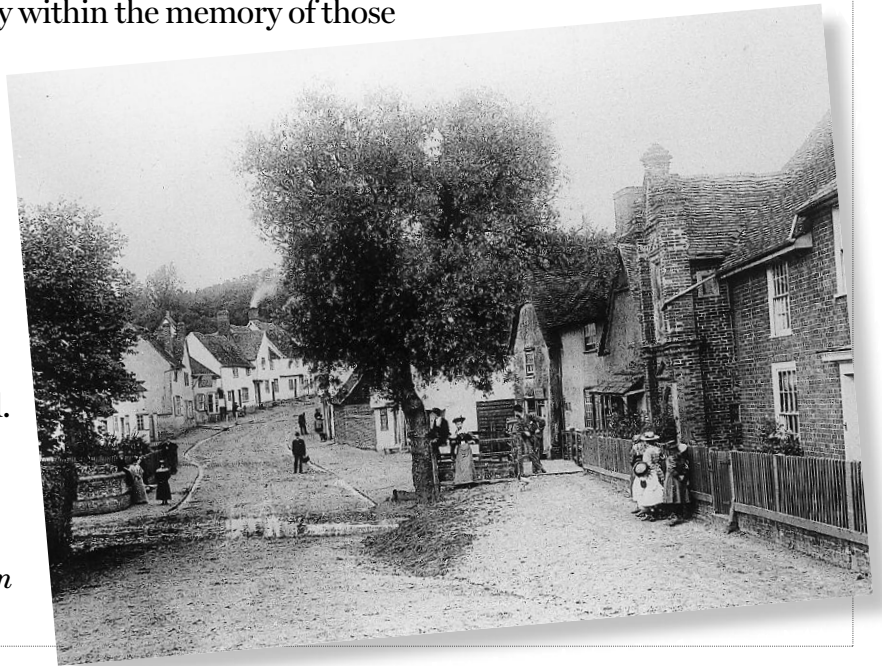


“...Anything & Everything”

CHAPTER 1. SHOPS, BUSINESSES & SERVICES

KERSEY IS PRETTY, AND USUALLY REMARKABLY QUIET. IT ALWAYS has been pretty, or certainly within the memory of those alive today. ¶ But quiet it very rarely was. ¶ How could a place have been quiet when it was such a hive of trade and industry? ¶ Early in the 20th century and before, shops, businesses and services thrived here. ¶ The life and employment they brought to the village are sorely missed.

*A view of old-time Kersey,
date unknown*



Everyone who talked to me remembered Stiff's shop, and Goymour's pork butchers. Most recalled the cake and sweet shops, the shoemakers, vets and blacksmiths, and the Post Office when it was in the main village street. The district nurses were mentioned more than once, and the doctors who used to rent rooms in the vet's and at "Leys House" to hold regular surgeries. One by one they have disappeared, the last – Stiff's grocers – only in 1992 and even that, at the end of its life, was a far cry from when it was in its prime.

Now all that remain are Kersey Pottery, the village Post Office run by Mrs Norah Orris in the front room of her house in Vale Lane, and the two pubs. Once a week, a

“STIFF’S SHOP,
JUST WHEN
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AND
EVERYTHING.”

Ted Martin

mobile grocery shop parks briefly at each end of the village and there is also a visiting library. For almost every other facility Hadleigh, two miles away, is nearest for the villagers. Most now have the use of cars, but quite a few rely on the buses which stop in the village.

Kersey Mill and Maltings stand picturesquely on the east side of Stone Street on the way to Hadleigh. Claude Munson's

memories of this as a working mill, and Christina Mellor's update on the restoration of the buildings make fascinating reading at the end of this chapter.

STIFF'S SHOP

Opposite The Bell pub are four newly refurbished terraced cottages, and behind them stand two large new houses. Each of these properties has its own garage or car port and, interestingly, "Mill House" was built around the mechanism of Stiff's old feed mill. For nearly a century this whole site belonged to the Stiff family and on it stood their busy general store which at one time had a staff of twenty men and women. This, their farm situated off the road to Bildeston and, for a time, their butchers shop in Hadleigh, a greengrocer's shop at Felixstowe and a market garden at Layham, formed the Stiff Empire. Jack and Jill Stiff still live in "Linton House" next door to what was their store (information about The development of the store is given in the next chapter, and numerous memories concerning it run through the whole book).



