

As follows.

“He was in the habit of preaching occasionally in a cottage at a village called Semer near Hadleigh. He was summoned before the magistrates, at the instigation of the rector, for this offence, and was fined twenty pounds; the holder of the cottage, a widow woman being fined the same amount. Mr Hoddy refused to pay, judging himself protected by his licence, protesting that he had no intention of breaking the law. In this however he was mistaken, for as the law stood then it was necessary, not only that the preacher should have a licence, but that the place in which he held his service should be licenced too. A waggon and a tumbrel were seized on Mr Hoddy’s own farm. The poor woman’s house was stripped of all she had by most reluctant officers, and the whole exposed for sale in Hadleigh Market. Mr Hoddy got a friend to buy his property, and he gave the poor woman new furniture for the old she had lost. At the next meeting of the Suffolk Benevolent Society at Stowmarket, the members came prepared to reimburse Mr Hoddy for all his loss.” Surely this cottage must have been the one that was demolished to make way for the first mission hall and ended up being attached to Corner Cottage.

Next door is Ash Cottage where the wheelwright lived and next door is Sawyers where the wheelwright worked and at one time also the carriage maker and to the rear of the property is the steel ring where the blacksmith and wheelwright put the rims onto the finished cartwheels, the wheelwrights shed and saw pit were further back into the plot. Inside the house is a quality half height cellar with its own well and it also has the old copper, range and an old Partridge bread oven. It is only a few months ago that this popular ironmonger finally closed its doors.

In the 1962/3 winter conditions were so bad here that helicopters dropped supplies. See the photograph of Jennings and Martin sign in the millennium book, the cast plate is to be seen in the side wall of Sawyers. In Fred Ainger’s time Walter Martin, the blacksmith lived in the house named after the woodworker.

Going up the hill, there stood some years back an old cottage on the left, I believe it burnt down and locals thought “not before its time”. The rise in land towards the Crouch was until the late 19th C a jigsaw of parish boundaries. From Bridge Farm to the top of the hill the land on the right-hand side now belonging in Semer, Whatfield even lost their part of Camping Close.

The last house is Old Tiles, and it has the most magnificent decorated plastered ceiling, (see SIAH visit 1969), one of the ground floor rooms has a badly deflected beam suggesting previous storage of bagwork in the room above. At a recent restoration chaff and seed were found under the floorboards on the first floor, it was quite thick and when thrown out onto the field it grew with a red flower. On research I found this to be stover, a clover growing to eighteen inches high it was fed to horses and went out of fashion in the 1950’s, quite often it was under sown into barley and considered a valuable crop. An even more valued crop was discovered by the police in 1977 for the gent living here at the time, just grew cannabis out of curiosity as others would do so with leeks, so he said.

When larger houses were underused grain was often stored inside and Tony Simpson told me that he had carried sacks of grain down the stairs in Semer Lodge in his younger days. Geffery Green postman and poultry farmer lived at Old Tiles. Previously he had once lived at the schoolhouse. In 1942 at the White Lion Hotel in Hadleigh a pair of shingled and tiled cottages known as Crouch Cottages, Semer was auctioned by R C Knight and realised £310, this could be the property. Turn around and head back to the old bridge. The first major property is Ash Street Farm, somewhere this building slipped through my research net and on contemplating, realised that it was one of the farms in Whatfield and any documents are filed with that village at Bury Records Office.

Next is Brett Cottage, previously a cottage stood where the garage is now and called The Brewers it contained two coppers and was used by the families living in the row of cottages. Each family in turn used the coppers for making their own beer, especially at harvest time. The beer was kept in one gallon stone bottles and water obtained from the pump standing at the Brewers. Gate Farm which is now demolished and once stood on the dangerous bend having entered the village from Hadleigh also kept brewing utensils for the people of the village.

A newspaper cutting stating that at ten o'clock on the 8th November 1822, under duress for rent, free of duty there is an auction. William Briar is officiating, and Nehemiah Stowe is the unfortunate one, Spring Cottage is the property, (I think his father was a wheelwright and coachmaker from Polstead, his sale of goods took three days at the Cock Inn, Polstead in 1812). It is offered as very superior farming, live and dead stock comprising of a large stack of fine upland hay, 6 fine cart mares and geldings they are of good size and symmetry and excellent workers. 8 very superior young red and white Suffolk polled cows, one with calf beside the others all in calf, beautiful year-old heifer in calf, 2 fine breeding cows, 17 pigs, poultry, a very good road waggon, good harvest waggon, 2 three quarter load tumbrils, ploughs, harrows, rolls, cart and plough harness. Household furniture consists of dairy and brewing utensils, 3 four-post and slump bedstead with neat common and check hangings, 3 featherbeds and bedding, flock bed chairs, tables, bureau, wheel barometer, good day clock in wainscot case, pier and dressing glasses, 4 iron bound hogs head beer casks, hogshhead brewing copper, 30 gallon washing copper, 2 coomb mash tub and wort tubs, 2 very good barrel churns, cheese tub, 2 capitol deal partitioned milk trays, 3 milk pails, butter stand, milk kettle, cheese press.

Nehemiah seems well organised, something is seriously wrong, it cannot just be a rent problem. This could have been a butcher's shop, am not sure but there would have been a shop in this road for it was a busy place. In 1877 William Stribling, a yeoman from Hitcham sold the property for £50 to Elijah Stow of Semer, it is likely that William was related to Edward Stribling the blacksmith who had his premises in Semer. Previous occupants had been Ebenezer Clover, in the ownership of Rebecca Stow, widow of Nehemiah, they married in 1798. Eliza the granddaughter of Nehemiah brother John, married a Joseph Cutten in 1852.

