

APRIL 1991

## WETHERSFIELD LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Arising from an exploratory meeting held at Virginia House, High Street, Wethersfield on Thursday, April 11, 1991.

### Present:

Ron Champion, Memories, High Street  
Barbara Champion, Memories, High Street  
Tom Grimwood, High Street,  
Doris Grimwood, High Street  
Stan Smith, Saffron House, High Street  
Doris Gunn (Sister of Stan Smith) Saffron House, High Street,  
Noel Choat, The Top Shop, High Street  
Dorothy Choat, The Top Shop, High Street  
John Smith, Virginia Cottage, High Street.  
Rita Norman, Derek Norman, Virginia House, High Street,  
Pat Law, Smithy Cottage, High Street

A recording of the general discussion on the prospect of researching a village history was taken and the following is an abridged transcript.

**Ron Champion:** I don't know for example how old the buildings are which housed the old Post Office over the road and I believe the Police House at one time, whether they were owned by the Manor or not. Equally I don't know why The Dog would appear to be a coaching inn.

**Barbara Champion:** It wasn't on a turnpike road.

**R.C.:** These are the sort of intriguing things we ought to go into and as Rita says some of us can do a little bit of research on aspects of the village. Sources of information are twofold: certainly the older inhabitants of the village must make a contribution. I think in discussion with other people so that it can be recorded rather than being taken down as notes which is very formal and offputting. If they could have quiet chat with someone with a tape recorder running we could take the bones of those discussions and record the village as it was 50 years ago.

**Rita Norman:** We would have the local accent then.

**R.C.:** We shall need an interpreter for some of them!  
Equally of course we have got to delve into what has already been written about the village and the sources there, I think, are quite considerable. I was surprised to go into the Sible Hedingham library and pick up the



official guide to the village - or to the Three Fields, Finchingfield, Wethersfield and Bardfield - which was published in the 1960s. Nine years ago there was a short guide to the church.

**Doris Gunn** then offered for inspection a paper on Bygone Wethersfield. This was in the Halstead Gazette Friday August 18 1944. My husband had it typed out. The earliest evidence of human occupation in this delightful parish is a pottery bucket of late bronze Age.

**B.C:** Does anyone know who Maurice W. Hughes was, who wrote the guidebook, or whether he is still alive?

**R.C:** The Wethersfield contribution in here was Mr E Fossitt, Clerk to the Wethersfield Parish Council.

**T.G:** He lives in one of the bungalows, (second on along behind the <sup>five</sup> police station. he's in his fifties. His name is Eldred Fossitt He was secretary of the Men's Club.

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**S.S:** The house next door, (Virginia Cottage/Blenheim Cottage) the lady had a private school. Miss Bradfield, gave piano lessons. Barbara Nottage says that was the only schooling she had.

**John Smith:** There is a picture of group of schoolgirls standing outside our cottage. I understand that John Nottage also went to school there.

**T.G:** I think Miss Bradfield was an aunt of his.

**B.C:** Referring to guide book. It looks as if the garage (Pease's) was a school once.

**Doris Gunn:** Here is the full history of the United Reform Church. (Handwritten account presented for typing out. See separate document).

**R.C:** Is it true that we have got a Plague House down towards Poor Park?

**Dorothy Choat:** There is a burial ground over there.

**T.G:** It was always called the Pest House. from the time of the Black Plague. It was the keeper's cottage.

**B.C:** The question is whether Poor Park was the actual burial ground because they often did plant on the burial ground.



**Noel Choat:** There are several burial grounds There were a lot up Justices Hill towards Stambourne road, near where the retired Lord Lieutenant lives. It's on the left as you come from the Stambourne road to Justices.

**T.G:** Mr Grossett(?) used to farm at the entrance to it. He came from the Northcountry somewhere. I think its Elms Farm.

**B.C:** That is outside our parish. We have to go all the way to Blackmore End and Beazeley End. Who lives in Codham Hall now?