Ted Martin: Stiff's shop, just when they was really going, in their prime – they'd sell you anything and everything. They used to sell suits, overcoats, shirts. Old Jack Stiff, he prided

*Stiff's Store
and Linton
House*



himself. He said, “We sell anything from a safety pin to a battleship!” And he did.

They had a mill where they used to grind corn for the farmers and what-not, at the back of the shop (Now “Mill House”). And not only that – Stiff’s shop was the first place in Kersey to have electric light, they made it off this oil engine called an Iron. That used to run the mill and charge the generator up to run the lights. And – you know wireless? Well, during the war and after they had what they call accumulators. you had to fix them on to your wireless to get ‘em to go. If you took ‘em to Stiff’s they used to recharge them off this engine. if you wanted anything for building – wood, timber, cement, they’d got it. If they ain’t got it they’d soon get it!



Jack Stiff: Before the 1939 war, in the shop we sold everything except wet fish that I can think of. We sold televisions before electricity came to Kersey, and coal, firewood, you name it we sold it. Tractors, motorbikes, anything we sold.



Victor Biebuyck: I can remember Stiff’s shop of course – there were a couple of petrol pumps outside there when I was in Kersey as an evacuee.



The petrol pump outside Stiff’s



Ruth Glead: Stiff’s shop sold most everything – sugar in blue bags, tea loose in quarter pounds, dried fruit and coconut in bags shaped like cones, oranges wrapped in coloured paper and vinegar by the half pint from large casks. The butter and cheese were cut from huge slabs and weighed in half pounds.

There were two pound jars of jam for ninepence, and salt in blocks.



Joyce Williams: Stiff's used to run a bus full of their goods into Hadleigh and sell them there, as well as other villages all around.



Leslie Williams: Yes, and they had paraffin oil and methylated spirits all mixed up with the groceries in that bus but nobody worried then!



Norah Orriss: When you think – every spot of sugar used to be weighed up, didn't it? And the same with butter – they used to get these pats – and cheese, and bacon. One minute they'd be getting a gallon of paraffin and the next minute come in and cut you a quarter of ham! Nothin was pre-packed and we were none the worse for it!



Irene Hasler: The hams in Stiff's shop were superb, they used to go to Africa and all sorts of places. The Kersey hams were well known. I always had one at Christmas – much too big for me but still they were good. And they did proper

“STIFF’S SHOP
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LIKE CONES,
AND ORANGES
WRAPPED IN
COLOURED
PAPER”

Ruth Glead

cheddar cheese on the rind, in the days before it came like soap. They used to keep it and mature it when I first came. And the shop was needed in those days. There weren't many cars, the majority had bicycles.

sea salt right into the bones – my poor old hands got sore! Then they were put into these big cement tanks in very black treacle, dark sugar and beer – that was what made them nice and sweet. They were kept in there for several weeks and had to be turned nearly every day and, after they came out, they had to be dried in the smoke house. You had to burn sawdust, and if you ever try to light sawdust with a match, it's a very difficult job! When they were dried you had to take them down again, and they were filthy from the black smoke. If you

Ruth Glead: I used to go and help pickle Mr Stiff's hams. They were beautiful hams and I can tell you exactly how they were made. He used to come to me and say “Ruth – there's some pork coming in today – can you come over?” They used to be really fresh when you salted them – not even a day old. You had to rub hard



were going to cook them before selling, say at Christmas time, they had to be skinned and rolled in breadcrumbs. It was quite a tricky thing really, you know.



Verena Manning: You could go down to Stiff's shop and get everything. I had my first high heeled pair of shoes there – well they had a little heel anyway – three and sixpence for these blue shoes. He'd got one or two pairs in the window and I suppose I might have been about twelve and I saw these shoes – and they were a royal sort of blue. Well, mother couldn't really afford them but she did give in and let me have them and did I love them!

I've still got a tea service which I got from Stiff's and it's white with little gold stars. Also, my sister in law Doris bought her mother a pair of vases in pink one Christmas and I bought mother a pair in green. Our brother Reg kept those of course and, after he died, my sister, Marjorie, said, "I've always liked these green vases," and I said, "Well, have them."



Claude Munson: When we lived up Windmill Hill my mother used to do her shopping at Hadleigh because it was nearer and she had two sisters living there. She still dealt with Stiff's though because they used to come around with oil and other things. Charlie Holden used to drive the van.

