the map and erect a village sign, various locals made their contributions and on the day many village people turned up for the unveiling, the Rev. Howard Crellin said a few words, all were impressed. It had to be taken down once when the new bridge was to be constructed, the foreman seemed more concerned with not damaging the sign than the fate of his new bridge.

PARISH OF SEMER.

NAMES OF ROADS.	DESCRIPTION.	DISTANCE.				TOTALS.			
		Miles.	Furlongs	Chains	Links.	Miles.	Furlongs	Chains	Links.
Hadleigh and Stowmarket Road.	From Whatfield boundary (Semer Ash street road to Hadleigh and Lavenham road) (Semer common)	0	2	4	75	1	5	1	90
	Hadleigh and Lavenham road to Kersey and Bildeston road (on Common)	0	2	5	40				
	Kersey and Bildeston road to Rectory road near Semer bridge	0	3	1	70				
	Rectory road to Dairy road	0	0	4	85				
	Dairy road to Semer Hall road	0	2	0	40				
	Semer Hall road to Nedging boundary	0	2	4	80				
Hadleigh and Lavenham Road (from Semer Common).	From Hadleigh and Stowmarket road to Crossways Kersey and Bildeston road (on Common)...	0	0	2	5	1	0	9	42
	Crossways Kersey and Bildeston road to Drakestone Green road	0	5	1	45				
	Drakestone Green road to Syer's Green road (G. Pound)... ..	0	0	3	65				
	Syer's Green road to post Lindsey boundary..	0	0	9	32				
Kersey and Bildestone Road.	From Kersey boundary near Money hole to Drakestone Green road	0	1	4	10	0	4	9	70
	Drakestone Green road to Crossways Hadleigh and Lavenham road (on Common)	0	1	2	60				
	Crossways Hadleigh and Lavenham road to Hadleigh and Stowmarket road	0	2	3	0				
Ash Street and Naughton Road.	From stone Whatfield boundary to Dairy road	0	0	2	85	0	1	8	93
	Dairy road to corner of Blacksmith's shop Naughton boundary	0	0	2	78				
	Whatfield boundary (Crouch hill) to Elm tree on do.	0	0	4	0				
	Whatfield boundary (on do.) to detached piece of Naughton	0	0	7	40				
	Detached piece of Naughton to Crouch and Whatfield road	0	0	1	90				
Crouch and Whatfield Road.	From Ash street and Naughton road to Whatfield boundary	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0
Dairy Road	From Ash street to Mill road	0	2	1	34	0	4	9	29
	Mill road to Hadleigh and Stowmarket road..	0	2	7	95				
Mill Road	From Dairy road to Mill gate	0	0	2	80	0	0	2	80
Sayers Green Road...	From Hadleigh and Lavenham road to Hall road and Rectory road	0	2	4	85	0	2	4	85
Rectory Road.....	From Sayers Green road to Hadleigh and Stowmarket road	0	1	6	15	0	1	6	15
Hall Roads	From Sayers Green road to Rectory road to Hall gate	0	0	9	25	0	1	1	0
	Hadleigh and Stowmarket road to Hall gate..	0	0	1	75				
Shoulder of Mutton Lane.	From Kersey boundary to do.	0	2	4	50	0	2	4	50
	Carried forward.....	5	2	1	54

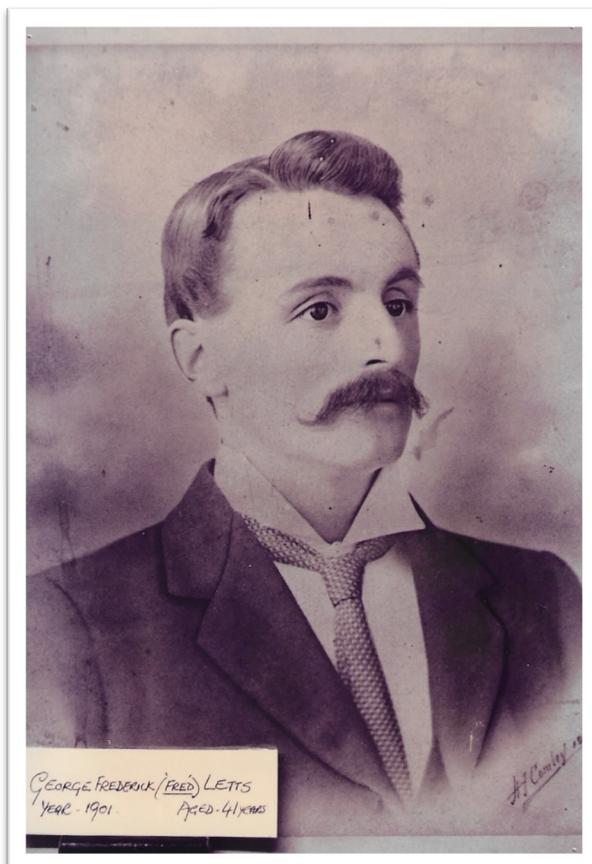
Pictured: Semer's roads from the Lavenham District Survey of 1864