It seems that the Stows had a long association with this property. Nehemiah, a widower, came from Poulstead and married a Sarah Green, a single woman from Semer. I sense a connection here with people from the mill, only a short way down the road. I have in my records the people living here from then onwards, too much information. I am told when flooded in this area water could come in the front door and flow out the back and talking with local people I think that there was no work in cleaning the river over the war years and that with the very serious winter of 1947 when everywhere flooded after the snow thawed this would have been a vulnerable area, any way it appears to have stopped doing so since then.

Bridge Farmhouse is a spectacular structure built at a similar time to Corner Cottage across the road though John Bloomfield dates an interrupted tie beam as early as 1360, another example of this beam exists again in Corner Cottage. Bruce Andrews commences the refurbishment in 1992, he had long and heated discussions with the planners at Babergh; not sure who won but the result was well worth the effort Bruce and Andy put into it all. Work slowly progressed, the frame restored, and chimneystack rebuilt and by 1997 hazel was inserted between the studs and the process of applying daub began. The mix comprised of 1 part chalk, 2 parts clay. 2.5 parts sharp sand and .5 horse manure with long chopped straw as needed. Back in the past, getting hold of good oak for the frame

could be difficult, the carpenters of the time had to resort to other means, ash and black poplar were replaced in this restoration.



*Pictured above: The studs repaired, wattle fixed, and the daubing being applied on the front by Andy.*

Travelling down Dairy Farm Lane, first on the left is Dairy Farm itself, and the Buckle families' offices for their enterprise and behind this collection of buildings is Mill House with a small footbridge crossing the river to Mill Field, the mill structure explained elsewhere. On the opposite side to the farmhouse is Orchard Cottage, and unfortunately in 1972 a nasty

murder occurred here, and a man named Sony Waller died. Emma Martin lived here as a youngster and interviewing her was one of my highlights in tackling our local history, more about her elsewhere.

Between the farmhouse and farm offices is a small barn, the same set up as on the road buildings at Drakestone Farm. Onwards on the left is the river Brett and the gravel working of the past and to our right is First Golder where the earliest recording started. Arriving at the tee junction Bildeston to our right and Hadleigh to the left with the Manor to the front hundreds of yards away across the river. We need to go leftwards up Cook's Hill; it was here in the past that someone with a heavily loaded cart could obtain more horsepower from the Rectory to get help upwards.

Immediately on the corner is a small cottage currently undergoing restoration, this is the plot on which no tithe was paid. Here was the last post office in the village and Joan Schiltz the last post mistress, she was originally a "Green" and had married Joseph Schiltz a Rumanian who had been a lance-corporal in the German army and then a POW living at Happy Cottage. Joan was old Suffolk and was helpful in getting me on my way, but it was not an easy start. She told me that her mother Adelaide called out to the night watchman when the road bridge was being rebuilt "was he all right" after an earthquake had shaken everything, he replied that "it was those boys playing about again", this was 1931.

In the year of James 9th at the court the Lord granted out of his hands to Thomas Chaplin, Richard Chaplin, Benedict Posford, William Posford and their heirs; to the use of the poor inhabitants of Semer two tenements with appurtenances of the demesne of the manor. This building near to

Semer bridge for the dwelling house of two or more poor persons of the own aforesaid and by the rector of the church there and four chief inhabitants of Semer aforesaid and when the first of the two feofees should then two other tenants of the manor aforesaid be admitted to the use aforesaid rendering thence to the lord yearly two shillings at the usual terms of the said manor and performing suite of court and to them and their heirs by his steward shall be given thence by the rod and by this grant and right to the premises the same Thomas Richard Benedict and William give to the lord for a fine and made fealty and are admitted thence as tenants. (This is difficult to understand but it is referring to a small property between the bridge and the corner plot on which no tithe was paid and to be used as alms houses.

The next property on the right up the hill was the second post office and it was to the rear of this house that bodies were found in a shallow burial. The next one is Tudor House built in 1932 by Mr Letts, an interesting lady who lived here and whom I asked for help was Mrs Sabine who rented the house from the Letts from 1940 to 1944, her husband was a Squadron Leader flying Blenheim's from Wattisham, who made the first bombing raid over Germany of the war, this was the Keil Canal. He was flying home from Egypt in 1943, on the same flight was Lady Teddar, the plane crashed, and all died. She explained how good the Americans at the air base were to her after the event and that she did work there whilst mentioning the big American dance bands that played on the base. The runway up until the Americans came was grass. She remembered a German bomber pilot aiming for the Hadleigh ammunition dump and hitting the Donkey instead, the pub in Stone Street. She recalls the WI making jam in the village hall, evacuees in Tudor House and their mothers walking up from Hadleigh in high heel shoes to take their young ones back to the East End, this would have been the time when the Krays from East London first visited our area. Two squadrons that were at the base were 107 and 110 and gliders were towed from there to Arnhem, also the Stirling bomber which crashed in the road by Nedging Hall gate. This could be the incident when Tony Simpson got there first and how he sat with the machine gun, ammo everywhere. As with stories from other people some parts I leave out, interestingly she tells of the many local folk who just visited Wattisham to see the planes.