**“AND THEY’D
LET YOU BUY
ON TICK UNTIL
SATURDAY
WHEN PEOPLE
GOT PAID!”**

Claude Munson

He and Chubby Jarvis were both prisoners of war in Singapore, you know, but when they came back Charlie worked at Stiff's. Stiff's was a good shop – you could get anything there. When we came back to live in Kersey my mother spent more money in Stiff's because she didn't need to go nowhere else. And they'd let you buy on tick until Saturday when people got paid. On Saturdays there used to be a queue outside the shop with people waiting to pay their bills.



Verena Manning: Wilf used to do my shopping at Stiff's on a Saturday because that was a very busy day for me. Frances' Cathy used to do a paper round and she'd come into the shop and Wilf always used to say how generous she was because she'd have younger children with her and she'd buy them sweets or something. Wilf thought a lot of Cathy. Well, everyone did.



Mary Holden: I didn't like the idea of Stiff's closing down really – that seemed that everything went. You know, it was a community that's gone. You see, what it was, the houses got

so dilapidated they had to be bought up by outside people and done up, and they had cars and didn't use the shop.

GOYMOUR'S PORK BUTCHERS

It is difficult to believe that the gracious house and garden known as "Leys House", opposite the lane down to The Green, was once the site of a business of the bloodiest kind! Yet pigs were not only bred but slaughtered and butchered there, and finally sold in the shop on the right hand side of the front door.



Ray Goymour: I don't know why my father was a butcher – I could never take the job on – I couldn't kill a pig to save my life. I'd have fallen flat. Take a knife – slit its throat? No. It came in that you used to have to knock them out first with a gun – humane killers they called them. The police used to come round to check and you had to have a license. Not like that Armour Bully Beef factory which I visited in Chicago. It's frightening – the cattle go in on a chain, scared, and come out the other end in a bully beef tin.

My father was a kind-hearted man. We had two horses in those stables near your fence and, when they got old, he insisted on them being shot on his own land. He wouldn't allow them to be taken away to be shot because he knew what went on in horse trading – they'd flog them on and

some of them would have a terrible time. He knew where his finished up – down at the kennels in Layham for the hounds to eat. Fair enough – better than being sent, live, to France to be sold for human consumption.

Our oldest horse was 27 or 28 years old – that was Grandfather's horse – Nancy we called her. She always used to shy on the road if she saw a bit of paper. Dad's horse, on a round, would go on when he stopped to serve somebody and then turn round and come back and wait for him! Nobody controlling it. The milk round horses used to do the same.

We had a slaughter house and a woodshed and a boiler house. There were two whacking great iron boilers there, each coal fired, because to scald a pig and get the bristles off you must have boiling water. The old pulley they used for hanging the pigs up was in there too. During the second world war pork sausages were unrationed you know. A shilling a pound! They were made properly then with pork and bread-rusks – not like today. Dad used the cleaned intestines of the pigs. It's plastic today – inedible.



Norah Orriss: Mother used to come up to Goymour's and make the sausages. I can remember her turning that old handle and the sausage meat came out the end into the skins.



Ruth Glead: Mr Goymour, the pork butcher, sold home made sausages at one and sixpence per pound, pork cheeses at a penny and tuppence, and real pigs fry liver with what was called the curtain. He sold real lard and pork scraps – nothing was wasted. His sausages were famous. And Mr Goymour Senior ran a taxi service with his pony and trap. He charged two shillings to take you from Kersey to Hadleigh railway station.



Verena Manning: At that time of day people used to snare rabbits you know and, on Christmas day we used to have a cold rabbit pie, and that used to be for breakfast which was a real treat because we never usually had nothing but bread and jam for breakfast or sometimes porridge in the winter. And, from Goymour's pork butchers shop, mother used to get about six pennyworth of fat and lean pork and cut that up into strips and put in with this rabbit pie and, in the crust, there'd be all lovely jelly! We always kept a few chickens and so always managed to keep a cockerel for Christmas dinner, but it's that rabbit pie for breakfast which sticks in my mind!

SWEET AND CAKE SHOPS

If I had a pound for every time Gladys King's shop has been mentioned to me since I came to Kersey I would be





Gladys King's shop, in the late 20s or early 30s

quite rich! It seems to have been the crystallisation of everyone's notion of the little village shop, the idyll that actually existed.