THE PARISH OF SEMER, (CONTINUED.)

NAMES OF ROADS.	DESCRIPTION.	DISTANCE.				TOTALS.			
		Miles.	Furlongs	Chains	Links.	Miles	Furlongs	Chains	Links.
	Brought forward.....	...	...			5	2	1	54
Drakestone Green and Ropers Green Roads.	From Kersey and Bildeston road to Harrow lane Kersey boundary	0	2	6	90				
	Stone in Green's orchard to Green's Garden gate Kersey boundary	0	0	2	58				
	Maple tree Kersey boundary to Drakestone lane leading to Sayers Farm	0	0	3	15				
	Drakestone lane to Lindsey boundary near W. cottage	0	3	5	40	0	6	8	3
Drakestone Lane ...	From Drakestone Green road to Hadleigh and Lavenham road near Sayers Farm	0	2	9	40	0	2	9	40
Chelsworth Road, from Brick Kiln.	From Hadleigh and Lavenham road to post Chelsworth boundary	0	2	9	10	0	2	9	10
	Total.....	...	...			6	6	8	7



Pictured Left: Mr and Mrs Maxwell.



Pictured Right: Fred Letts

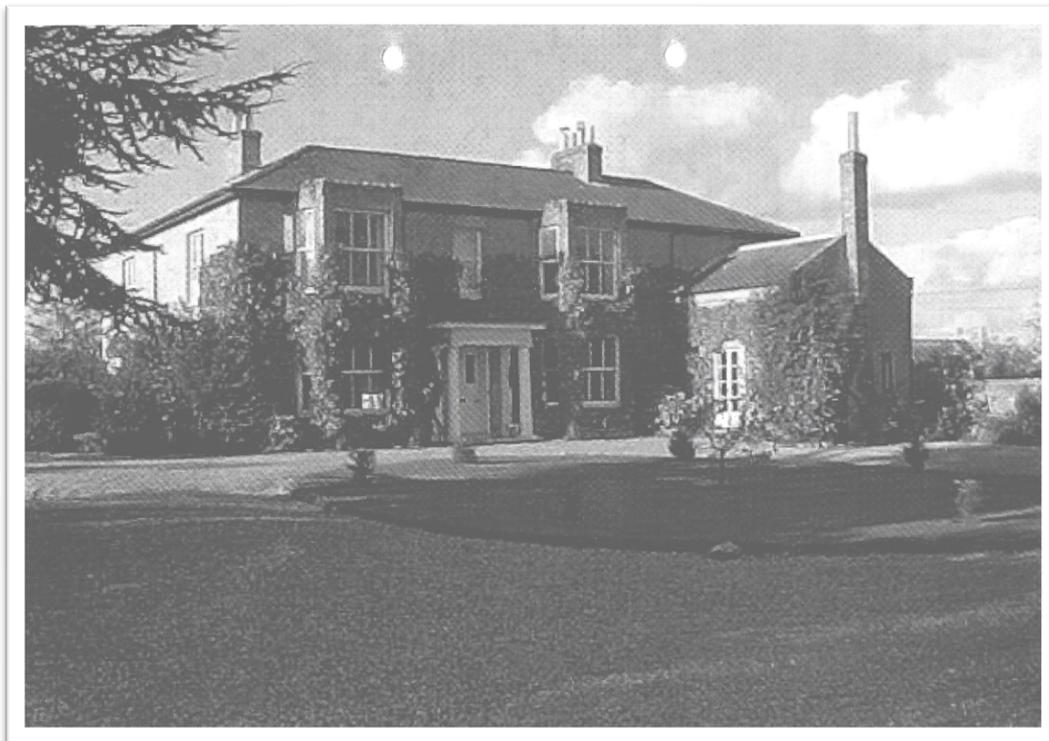
Hall Houses

The village is full of interesting houses, the three that stand out most in my mind are Corner Cottage, now called Foxgloves at the far end of Dairy Farm Lane, Bridge Farm in Ash Street and Tudor Cottage at the top of Watsons Hill. They all date from the middle 15th C, Bridge Farm maybe earlier. Before looking round the village at other properties it is significant to understand how a hall house worked.

They were first constructed by the Anglo Saxons and in a way, they represented the social climate of the times, if one had wealth then flaunt it, expressed by the quality and size of the timber sections in what was a totally timber framed house. The crown post was a central feature of the hall, placed on the centre of the main beam supporting the roof purlins and its collars and situated so that it could be admired, the poorer face of any timber would be turned away from the viewer and lower quality used in the service areas.

The head of the family sat at the “high end” of the hall, on a raised plinth and protected by a canopy overhead. An open fire would burn on the mud floor towards the “low end” and smoke drifted upwards out of a gablet or holes in the roof, later, wooden chimneys were fitted above the fire to take away the smoke. It was not until the 1580’s that proper chimneys were added usually with a first floor installed at the same time.

The earlier halls were of a simple two or three bay structures, the low end had a buttery and pantry (wet and dry store). A screen separated the fire from the passageway and service area, as in Corner Cottage one can still see evidence of the doorway which pack mules used to go through the screened passage to the rear. It was a dirty and draughty environment to live, soot fell from above, uneaten food on the mud floor and no privacy whatever, all the head’s retainers would eat and sleep here, whilst he retired to private quarters, developed more as time went by. You will realise by now that “high and low” has nothing to do with measurement but status. The writer built a medieval hall on the end of the dairy in the village of Pebmarsh in a 1450 style and managed a centre two page spread in the local press. Many halls have been restored but there is not so much interest in constructing a new one.