The next house on the right is the first post office, and lastly on the left is the village hall, we have arrived back at the old rose fields.

Time to turn about and back to the road on the left before the bridge, turn and with the river on our right hand side we find on the left, a commercial site that was once the village rectory, burnt down in 1953, local folk were incensed, many thought it arson. One man admitted to me that when working for Biggs Wall and demolishing the last of the building he and mates found what was left of the wine cellar, it took longer to do the job than expected. Biggs Wall were the civil engineers who took over the redundant site and laid watermains all through the villages in this area, it was a large operation, this would be around 1956, some houses are still on bores and checks are occasionally made to see if any new and heavy pumping operation affect their aquifers. Not so many years back a transport company wanted to make it a depot for empty containers, this did not go down well with the locals, they fought to reject the plan and won the day.

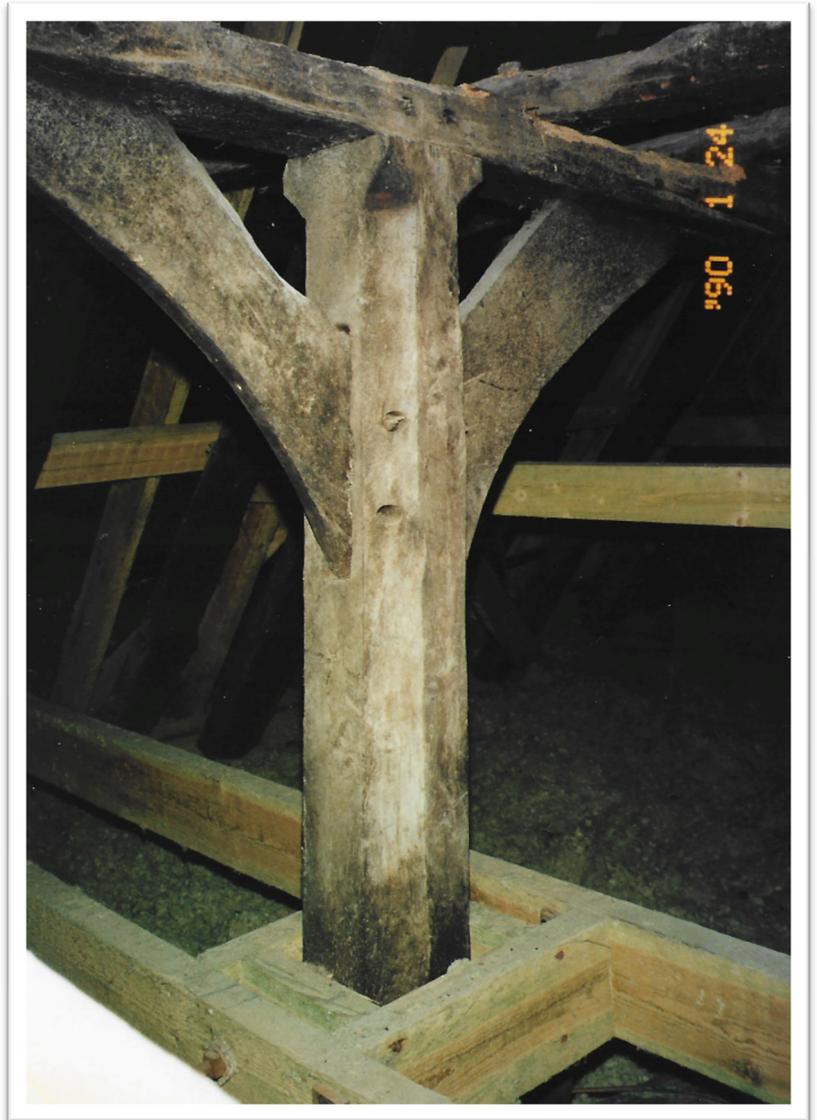
The company had already invested some money in a new road that is why a small dead ended road in front of the corner cottage is bypassed. It was here that a telephone box stood, I walked past to find it no longer there, puzzled I wonder why and realised vandals would not have put down the grass seed that was growing in its place. When walking down towards Ash Street I would always stop on the bridge look towards the church and spend time till I saw a few kingfishers, time well spent.

Going on our way we pass the entrance to Church Meadow and the track to the church, the meadow is the same size as about 600 years ago and when put up for sale some years back was purchased by

the Miss Vale's for the use of the village, when needed it is an ideal place to hold a function. Just past the entrance to Church Meadow on the left are two houses built by Biggs Wall for their staff.

Next is Ovamere, named for it overlooks the mere on the other side of the road, it was built by Mr Maxwell for Vic Ainger in 1925, Vic was a farrier in France in WW1 and when living and working here kept many beehives. The trees planted originally on the slopes around this house were walnut, unfortunately sycamore have proliferated.

At the corner on road turning right is Happy Cottage, back in WW2 both POW's and evacuees occupied it, it was told by Joan Green that a notice with this name suddenly appeared one morning, she was the post lady and found her husband here. Walk down the lane with the mere on our right-hand side and all the property is on our left. Firstly a three-story house followed by the Mission Hall, in the past also a reading room and men's club, then the school complex and then Rye Cottage, followed by the entrance to the Manor. Retreating to the tee junction with the steep hill on our right, over the other side of the road through the wood was the footpath to Gate Farm, this used to much bigger in the 19th C and used instead of the road to our right known as Watsons or its by its earlier name Tugwood Hill.