Ruth Gleed: Mrs King kept the sweet shop near the stream. (the north end of "Bridge House"). One could buy many things for one penny, and lemonade crystals from a glass jar for a penny an ounce. At Christmas you could decorate your Christmas tree for a shilling with sugar mice, sugar clocks and sugar lanterns. And when her walnuts were ready she sold them for a penny for twelve. It was heaven for us children when we had a few pennies to spend. I was lucky – I had an older brother who started work before I started school, and he often gave me a penny or two.



Verena Manning: I can remember going over to "Ayres End" or Tudor House as we called it then, when the garage and the big room which Mr Innes later had as his study were being built on. I was three then, and Reg was only saying not a great

while before he died, that the workmen used to make such a fuss of me and buy me sweets from Gladys King's shop! I remember they used to buy me those white and pink coconut chips and I used to sit with them when they had their break.



Cherry Chalmers: Gladys King's shop was one of the happiest memories p'raps. Dad would say, "Go and get me ten Woodbines" – five Woodbines p'raps in them days – "and you can have a ha'penny to spend." And what you could get from Gladys! Christmas time, she'd decorate the shop up and she'd have these chocolate mice and all that stuff, you know, and liquorish. That was great really. Yes, that was nice.



Jill Harbinson: When I bought "Bridge House", I had the option of buying the two thirds that were empty or the whole house which had Gladys King and her shop as the occupying third. So Gladys King was my tenant and she paid fifteen shillings a week rent. She kept the shop there and sold ice-cream and cigarettes and baked beans and so on and she kept it on until money went decimal when she retired and went to live in one of the bungalows in Vale Lane.

We knocked through from our part of the house into hers and continued having it as a shop. We gave up the ice-cream and cigarettes but we kept sweets, and I then tried to make it

**“THE AMERICANS
USED TO CYCLE
OVER FROM
WATTISHAM
BASE AND THEY’D
BUY BREAD AND
CAKES”**

Ivy Tricker

an outlet for anything made in Suffolk, whether candies or basket work, jewellery or hand-painted china. And marmalade, jam, coconut ice... I used to make fudge by the gallon every weekend. There was a bell fixed on the door as people came in so, if we were there, we could have the shop open and just walk through. I bought proper duck feed wholesale and then measured it into bags of four ounces each and sold these for people to feed the ducks; it meant that they were fed properly. I had five white Aylesburys of my own which I used to let out onto the Splash every day, so people would pay to feed my ducks for me and then I used to sell the duck eggs!



Ivy Tricker: Grandma, after she was left a widow, she had a shop in her front room (now “Corner House”). She made bread and cakes and things to sell and did quite well. The Americans used to cycle over from Wattisham base and they’d buy a lot from her. When we got to about thirteen, we children used to go over there on a Saturday and help her and then she’d give us a shilling or two and perhaps a few pear drops. We thought that was lovely!

BREAD, FISH AND OTHER DELIGHTS:

Marianne Lash: The old bakehouse of course is immediately on the left as you go to the pottery and it has the most wonderful oven – beautiful.



Ray Goymour: There must have been a baker at “Leys House” at some time because there was always a baker’s oven at the back, where their extension is now. Before that it was a pub called “The Sun Inn” and, first of all, it was a Medieval hall house.



Norah Orriss: Eric Percy from Hadleigh used to come round with the bread didn’t he, and the Co-op used to bring groceries and they used to bring bread as well. We had three bakers delivering didn’t we? I’m wondering if we didn’t have a bakers in Kersey in our time because people used to make their own bread.



Ruth Glead: The best bread I ever tasted was made by Mrs Jack Martin who lived in Sampsons Hall Cottage. It was baked in a brick oven which was heated by a faggot of sticks, set light to and left to burn to ashes. These were



A recent photo of the Old Bakehouse, lovingly restored by Elaine Arthey

then raked out and bread baked in the red hot oven. That was real bread.

Mr Smith, a Hadleigh fishmonger, used to bring fresh fish to Kersey once a week and, as he fried fish as well, he would bring some cold fried fish left over from last night which mother bought for twopence a piece. That was a real treat.