Pictured above: A past photo of Semer Lodge

Walking round the village

Starting at Ravens Hall, which is just inside Lindsey, though sometimes in Semer for the occupant found he received his mail quicker that way. It is a substantial property with massive jowl posts, it is a jettied building though this was covered up in the Georgian period and the southern aspect now shows a flat face, the roof seems at odds with the structure, and I wonder if the place caught fire in the past needing restoration. However, it shows that the original entrance was from the road leading from Drakestone Green to Lindsey.

It is a building with a big history but unfortunately, it is not in Semer though twelve of its acres are. There are several pointers indicating it was once called Hobarts Hall, not sure yet. A hoard of coins found in a field behind the Red Rose in 2020, were described as gold angels and silver coins, experts put the date some time during the Civil War with a value around £100,000. Who was living at the hall in this period and what faction did they support?

Going down the lane towards Hadleigh the next habitation is Ropers Green Farm on the right and Woodlands, a cottage which had been derelict for many years and has now collapsed, the Ranson family lived and farmed here for many years.



Pictured above: Woodlands around twenty years ago, now fallen down.

I am told that the main activity here in the past was pig rearing. There was a smoke house on site and there appeared to be a connection with Jubys, the pork butchers in Ipswich and improvements were made around 1885. For water they would have used the bore at the Drakestone Farm constructed 1933, before then they all used a very large, bricked catchment well, which in my time never ran dry, this was situated by the farmhouse back door at Drakestone Farm.

Carry onwards and in a short while on the right and find Drakestone Green and farmhouse, firstly a roadside pond then the granary, a barn with cottage converted in 1985. The Kersey and Semer boundary zig zagged through this plot and not until the 1935 was it all enclosed into Semer. At both Ropers and Drakestone are pudding stones likely to have been placed as way markers in the 17th C, some visitors have associated them with ley lines. See photo of Albert and stone in the Millennium book. I always regret levelling out the lynchet on the meadow showing the Kersey and Semer boundary.