*Pictured above: The original crown post in Tudor Cottage where the new and old roof co-exist together, note the smoke blackening on the timber.*

Go up the hill and on arriving at the top at the bend is the Old Cottage or Tudor Cottage, it was restored in 1973 though the iron window frames are thought to have come from the workhouse when it was demolished in 1926 and years before then a brick skin had overlaid the timber frame. The cottage was constructed in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> C and built as a two-bay open hall with a collar purlin roof and still complete with its 7" x 7" octagonal crown post, elm is used in part of the frame. The high end of the cottage faces the road and a double scarf joint, brace to the middle rail and a long scarf joint show the early dating. I have often noticed that where timbers got covered with smoke from the domestic fire there is an absence of woodworm, one way of fumigating the roof.

The ceiling in the service end looks to be late 17<sup>th</sup> C, the smoke blackened roof timbers and original oak lathes to support the thatch still exist and the inserted chimney is to the lower end of the crown post.

On the opposite side of the road stood the equally old Ivy Cottage but unfortunately it was demolished. In 1970 the West Suffolk County Council had issued a repairs notice on the owner which is the first phase of a compulsory purchase order. In the late 1960's Mr F G W Letts wanted both the cottages demolished but the local authorities saved Tudor Cottage on architectural merit, sadly Ivy Cottage did not. Slightly down the hill behind Tudor Cottage was a farmstead occupied for generations by the Watson family. The site of the building was horse ploughed till 1953 when a crawler tractor deep ploughed and building debris surfaced, we also need to remember that this is the possible site of the mill but that we have no documentary evidence.

Two more houses on the left before the tee junction with the Bildeston Road, the second on the site of the village pound, where the pounds man collected stray livestock, impounded, and released them when the fine was received. The pound here was just on the edge at the bend in the road. Just opposite is Sayers Farm, to the right towards Lavenham would have been Mr Matthews old brick works just before Ravens Hall, I have no information on its past. Opposite the old pound going south is Dick Smiths Lane leading to Drakestone Green and the boundary with Kersey. Taking the main road to the left will lead to the old Gate Farm and its dangerous bend which if Pocklington is right is where the common had been gated and which he intended to take down, well it is not there today.



*Pictured above: Transport at the Rectory*

## Village Hall

Situated on the Bildeston Road overlooking the old common and built by Fred Letts to celebrate the coming of age of his son George in 1923. It is constructed of timber, measures about 20' x 48', with an extension on the east end, this later addition for toilets and kitchens measuring around 25' x 13'. It is clad with sawn weatherboard and has asbestos slates on the roof. Inside there is a large stage at one end with exposed rafters and match boarded ceiling and tongue and grooved floorboards. It was constructed by Cyril Green whose workshop was down the road on Cooke's Hill, Cyril was gifted £4 from "the Semer men's' chest", obviously a thank you.

On the 7th December 1923 G F Letts was committee chairman when it was resolved that an ordinary meeting would cost 10 shillings and entertainment twenty one, an additional one shilling for lights and heating. It opened on 28th November that year with a concert and whist drive, the proceeds came to £107 2 6d which passed on to Mr Letts to help pay off the debt for his furnishing the hall. It was decided to add a dressing and refreshment room at a cost of £75 16 0d.

At a meeting held on 19th April 1938 the parishioners' made arrangements for future air raid precautions, on the 7th May 1943 the Parish Council of Semer is dissolved and petitioned to become only a parish meeting with Mrs Maxwell to become Chairman, Treasurer and Clerk. I do not have any information about Mrs Maxwell but have the feeling that she was a driving force in the parish during WW2.

In 1945 there is concern with the lack of housing for farm workers and the need for electricity and a better water supply. In 1946 Mr Manning will do the repairs to the hall including painting and tarring. In the following year it decided not to get a caretaker until the cottage adjacent was repaired, Mr Redman could have the use of the hall as a Sunday school. Whenever funds became short, they always resorted to a whist drive. In 1949 the committee agreed to hire the hall for Parliamentary and County Elections at twenty-five shillings plus the caretaker's fee. In 1950 the hall is insured for £1680, in 1952 Mr Letts was approached and asked to supply water to the cottage which is to be repaired before the new caretaker Mr Squirrel moves in, (not sure where the water comes from). In 1955 "Caretaker wanted for Parish Hall Semer", two bedroom cottage, rent free, mains water, no electricity, a house to house collection to be made towards the costs of £56 8 3d.

In 1961 Mr Squirrel installs electricity to hall and cottage, in 1963 it is affiliated to Suffolk Rural Community Council. In 1968 Mr and Mrs Knights leave the village after nine years as caretakers, a year later the cottage renovated with Mr and Mrs Potter taking over. Mrs Letts feels that the open day for the rose gardens is doubtful in '71. In this year it was suggested that the village have a local historian. 1972 bought firstly a request to create a commercial vineyard and another to have a caravan park in Semer Wood both were refused by Cosford Council. In 1973 the caretakers of the cottage beside the village hall complained to the Officer of Health, as they considered it unfit for habitation, the cottage was condemned. The committee considered several options, it was agreed to sell the cottage, dismiss the caretakers, and employ a resident caretaker. After difficulty in removing Mr Potter and Mrs Goode it was agreed to be sold at an open meeting. A reserve price of £4500 is placed on the cottage when offered for auction also to dismantle the passageway between cottage and hall as for years the cottage toilet had been used by male visitors to the hall. Mr Cosford purchased it, he was the man who renovated the Red Rose pub and kept his stock of reclaimed timber at Drakestone Green.