Cherry Chalmers: My grandma used to make wine when the men were harvesting, and she'd make bread and cakes and give to the workmen, and she'd brew beer. Her name was Maria. Any older person would tell you about her, Lance Wyatt would. He made my day once because he used to come up with his stuff from the allotment to sell and I was making some buns and there were some hot ones out the oven. "Oh,' he said, "You're just like Maria! Can I have one – I do love hot buns." So after that I always used to give him some hot buns.

THE SHOEMAKER

People remember two shoemakers in Kersey, Mr Everett and Mr Vince. This trade must have been as busy as the blacksmith's because people walked almost everywhere. Footware, particularly the boots worn by farmers and labourers, needed to be strong and are described in detail by Ted Martin below.

(The charming picture of a brother and sister outside their cottage door was among many passed to me by



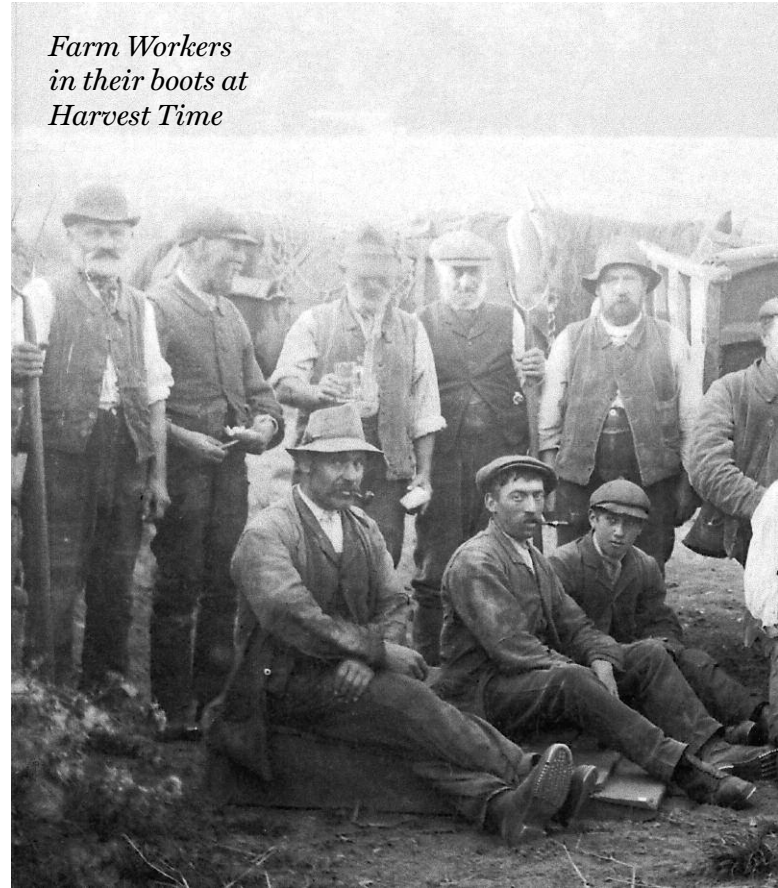
Frances Whymark from a collection made by her brother, Leslie Cockayne. Unfortunately nobody in the village has an idea who the children were, but I am sure that the little boy's sturdy boots typify those worn by the majority of Kersey schoolchildren seventy or eighty years ago. After all, those from Kersey Tye, Lindsey and Semer had a long way to walk to school.)



Mary Holden: As a child, when we had school holidays we played on the Hill because there were no cars. We had a top or a hoop. At the very end of "Arran Cottage" opposite your cottage there was Mr Everett, the shoemaker and we used to go in there for a new nail for our tops and he'd say, "When I've sold this shoe!"



Ted Martin: Everett could make shoes by hand. He had a pair he'd made himself and worn for thirty year – beautiful



*Farm Workers
in their boots at
Harvest Time*



soft leather they were. And in the end they had this pretty pattern all over them, but that was cracks!

Old Arthur Clarke – Tit Clarke we used to call him – used to live in “Rose Cottage” on the corner opposite the rectory. And he always wore hob-nailed boots and he always bought them from the same shop in Colchester. He’d start off at five o’clock in the morning and walk to Colchester, buy his boots and then walk back, and he used to be home by twelve o’clock mid day. And when he went to Everett to have his boots mended he’d take off one and sit watching while that was done and then he’d put that one back on and take off the other to be mended!

They used to have them – like little nails – to put in the bottoms of hob-nailed boots. All the farm workers that time of day wore leather boots and they had hob-nails all alonger there, toe tip right under the toe and a heel-iron on the heel.