Albert kept horses at Drakestone until 1969 and am told that friends sometimes calling on him in the dark may be told that he was out ploughing by torch light. I bought the property from Albert's estate and was always interested in the characters that came looking for him, one of my jobs was to take down a copper and other strange apparatus in the outhouse and wondered how much beer he had made there.

On the other side of the road to the farm buildings lay old Cawton, Caughton or Cauton Common the enclosure hedges now grubbed out and its once again a large field. Drakestone Green is so far to the south that people in Semer are surprised it is there at all, only recently have I found out that another name in the past was Worstead Tye. The Drake element could come from dragons which the local folk called crested newts who would have inhabited the ponds on the common, the ston or ton element is hamlet.

Walking down a narrow sunken lane one will arrive at a tee junction, to the right is Kersey, Shoulder of Mutton Lane and in the past a farm opposite the lane with Clap Gate giving access to the common. We go to the left, pass Common Farm Cottage and then the entrance to Common Farm and arrive at the crossroads, going straight over one arrives at the road to Bildeston, we go right and re-join that road nearer to Hadleigh. On our left would have been the twenty acres of rose fields owned by the Letts' family, they stretched towards and behind the village hall, I was told by Geoff Coe that on one occasion George Letts had the men set fire to 15000 roses, he was rather shocked. Fred Ainger commented that people came from afar to purchase the prize spring onions grown here.

Next on the left is Semer Lodge, upon the instruction of Dr Archer in 1911 the Semer Lodge Estate was put up for auction, extending to 338 acres 3 roods 14 perches it included Semer Lodge, Bridge Farm, Kersey Farm and various fields. Fred Letts purchased the property for £6000. Over on the right-hand side lie the three Lodge Cottages built by the Letts'. Then Cosford House where only a few years ago Robertson Family lived running their haulage business and which previously had been the Workhouse hospital for infectious diseases, in particular smallpox.

Next is the last property, the entrance to the right leads to Hillside and the old workhouse site with the one-acre paupers burial ground lying diagonally over on the far side, at the time of writing it is covered in trees.

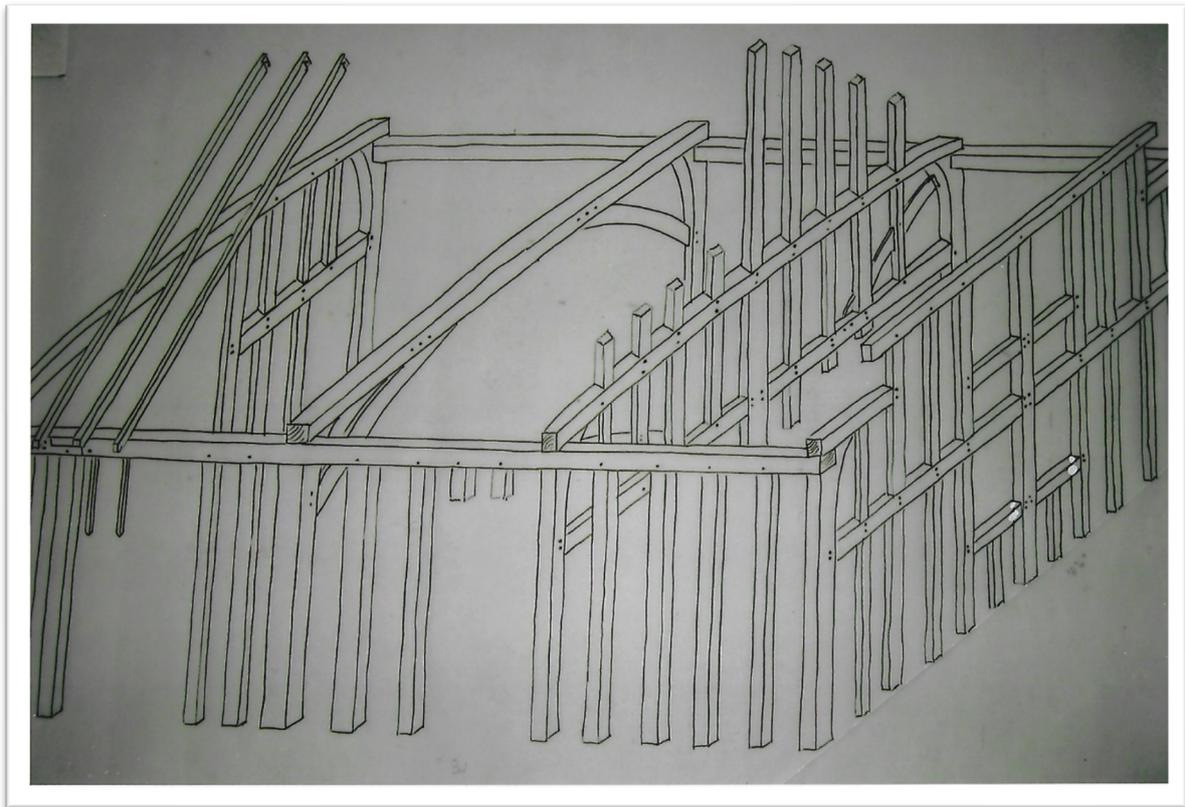
Opposite the old Union site entrance is Ash Street, bending back sharply towards the river Brett. Around halfway down the lane and on the right, we come to the road to Whatfield fording the river, known as the Overgang, (translated as way above the river). A little way further up the hillside on the left a track led up to stone pits, the stone being bought down the hill in bins on a miniature railway, further on to an old bridge crossing the water, the land on the left would have been Camping Close and to the right Bridge Farm. Just before we got Camping Close lay the rhubarb field, owned Mr Emeny from Hadleigh, he had the use of the night soil collected in the Hadleigh area by the three King brothers from Boxford, no one upset the collectors for it was carried in buckets through the accommodation. It was taken as fertilizer and laid over the rhubarb beds, Margaret Self tells me of going to a party in her finery, through the field and getting in "a right mess".