In 1980 the hall insured for £15000, contents £1500 and public liability £250,000, extra pieces of land had been added for the car park over the years. In recent years, many improvements have been made to the hall, Richard Keens for one who has donated much time, effort and materials. It is now one year short of its hundredth birthday and in all this time has served the village very well.



*Pictured above: This is what happens with excessive rainfall at Church Meadow.*



*Pictured above: Harvesting the old way in 1926, opposite the first "Old Post Office" near the Village Hall.*

## Village history from the people themselves

This was the most enjoyable part of recording history over the past quarter of a century, lovely people and in the early days with a very thick Suffolk accent, I had to be careful. One elderly lady in Whatfield said “yes” she would let me come over but only if she had a chaperone, which was fine, it turned out that the chaperone gave me more history than the lady herself. Following are comments and views of folk I talked to.

### Fred Ainger

A delightful man whose feet were firmly planted in Semer, he was one of the people who called the Union “The spike” and explained how the paupers whilst standing up went to sleep on a stretched clothesline. Overmere built for his father Vic by Mr Maxwell in 1925, he bought Fred when six weeks old to Semer, Vic had come from Bradfield, his mother from Wrabness. On leaving the army as a farrier he had worked for Walter Martin and lodged with the wheelwright in 1920’s and for a while worked with Cyril Green, spending time demolishing the old Union. He had one of the biggest apiaries in Suffolk, made chicken huts, cut hair, did general carpentry and cut wedding rings of fingers. His employer was Mr Maxwell, a retired tea planter and his wife an Australian lady were very well liked in the village, both the Maxwells and Vic enjoyed a good relationship. Mrs Maxwell died and the estate sold, in 1953 Semer House burnt down, the local population infuriated.

Fred tells of Mrs Maxwell sitting in the church porch at two in the morning listening to nightingales, of going about selling Vic’s honey at a shilling a jar. He was an enterprising lad for when pumping the organ at a wedding the best man gave him 2/6d, after running round to ring the bells the same man gave him another 2/6d and a funny look. Fred started his job as petrol boy for Mr Emeny in 1938, the mechanic he worked with was named Holbrow, today Ainger Holbrow still service cars in the High Street, Hadleigh, the main building was originally a hanger from Hadleigh Airfield. He tells of local roads being repaired with drums of tar being heated up and laid on the road with stone from the pit then rolled in with anyone of the four road rollers owned by Mr Emney. Fred wrote up his thoughts on village life in Semer and how it kept him going during his overseas postings and how difficult to recapture it in a modern world.

### Granville Bendall

Electricity came to Sayers Farm in 1963 and to Drakestone in 1962, his water supply was one of the first to be laid on in the village in 1953, he tells of substantial changes to the locality when Biggs Wall took over the remains of Semer House and set up there as a base. Pipes arrived daily from Stantons, and they laid on the water supply over a wide area. One story I picked up was that the original company employed to lay sewerage in Kersey went bankrupt because they put in a fixed price, not knowing of the many springs in that area, forewarned Biggs Wall did it on a day rate. Interesting that Kersey can be known as an early industrial area and may have succeeded because of the fresh spring water flowing down the slopes taking the muck into the steam and away, and the population would still have good water coming out the ground. He remembers a Lewis gun on top of the pill box in what is now known as Bendall’s corner, so called for the family cornered the market in this small area. A searchlight sat in the spot next door to where the pound used to be, it was linked to the one at Bildeston and another at Raydon.

He adds a little to the Stirling bomber story, it was early in the war at 9 o’clock on a Sunday evening with the plane heading for Wattisham airfield and had been dropping ammunition on the way down, over the fields, all the crew died.

In the times before main water the Pouldings, Schbloch, Spooner and himself would get their water from the spring at Ravens Hall each day using a tub on iron wheels, the ten gallons after spillage on the return trip ended up only eight. Other local sources of water were Drakestone, Common Farm

and the pump outside Overmere. The clay for making bricks at the brick yard came from Granville's land and the spring there provided water for the pug mill, a track can be seen running from the pit to Ravens Hall as a cropmark. He remarks that when ploughing in the field beside Semer Wood he could often hit obstacles and always assumed that these were the remains of old tree roots from the days of ancient woodland, about half the wood remains. I have always thought that Rev J Y Cooke and Mr Matthews, the brickmaker, made a good team, with Granville's clay, Ravens Hall water and the reverend's ambition and money, it is how the property with red bricks multiplied in the village.

### Geoff Coe

Geoff worked for the Letts for thirty-two years, he lived at no 2 Lodge Cottages, he firstly worked with Alf Goddard on the farm and later in the nursery and rose fields. He worked for the Americans at Wethersfield and the last few years at Wattisham, he notes an attitude of better-quality maintenance with the Americans. The Letts business started in Hadleigh just under "the Castle," in 1952 they relocated to Semer, he remembers stacking corn on the ground floor of the Lodge but refused to do them more than two high for fear of the load going through the floor. This would mean he was working over the cellared area. Interestingly for I kept picking up information about the Pond Hall Gang who in their big smuggling operation had a safe house in Semer, these large cellars were the best in the village.