Ivy Tricker: Mr Everett, the shoemaker, used to come down to the White Horse every Saturday night for a drink and when our boots needed mending we’d take them over there to him. He’d bring them back on the Sunday night and that Sunday we had to stay in.



Ted Martin: The other shoemaker, Vince, lived in the top

end of the house next to the Bell (now “Carlton House”) which used to be two cottages. And his daughter used to make dresses and things.

THE VETS

Vets had an important role in the farming community. Because farms were considerably smaller than most are today, and there was little or no governmental guidance as to the breeding and handling of livestock, the vet was looked upon as a valued friend whose advice was usually accepted unconditionally. Not only could he be relied upon to reach the most isolated farm and give his professional and moral support in the treatment of ailing animals, he was also the main enemy of the rat population at a time when there was no such person as the pest controller!



Paul Ryde: The Veterinary Practice, which is in Hadleigh now, used to operate in Kersey from “Kedges End” where the horse’s tail hangs. It was called Denbigh House then and we worked in a little green shepherd’s hut out at the back. And that was all we had, believe it or not. And when the rains came we couldn’t operate very well because the rain used to come down the land and flood all our yard at Denbigh House and we used to come out of the front door – not the back

door because it was all flooded – it was a regular occurrence in those days.



Grace Farthing: I was born in “Water Cottage” near the Splash. I was born upstairs because the water was coming in the front door! Later, we moved across the road to the vet’s house because my dad worked for the vet. The horse’s tail used to hang from the eaves – it’s still there now. There were lots of dogs and things out the back there! They had a wooden hut which they had as a little surgery. My grandma lived with us, and Christine was born in granny’s room as we always called it.



Norah Orriss: You see, when Grace lived there the door was at the front and when my Paul was a baby the doctor’s surgery was in Grace’s mum’s front room. Dr Barnes used to come there. You used to wait in the hall and then go in there.



Reg Farthing: Yes, and after Grace’s mother and father moved out of the vet’s in 1962, Mrs Anderson held the doctor’s up in “Leys House” a couple of days a week.





Grace's mother, Agnes Spraggon, with her mother, Mrs Green, outside Denbeigh House – now “Kedges End”

Naomi Partridge: The Andersons used to live in “Leys House”. Mr Anderson was Parish Clerk for a long time but he died quite young. The doctors from Hadleigh used to have one of their rooms and hold a surgery there twice a week.



Cherry Chalmers: Where the horse's tail is the vet lived

there, Jack Lemon, and he used to sell you a bottle of white oils what he used for horses but that was wonderful for rheumatism. And if you'd got a pain or anything, dad'd say, “Go and get some horse oil” a shilling!



Paul Ryde: Veterinary practice was very primitive when I started. No farms here had water or electric light, no facilities or services at all. Either you went to a well and pumped the water up or you got a bucket and filled it at the horse-pond. All the roads to the farms were just rough tracks and in winter you had to walk from the roads to an off-lying farm. You couldn't get a vehicle up them, they were just so muddy and full of ruts made by the horses and carts.

We had no vaccines so you couldn't vaccinate anything. There was no penicillin, no anti-biotics, it

was all drenches. We had Calomel, a mercury compound powder that used to be used for pigs because you couldn't drench a pig. Calomel was a little tiny drop. For the drenches, we used to have to mix up powders in bottles and bottle it down the animals' mouths. Most of it was Epsom Salts – magnesium sulphate. It's a purgative.

The drinks were different colours – red, blue and yellow according to strength – and we always kept a green one

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LEMON’S
DRINKS. HE
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TO BE ABLE TO
CURE THEM.”**

Daniel Cooper

had one of George Lemon’s drinks. He always used to be able to cure them.”

Old Mr Lemon at that time had lost a leg through being kicked and he used to mix up the powders in the surgery for us. So I came home and I said to him, “What was the drink you used to give Daniel Cooper’s beasts, a brown liquid in a bottle? Mr Cooper thinks that’ll cure his bullock.” “Well, I’ll tell you while we have a cup of tea,” Mr Lemon said. So we made a pot of tea in the surgery and there was some left and he said, “Right, pour that in that bottle now that’s cold and put a little milk in so it looks just right and that’s the drink that’ll cure that bullock.” And the worst of it is, it did!