I took a "bumby bucket" to a series of lectures my wife and I were attending in Kersey, it was used as the outdoor toilet and had a swastika impressed on the bottom, our way of crapping on the Germans, it got a round of applause. Fred Ainger worked for Emeny until eighteen, as a mechanic when he went to war with the RAF. Chris Martin was in partnership with Emeny, and it was he who had got fed up with the rhubarb, set light to it all one morning. A small windmill by the Overgang

pumped water to Semer Lodge, taken down in 1994. At the tee junction the road leads leftwards to the Bildeston Road, we have Spring Cottage on the right.

Corner Cottage, the old medieval hall is across the road at the start of Dairy Farm Lane, the right-hand end of this timber framed building is original, it is possible that the left end could have been destroyed, possibly by fire. There is no smoke blacking on the original roofing timbers so it is to be assumed that this house had a wooden chimney added to the rear. The first floor is installed in the late 16th C and on a brick chimney, probably built at the same time, is the only example of Reddel, I have ever seen. It is very rare and is a red paint on which white mortar paint highlights a better-quality brick than is underneath, it finishes at collar height. As I have written elsewhere "it was all about status".

Leigh Alston and I went all over the timber frame, and it was he who thought it could only have a timber rear chimney and that it was speculatively built around 1480, not unusual, for this part of the country was becoming extremely wealthy. Leigh described it as "a lower quality, in line, traditional late hall, likely built for a copy hold tenant around 1480 to 1500."



Pictured above: My drawing of the original timber frame, note gap in the front showing two studs missing, the doorway to the screens passage. Pictured inset: close up brickwork

Len Green remembers as a lad a Mrs Manning selling cigarettes and sweets from the house which he called a shop. Originally the structure now attached to the right-hand end of the building was a mission hall founded by John Ansel of Hadleigh 21st April 1856, the existing building was possibly built by a John Cook of Hadleigh in 1877, the previous old cottage having been demolished to make way for a better mission hall, it would have been owned by a Mr Stowe. In 1949 it became a workshop purchased from the trustees for £100 by Edgar Manning, a builder.

In May 1805, a Mr Hoddy was convicted of preaching in an unlicensed premises at Semer and fined £20 as was the occupier, a widow Hannah Green. The following account of this incident appears in *Reminiscences of the first four Baptist Churches in Suffolk*.