**Stan Smith:** A Mr. Tabor. This one has the farm called Codham Park. He lives at Codham Hall but he works in London.

**N.C:** Mrs Tabor, Mrs Massingham and Mrs Carder, who are all quite elderly live up there. They are customers of mine.

**Doris Grimwood:** Mrs Metson is a great friend of theirs.

**R.C:** We should investigate the whole of this street, part of Silver Street, and the Braintree road. There were 60 houses listed by the Royal Commission as being worthy of preservation.

**B.C:** Someone will have to go to Essex Records Office and photocopy the Royal Commission List.

**T.G:** The village hall was a Maltings. We got a disappointment at the Men's Club because that little old place on the end which is a disgrace to the village . We thought we would get something done about it but it is not a listed building. We have tried to buy it but he just won't answer letters. He is just awkward. Brown, his name is. When that was a brewery that was used as an office.

**B.C:** When did it stop being a brewery?

**T.G:** It became the village hall in 1920-21. When it started they issued shares and practically everybody in the village bought shares.

**Doris Grimwood:** They were pound shares, which was a lot of money in those days.

**T.G:** When the fellows came out of the First World War the village decided they would like to give the ment something so they gave them a little room at the back. That was the beginning of the Men's Club . I have been on the committee 50 years but I have just resigned.



**R.C:** We have also got to look at the Manor, and the family concerned with that.

**Doris Grimwood:** The Marshes were the people I remember from when I was a tiny girl because my father worked for them.

**Derek Norman:** Marsh was the vicar, wasn't he?

**T.G:** Her father went there as a shoe boy and finished up head gardener.

**Doris Grimwood:** He went up there when he was 11 years old and was there until he died.

**T.G:** The little lodge was built apurpose for them. They lived, her father when she was born, in those brick house up Sandhills, a row of them. Sir Fortescue Flannery went shooting one day and he saw a lodge. Tom Wicks was the builder in the village and he took him and showed it to him and said he had got to build one just like it. He come home and built the Lodge at the Lodge gates and her father and mother were the first to move into it. And her mother had to open the gates for the cars when they came out and in - that was to pay for their rent.

**D.N:** We have seen the sale particulars of the manor.

**T.G:** We have an old catalogue of when Squire White lived there. He gambled, well he used to play cards for three or four days - well he went broke and that was sold in Chancery.

Then when the Boer War was on, in 1880 something and that was sold and Marshes bought it. Our little old farm made £50 an acre, quite dear then. A lot of money in them days. Well the Marshes, something happened and they lost their money. The Flannerys bought it somewhere about 1904. He bought the farms all round, the houses in the village and everything. He paid £14 an acre and thats where Marshes' money went.

**D.N:** Can I ask why this house (Virginia House) which is a very old house was not part of the manor?

**T.G:** The Bake House and Church House, that never belonged to the Manor.

**R.N:** There was a complex of buildings at the back of our house with a cooperage and brewery.

**S.S** The Dog used to belong to the Ravens and the Ravens had the brewery at the bottom. (of the High Street). They brewed the beer there and it was sold here.



**T.G:** The Village Hall was the maltings where they made barley into malt.

**S.S:** All the Ravens are buried in a marble tomb in the churchyard. They were wealthy people but they didn't live very old. A lot of them died quite young.

**T.G:** Mrs. Maberly, what lived in the Old Court, what gave the old maltings (village hall) to the village was a Miss Raven.

**B.C:** We have got to go into all these old families.

**D.N:** There seems to have been a number of bakeries.

**S.S:** There were always two.

**T.G:** One at the bottom where the restaurant is now, that was a shop. Bowtell had the bottom one,

**S.S:** There was another that used to come delivering through the village. (?White).

**T.G:** Bassy Bowtell didn't they call him?

**R.C:** What do we know about Wethersfield Place and is it earlier than either the Manor or the Hall?

**T.G:** What was the Army man, Gordon, one of them was shut up in one of the places in Africa. Gen. Gordon (Khartoum).

**R.C:** Barrack cottages. Are they Cromwellian.?

**B.C:** They certainly seem to be old enough.

**T.G:** Cromwell had a lot of his soldiers at Marks Hall, near Colchester.

**R.C:** On the map there is a priest's house near Rotten End Farm.

**J.S:** There was an article in the paper about it being sold.

**R.C:** There is a former Roman Catholic chapel, by Codham Hall, in Codham Hall cottage. I wonder if the priest's house is where the priest of the chapel lived.