(Epsom salts and Aloes) in reserve so that, if the animal wasn’t better the next day, you could give it a green one, because you were “changing the treatment!”

I always remember going to a beast at Hitcham belonging to a dear old gentleman named Cooper at Whitehouse Farm – they were all family farms. I gave it probably a red or green drink and the next day it was no better and this old gentleman said to me, “You know, I think it would be a lot better if we

The first antibiotic that was used was Penicillin and it was used for mastitis in cows. It wasn’t an injection, but a little tiny tablet we used to mix up in water and squirt between the cows’ teats. Absolutely marvellous, it was a tremendous miracle to the farmers at that time. And then of course, all the other things came in and unfortunately, as has happened in human medicine, antibiotics were so efficient that they were used for everything when they shouldn’t have been. So that’s why we’ve got resistance to them today. There’s lots of acrimony and blame laid now but no-one could foresee the future, that was the trouble.

The animals in the old days were actually much healthier despite the lack of medicines, and the reason for that was that they were kept in small numbers. Every little farm had perhaps one cow to provide milk for the house, about two or three sows and perhaps two horses. And there were actually ten dairy herds in Hadleigh at one time but they were fiftens, twenties – now a herd is two or three hundred and everything is concentrated. And this, I think, is one of the problems.

THE BLACKSMITHS:

As we might expect, before the days of cars and combines, blacksmiths were greatly in demand. Horses – indispensable on the farms – were also used by roundsmen and individual trap drivers and riders. Each

and every horse needed shoes, and five local blacksmiths are mentioned in the testimonies which follow.



Fred Bramham: This building, the pottery, was originally stables – up until the 1950s the studio was in use for shoeing horses. So, when we came, there were the remains of a Forge where they used to do running repairs on farm machinery and so on. (Fred's stories about the pottery and the work that he and Dorothy Gorst do there will appear in a later chapter.)



Cherry Chalmers: Going back a long way, dad had a blacksmith's shop up the street round the corner by "Corner House". And then he couldn't get his money so he packed that in. After the Scots ladies died who he was chauffeur for, he tried another go as Blacksmith up by where Frances is now. (The Haven). He made a wooden shed, you know, and they used to go and have the horses shod there. And Robbie's got his anvil – he loved his grandad.



The Wheelwright's/Blacksmith's (the building behind the cart)



Ted Martin: There was a blacksmith at Kersey Uplands, just before the left turn to Polstead – in fact the shed's still there with all the blacksmith's tools untouched. I worked there myself for a while. And there was one where the garage is now at "Row View". It was a wheelwrights as well.

That one belonged to Lance Wyatt's grandfather – his

mother's father, Mr Fenning – and after he finished it fell down in the end. Arthur Towns, or Crimey as we used to call him, worked at three altogether – the one opposite “Corner House”, one by “The Haven” and the one belonging to Arthey's where the pottery is now.

I remember once, he needed some more four-inch nails and Mr Arthey straightened out some used ones and gave him those. “What's the use of this bloody lot to me?” said Crimey, “They'll buckle at the first knock I give them.” So Mr Arthey went to Partridges in Hadleigh and bought 2 lbs – well, you don't get many four inch nails at that weight. Old Crimey went mad – “They won't last me five minutes!” he said. “Here, take the car and the money and get more yourself then,” said Arthey. And Crimey did!



Claude Munson: There were a few good farmers but more bad 'uns, and if a poor horse lost a shoe they wouldn't worry about it – wouldn't spend money at the blacksmiths – and its hoof would bleed on very hard ground. But at Trickers Farm where my father worked – he was a good farmer and his horses was well looked after. And Jackson, who farmed down at Kersey Priory, he was a good man – a good man for the



church – I don't think there was a man did more for the church than he did.

THE PROGRESS OF KERSEY POST OFFICE:

Cherry Chalmers: There used to be a Post Office up the top of the street and there used to be this little lady called Mrs Mann, and Mr Mann.

And every time you went in she'd rub her hands and say,

Freeman and Bertha Mann on the step of their Post Office with Mrs Rose Farthing sitting next door

“Oh, you have come at the right time now”, you know. And she’d smell of wash and soap and that because she had a big counter up there and it used to shine so much. Every time it thundered she used to get under it in the cupboard because she was such a nervous type!



Rachel Wells: Freeman Mann who kept the Post Office at the top of the street, was my grandfather’s brother.