Geoff talked about the rhubarb crop on land behind Cherry Hill in the 1960's when Emeny and Chris Martin were in partnership, Chris who was fed up with rhubarb set it alight one Saturday morning thus ending their association. He adds that the crop faced the early sun and using straw forced it up, so it was ready in early spring and though a good crop the market was sometimes uncertain. Cecil Gynn talks of taking this crop as far as Glasgow. I think we can be sure that Mr Emeny was a smart operator.

### Len Green

Born in 1907, came to Mill House when seven years old from Poslingford and lived here ever since, he attended the village school by the mere with around another thirty children aged from five to fourteen years old and when the school closed when he was twelve, he moved to Bridge Street school in Hadleigh. In the war he served with the home guard and usually manged a cow and calf story when it came to doing night duty, he had always worked on the land and in later years for the Wallers and Buckles.

### Joan Schiltz

Joan's family go back in Semer at least 250 years in a continuous line, she served six years in the Royal Artillery in WW2 and in later years received a pension toward the deafness she picked up during that time. Her family all seem to be involved in the Semer Post Office, Cyril and Adelaide Green, her parents took over the post office in 1909, then in Hill House on Cooke's Hill, when her husband died in 1930, she moved fifty yards down the hill to the third Semer post office and Joan carried on till it closed in 1960. Uncle Geoff retired in the 1930's, he was also involved with the post office and he was the one who had problems at School House, he then lived at Crouch Cottage where he died in 1942. He is also famous for with his wife having triplets and I have the telegram from Balmoral conveying the Kings congratulations on their coming of age.

Joan lived at the cottage on the piece of land near to the bridge where the third and last post office was situated, she did the post round from 1947 dropping off the East Anglia papers on the way. She tells of her round as far as Common and Drakestone Farms and because the snow being so deep, she needed to come back across the fields. I had one winter at Drakestone where there was little on the fields but nine feet deep in Drakestone Lane, I phoned the council after a week and said "help" and

they replied that no one lived there, to be fair to them they sent two diggers for two days to sort it out. Garry Watts said sorry afterwards, he was clearing snow on local roads but could not do ours for his blade was too wide for the sunken lane.

One item I picked out of all the things she said was that Mr Pitt, one postie who lived at Great Bricet cycled to Semer for five thirty am, did his rounds to Elmsett and Whatfield and went back home at seven thirty, think of it in the winter. When Hill House had been vacated in 1930, Wilkinson moved in and took over the facilities to repair bicycles. Claude Green, Cyril's son came next, he sold loose petrol which he purchased from Stiffs of Kersey in cans.

Joan had papers from the auction of her property in 1896, from the estate of Rev Charles Russell Cooke which indicated there had been a blacksmith on this site, purchased by Rev J Y Cooke to build the cottage which stands there today. The same time as refurbishing the rectory and later known as Semer House, then a prep school, then purchased by the Maxwells.

### Alf Goddard

I have a newspaper photo of him in 1972 at eighty-one years, from Lodge Cottages, he started work at thirteen with a wage of 3/6d per week, he retired at seventy but still worked part time for Mr Letts at Tudor House, during his working life the cutting says he won 185 prizes for ploughing with horse and tractor.

### John Goodale

I was not old enough to interview this man, he was from Aldham and made a will dated 29th September 1627, he held freehold lands in Rayden, at that time occupied by Thomas. From this land he made an annuity of twenty shillings each year to be paid out to the poor of Aldham and Semer on the 14th December, asking his friends in Semer, Brunning the parson, Richard Chaplin, Edmund Chaplin and Bennet Posford, inhabitants of the town and their heirs for ever to distribute this money in one entire payment. He stated that twenty shillings buys twenty dussen of bread. Granville told me that he was still collecting this money yearly from a small piece of land swallowed up by the golf course at Raydon.

### Cecil Gynn

Tells of the German POWs housed in the Union in WW1, up to fifty or sixty tramps each night lodged there. He says that the cells on the right-hand side of the road in the union grounds had grills on the doors and the inmates had to break so much stone and pass it through the grill to earn their keep. He used to take straw when needed for the pigs and cattle kept at the Union, he was foreman for Mr Emney who had twenty-six acres of rhubarb at Semer, fourteen acres of rhubarb and ten acres of asparagus at Polstead. Cecil drove lorries for Emney and took rhubarb to London, Birmingham, Coventry and Glasgow, he was eighty-eight, sharp witted, he had written a short story about Hadleigh between the wars and greatly interested in my research. Like many people I interviewed he was an extremely bright gent and interested in his local history.

### Dot Halls

Dot was the daughter of Walter Martin the blacksmith who had his forge in Ash Street. After the village school closed, they were picked up by a horse and break, later a grey bus with Happy Day on the back and later a larger bus with Nancy on it, at one time a charabanc with a running board named Viola, yes, they were all owned by Mr Emney. One Christmas she recalls a great party with a huge Xmas tree at the Union. Confirmation classes held at Rye cottage where the Rev Donkin lived in 1925, it was thought he was deaf but when helping her sister Edy (Edith Eccles) with some answers

they found out otherwise. Barry Carter said that her father was a craftsman, specialising in making and repairing harrows.

### Hines family of Semer.

I have over twenty pages of family detail of this family, far too much to print here but if anyone has a genuine interest, I can help them with their research.

### The Malyon family

The three Malyon's purchased Drakestone Farm from Mr Ellinger in 1917, a Margaret Warner recalled staying a while with her Aunt Christabel when she was two and half years old, after a seven year stay her mother demanded she return home. She remembers going to the school run by Mr Schlinger and that she and her sisters would return at every opportunity to the farm. Her two uncles were Walter known in the family as the thinker and William known as the worker, they all remained unmarried and treated with respect by people in the parish, the lane down to Hadleigh was called Malyons Lane.