**S.S:** They say the hall at Codham Hall was big enough to turn a waggon and four horses round.



**B.C:** The Wentworths, whose tomb is in the church covered with the grafitti, they must have remained Roman Catholics and this was the chapel attached to Great Codham Hall I should imagine.

#### **RE THE MANOR:**

**T.G:** Flannery was in Barclays Bank and everything. His son Harold, he bypassed him and he left it to his grandson, Derek

The old man didn't know, the war came along Derek joined the airforce and he was shot down somewhere , never found , and his father had nothing to do with the estate at all. The Banks took over, the estate was sold and Woods and Co bought the lot.

Just over £40,000, eight farms the lot.

They held it for one year, they never paid to take it up. They cut down all the timber, on all the farms all the big elm trees, big oaks out of the woods and they reckon they made nearly enough out of timber to pay for it. Then they came round and offered it to all the tenants. The tenants couldn't grumble because we all bought it cheap.

When old Sir Fortescue (Flannery) died his will was well over £400,000 - nearly half a million -Well in the 1930s that was a lot of money. When Sir Harold died all he left was £50,000. The banks run it and it was just muddled away.

Plenty of the houses in the village never cost much. Where Stanley lived cost £240. Some cost as little as £150. We bought our farm, 80 acres for £5,000 because we were sitting tenants.

They tell me Sir Harold, he wanted to give the playing field in memory of his son Derek . He had to buy the land, of the estate, to give to the village which was a wicked shame just because his father bypassed him and left it to his grandson. The old man thought he was clever and going to cut out death duties Course he had no idea the war was coming along.

**S.S:** He was awkward, wasn't he. Didn't they have to keep a fire in his room after he died?

**T.G:** Yes he had got to lay on his bed seven days and the fire had got to be kept on and people went up from the village and looked at him.

**R.N:** So we've decided that we'll have the meetings on the second Thursday in the month. 9th May will be the next one.



**T.G:** The mushroom farm, that was built in 1936-37, one of the biggest swindles in Wethersfield.

**S.S:** It has been all the time , ever since it stopped being a field, there's been some money spent there for nothing.

**B.C:** The Engineering place (Wheatley's).

**T.G:** That started in 1934-35 when Vic ( ) got married, his father built it and he went in there with three or four lorries, and two cattle floats. His father, they said carted tarmac when they first tarmacked these roads, from Hedingham.

**B.C:** Who can produce any facts on when Saffron was grown; how much was there a wool trade in the village? Whether some of these houses were in fact weavers houses?

**S.S:** We had someone from Chelmsford who spoke on it to the Tuesday club.

**Doris Gunn:** There was the plaiting of straw for hats I've got some of the plaiting and the things that you split the straw with.

**N.C:** The Women's Institute may know some people.

**B.C:** We have a friend who could give us a talk on heraldry. And there is the Bronte connection. He got too interested in Mary Burden of Blackmore End and they went off to Haworth in Yorkshire. *Patrick*  
*Burden*

**R.C:** He was widowed and he then went back to Mary and said what about it and she said no.

**B.C:** We haven't mentioned the services in the village. When did the village get water?

**T.G:** 1937, all dug out by hand by gangs of Irishmen.

**B.C:** How many pumps were there?

**T.G:** The pump was still opposite you (Memories).

**Doris Grimwood:** Mrs Wicks she had to walk right along there to get water. I remember that when I was a little girl.

**T.G:** Just across the park there were springs where they used to put the bucket under. There are springs about everywhere. Our little field called Hopground there's four or five drains that run continuously. That's where



the brook starts that goes through the brook (farm?) and across the road there. The electricity came on about 1938.

**B.C:** Was it because the Lord of the manor didn't like pylons?

**T.G:** He didn't like overhead wires because his trees had got to be cut back. He couldn't bear a tree cut down. Then of course as soon as the estate was sold Woods and Co cut the lot down.

They made a packet out of Wethersfield Manor estate.

Simms Cottages, on the Braintree road they never belonged to Sir Fortescue They belonged to Mrs Maberley. There used to be a tailor there (?at Simms?) I can remember him sitting in the window cross-legged. He used to make suits for anybody.