Around 1935 the only drinking water was from the two ponds, the huge catchment well by the back door became contaminated due to pollution by livestock, Tom Ranson bought the water from the ponds using two buckets on a yoke when that ran out it was down to Kersey with the water tank, the bore was drilled at this time. She remembered four workers a Frank Howe, the horseman Leslie Bull with Fred Fosker and Sharper. Margaret Ranson from Ropers Green worked in the house but died at only twenty-four years with a growth on her brain.



*Pictured above: Walter Malyon, in his Home Guard uniform.*

They kept six thousand poultry, six Suffolk's, one shire horse, twenty bullocks, three goats, a few calves, twenty large sows and up to two hundred pigs and a tractor. At this time, they rented Crosslands about sixty acres from Lance Arthey. Walter was very go-ahead with new ideas, keen on the latest equipment, Eddie Manning kept the farm in good repair and worked out off Cyril Greens workshop. The threshing tackle bought in by Taylors of Bildeston, Charringtons from Hadleigh the steam ploughs. Going down the lane towards Hadleigh at the corner of Barn Field was a stone pit this is at the junction of a track leading to the common, known as Joiners, shown clearly on the tithe map. The farm became a little too big for them and in 1945 it got sold to the Ranson brothers.



*Pictured above: The Malyon Family at Drakestone Farm around the 1930's*

## Emma Martin

Emma was born in Semer Workhouse in 1892 and she and I had a chat in August 1994 when she was 102 years old, after a few hours I walked out exhausted and she was as spritely as when we began, a carer walked in during our talk and I was introduced as one of her gentlemen, looking back on life this was one of my highlights.

Emma's mother got thrown out of her family home when her stepfather objected to her pregnancy, she was taken into the workhouse to have the child. Emma remembers a jam factory at the Union, taken down before the Union itself finished, she attended Semer school and took the bully to task, punched his nose and drew blood. The Union children came to school bringing their milk and huge sandwiches for lunch, she always thought they were filled with meat. She left school at thirteen and was sent to service in London, this was not successful, she indicated that something bad happened so made her way back home by herself where a marriage was arranged. At seventeen married George Martin in Kersey church, he died in 1974 aged ninety, she saved enough money for a double plot and will join him later in the same church yard.

She described him as a hard man and that he did not own a shirt before they married, she very carefully explains buying the material in Hadleigh so that she could make one before the wedding. She undertook any job and worked as hard as the men, including working on the threshing machine, pitching sheeves and certainly disliked stone picking especially the rate of a penny a bushel. In her early married life, she lived in the thatched cottage by Dairy Farm where her husband was a horseman, she was frightened of the pond by the gate there, I think this may have been Orchard Cottage. She lived for a while in Tea Pots near Giffords Hall and stone picked there to clear the ground for the tennis courts.

Someone in Hadleigh told me the story of an elderly lady looking for her mother and had got lost, no one took her seriously. She was indeed looking for Emma at Sydney Brown Court. People like Emma made a sometimes-sensitive job very enjoyable.

## Ken Martin

The son of the blacksmith was called up in 1939, trained at Dover where he had his twenty first birthday, he was in the 30th Field Regt. Royal Artillery, 4th British Div. and got sent to Belgium, not so long after his officer said, "pack your gear we are going back to England". He wrote up his experiences of getting back to Dunkirk and the journey home, it reads like a film script, the ack-ack gunner on his ship, the destroyer HMS Wolsey shot down a plane dive bombing them. When he arrived back in Semer all the village turned out to greet him and presented him with



*Pictured above: Emma Martin at 102 years young.*

a leather wallet containing £25. He married a Berkshire girl survived the hostilities and they had three sons.

### The Maybee's

Lived in Overmere near to the church and had a communal water pump outside their house, George had been with Mr Grimwade, the solicitor and in 1938, joined the RAF and was ultimately stationed in Burma. George did not like flying but somehow was persuaded to get into an aeroplane which immediately took off and took him for a joy ride over the jungle. I am not sure which worried him most the Japanese or a nasty landing.

The Maybee's told me about Henry Hines, he is the one who drank, swore, smoked lay in ditches and lived to a ripe old age, he ate the fat, and his wife ate the lean, the trouble with characters like this is that it could all get a bit expanded. However, the tales came from many sources and one that is possibly true is that on visiting London he went where he was told not to, got the pox and on returning to Semer was banned from everywhere and had to sleep in the fields, it seems farfetched, but he did have a badly pock marked face. George's mother paid £17 for him to attend the Greg school in Ipswich, and he received a grant from the Ann Beaumont Trust to attend the Sudbury Grammar School. Mary's father Sidney Charles Poulding was severely wounded in his legs at Passchendaele in WW1 and yet still managed to carry buckets of water up Tugwood Hill to the Old Cottage/Tudor Cottage.

### Rev Donkin and Boris Karloff

The reverend was a kindly man much respected by the local people, his only son Harold killed in the battle of the Somme in 1916, and he never passed by the memorial to the fallen in the church yard without stopping and raising his hat. He married Julia Honoria Pratt, she was one of nine children, several of her brothers were diplomats, however the youngest, at the time the black sheep of this family, was a little different, he was named William Henry. He firstly travelled to Canada and then down the west coast of America to California, yes, he arrived in 1919, Hollywood time. Here he started in films and made his career as Boris Karloff and in all made one hundred and thirty-two films. Though he was known best for his parts in horror films his daughter Sara Jane told me he was a very gentle man and enjoyed making films for children.

He married five times and Sara was born in 1938, she visited Semer on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1993, and it was only then that I was able to make the connection between the old rectory and the village with the photographs she bought with her. I would imagine her father would have got on very well with the reverend. It seems that when he first returned to the UK his brothers were put out for Boris was earning far more than themselves. Boris was born 1887 and died 1969, on a visit to Semer the older Mrs Bendall enjoyed meeting him for tea with the family. Boris at a party in Hollywood for his fifty years in films said, "I am a very lucky man, here I am in my eightieth year, and I am still able to earn my bread and butter at my profession".

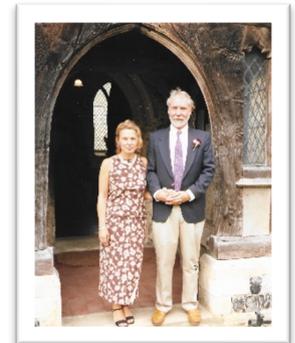
Rev. Donkins daughter was born in 1896 became a hospital nurse, named Dorothea and known to all as Dorrie, she was the main speaker at the Semer W I's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner. The Reverend would cycle around the village with his dog sitting in the front basket whose main interest was looking out for Spider, George Bendall's dog, for a growling match.

## Robert Parke

Robert Parke was born in Poslingford in 1580, he sailed on the Arabella with Winthrop to Massachusetts in 1630. The fleet consisted of eleven ships with around a thousand people and called the exodus or the great migration, he seems to have been a main player in these events. He married Martha Chaplin in All Saints in Semer on the 9th February 1602 and three children, Martha, Robert and William were baptised there as well, other children were baptised at nearby parishes.

Rev Donkin did research at the Ipswich Library and could find no evidence of Martha as a passenger on the boat and thought she may have died beforehand for as he explained, she would never have been left behind. Robert died in Mystic, Connecticut in 1665.

Some of his family returned to Semer in 1998 and two of their number, Bill and Alisia, had their marriage blessed. Later Leslie Parkes wrote a nice letter and thanked me for the village hospitality and thought that Robert and Martha could not have come from a nicer community.



*Pictured above: Bill and Alisia Parke*

## Norman Russell

Born in Monks Eleigh, apprenticed to a butcher in that village and after worked for thirty-three years for Biggs Wall as a digger driver. Biggs Wall founded in Muswell Hill in the 1950's other depots were at Ridgewell, Bury St Edmunds and Bradfield, the site in Semer was purchased after the fire and new offices built on the site of the old rectory.

A Mr Joiner ran the Semer depot and was able to conclude sewerage and gas main contracts in Suffolk and Essex, our depot closed in the 1960's and all staff were made redundant. People say that in its heyday there were queues of lorries in the roads in the centre of Semer waiting to unload pipes and were stored in fields around the depot. Norman also said that the Ranson were very hardworking farmers and would be found at night ploughing by flashlight and that when Connie Ranson answered the door at woodlands the chickens would walk out. Claude Greens nickname was Hub, Charlie the Guvnor. Whilst Schbloch was away Charles Elford, the man who evaluated horses up Rye Hill, managed Semer Manor and when Anton returned Charles took the farm at Sayers Green, apparently when the Schbloch's parted Gabriella taught Latin in an Ipswich school.

## Mrs Woolard

Florence attended Semer school until seven years old and when it closed went to Hadleigh taken by a waggonette (a covered four-wheel wagon pulled by two horses). She describes the Semer Union being a wonderful building, the house the Nunn's had lived in had been the laundry, she remembers the POW's and a children's party in 1919 with a dinner, they played games and burnt the Kaiser, I wonder if this celebrated the end of hostilities. Mr Richards was master of the union who wore a top hat and was assisted by two daughters Isobel and Elsie, this would have been in the 1920's and she can only remember the union as a pleasant place.

A platform cart bought twenty POWs each morning through Ash Street, their legs hanging over the sides, two got dropped off at the blacksmiths to help during the day and the remainder go to work at Whatfield Hall, the cart returned at three o'clock. One of the men working at the smiths was named Scotty, who made whistles for the local children. She has had two husbands, three children and one of the sharpest memories encountered for some time, she was in service with Mrs Maxwell at Semer House. Also mentioned are the illusive two cottages that burnt down on Crouch Hill, she thought a passing steam engine giving off sparks caused the problem, this was the 1920's and they were situated on the ground where Nigel Jennings house is now. She has solved a slight problem for she called Old Tiles, a recent name, the Crouch, is this Crouch Cottages?

*“You may be surprised to know that according to our planners, Semer is not a village but open countryside, I do not mind, it was the best place where my family and I ever lived, unfortunately when told to downsize we had to leave.*”



*Pictured above: Michael Thorogood's First Semer history walk July 2005 on Weigh Bridge*

*A friend who read through my drafts whilst writing this book said it was “Quirky”, I was happy for I have been this way for many a year. I hope this sequel gives a wider view of local history and spreads interest in forming a village history group.*

*A Semer resident, Michael Thorogood, lived at Drakestone Farm from 1985 to 2011 and enjoyed every moment of Semer and its history.”*

*Written at Hintlesham in the winter of 2022  
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