**B.C:** Somebody ought to do the history of all the pubs.

**T.G:** The garage was the Red Lion. The Castle was the bottom one (Castle House). The Red Lion, in the first world war they put wounded soldiers in there to convalesce, the pub was shut then as a pub.

**Doris Grimwood:** They had little teddy bears and they used to put the fingers in their arms and we children used to watch them. They had nothing else to do. I was only five.

**T.G:** When I first came here 65 years ago you knew everybody. Where they got the custom for 3 or 4 pubs I'll never know. First of all I came here with my brother up to Hawks Hall just on the edge of the aerodrome which was taken down when they built the aerodrome in the 1940s.

Then father hired this place off Sir Fortescue. That was a time when a lot of the farms lay dormant. Grays was and the Broads, 1929.

**D.C:** When I was a kid I used to bike round here and when I came to live here I thought there was something different. I think the road round here was different. Did you just carry on straight towards Finchingfield. You have to stop there now. I don't remember it being like that.

**T.G:** The road was altered and widened but that was in the 1930s It was altered in front of the village hall but they have made it go out to part of the green, so that you could see round by the tavern.

**S.S:** I think that was one of my brothers ideas.

**B.C:** Did n't the village green used to be bigger?



**T.G:** It used to be bigger. It used to be a car park. Everybody parked their cars on there when there was something on at the village hall. Eventually the parish council got it kerbed. There was no grass on it at all.

**Doris Gunn:** We used to have the fair on there. We had the swings right in front of the house at the bottom.

**S.S:** A chap I was working with, 1921 I think it was. He was mowing round a field of wheat, ready for the binder, packed up five o'clock and came walking down to the fair. He said he hadn't got to work in the heat. Yet he came down to the fair. That was in July that was.

**R.N:** Was that every year, the fair?

**Doris Grimwood:** Yes.

**B.C:** We were surprised there was no firework night when we came here.

**Doris Grimwood:** Billy Hasler had all the money and he had all the fireworks We used to follow behind him because we hadn't got any fireworks or any money. He used to spend no end of money and we followed him wherever he went. Then they stopped the fair on the green and they had in our little field on Martins Hill, we used to let them go on there.

**T.G:** I remember poor old Morgan the blacksmith here and Ted Root and George Hitching having a ride in the dodgems. They had never had a ride in them things before.

**Doris Grimwood:** Poor old Ted had a big boot, didnt he.

**B.C:** I gather that Suffolk County Council has been round taping all the older inhabitants. I don't know whether anything has been done in Essex.

**S.S:** We are forward in some things and backward in others. Two or three years ago we went a lot of miles in Suffolk one day, we did, and hardly any white lines. We come into Essex before we saw any white lines. They hadn't caught up with us. Soon as we got back into Essex there's our white lines. We done a lot of miles in Suffolk and there was none. It was bare,, something missing.

**T.G:** They keep on the right side of the road down here.

**B.C:** Suffolk has done a lot of recording of folk songs. Is there anyone in the village who is a folk singer?

**D.C:** You want to see Maisie. She moved from Bardfield to here.



**N.C:** The Exercise Song. I've got the words to that. Maisie Hasler.

**T.G:** She lived up Petticores,(?) up towards Stambourne. They lived just this side of Sudbury. He was a nice old boy. When ever I was up that way she would holler to come and have a cup of coffee. Old Harry. We used to set their potatoes for them. We used to rear sows and he'd bring his boar. No money ever changed hands We never paid anybody for anything. Then when Cyril wanted to do the farming he come and asked me for character for the council. I wrote him out one.

**Doris Grimwood:** They were nice people.

**D.N:** All right then, Stan for next month? Will your brother be able to come?

**T.G:** He's 91 and runs all the whist drives round here for miles.

**D.N:** We might have to go to a Whist Drive first.

**T.G:** Another old boy in the village lived here 90 years, that's Johnny Metson.

**N.C** Jim Coe's another one from Blackmore End.

**T.G:** Down at Valley Farm, there's Harry Kling.

**Various members then accepted inquiry cards to research various aspects of the village and report back to the next meeting.**