Ruth Gleed: Mrs Bertha Mann kept the Post Office at the top of The Street but, apart from paying our pensions, all she sold were postal orders and stamps.



Norah Orriss: Originally the Post Office, once part of “Boutells”, was next to the White Horse. The Manns had that for years and years, and then they gave up and Stiffs took it in their shop.



Grace Farthing: I worked in the Post Office at Stiffs for a

couple of years and then I married and worked in there afterwards until Christine was born.



Norah Orriss: After Stiffs gave up the Post Office, my next door neighbour took it over – Mrs Joyce Williams in number 5, Vale Lane – and she did it for about fourteen years, ’til her husband retired and they were moving away. The job was advertised and at that time I’d done a couple or three years at BASF and been made redundant so I thought I’d have a go at it. Well, I applied for it and so did three others and I got the job!

I started running the Post Office at home in December 1982. A second-class stamp at that time was fifteen and a half pence and the first-class was nineteen and a half. So really a second-class stamp has only gone up four and a half pence in sixteen years. When Joyce had the Post Office she’d just open the door and pull the counter down but I had to have a hole in my wall made and a proper screen. I’ve enjoyed it, though it’s completely changed now to what it used to be. There used to be about one form for everything and now you’ve got one form for each thing!

THE DISTRICT NURSES & MIDWIVES

These women were invaluable in the days when there was no National Health Service and few families could afford

doctor's or hospital fees. Prior to the second world war district nurses were generally provided for "the sick poor" by donation-funded voluntary district nursing associations. Their approach was far less clinical than today's and they were valued members of the community, usually looked upon as particularly knowledgeable and dependable friends.



Cherry Chalmers: The District Nurses, several of them, used to live in "The Haven" when that was a wooden hut, literally. It was made more or less reasonable to live in but there weren't much mod cons then.

They used to lay out people who'd died, you know, wash them and everything, and then they'd leave them in the coffin, open, in the front room as we called it in them days, and people used to go and look at them!



Ruth Gleed: The money my mother made from her sewing went to help pay for the district nurse. A headache was cured by a vinegar rag wrapped round your forehead – there were no doctor's pills then. If you were ill the rector's wife would bring you a can of homemade real beef tea!



Owen Gillingwater: When I lived at "River View" with my grandmother I stumbled and caught my arm on barbed wire. The local nurse came and stitched it up while I sat in the window where we always had a great big yellow Art Deco vase. Our daughter's got that vase now!



Gladys Rice: I had Paul and Pam at home in Polstead and I had Nurse Knight who used to live at "The Haven" where Frances do now. I had no doctor or nothing – she didn't want a doctor although Paul was my first child. She said, "I'm not having any doctor unless I have to!" She liked to deliver them on her own. And she was a little tiny thing – she said she was stiff for days after Paul was born!

She helped me so much, you know. But Pam came quickly – Nurse Knight said, "Give me time to wash my hands!" We didn't have a bathroom then – we had a basin on the washstand in the bedroom.

Well, then I went eight years and I had Ruth after we came to live in Kersey – she was my surprise baby! I was so lucky – there was a nurse, well not a proper nurse, but she used to go round to people when they had babies – and I had her in for a fortnight each time. She went to Mrs Stiff when she had all her babies. She used to look after you and the baby, because they were fussy then they wouldn't let you get out of bed for a week, you know.



Cherry Chalmers: One of the district nurses came when I had Robbie in my parents' cottage; they used to deliver babies then – you didn't think of going down the hospital. Mum had a brass bedstead, as they did then, and they tied a roller towel onto the head of it and then when you had a pain you pulled on the towel. And then, afterwards, the nurse bound you up with a roller towel. But I think that kept your tummy in.



Frances Whymark: The district nurse, Miss Knight, had a little square Morris Eight. She actually delivered me, and my mother wanted to call me Shirley and she said, "No way! She's not a Shirley." That was in Shirley Temple's time, of course. When I used to be doing the garden down at "The Cottage" she used to trot past to the Post Office when it was up the street and she often used to say, "When you've finished that hedge you can come and cut mine!" And little did I know that Gerald and I would one day live here!

KERSEY MILL AND MALTINGS:

Kersey Mill, one of several in the area, was among the last to fall silent. Fortunately however, its present owners have for some time been refurbishing the buildings, both



The new patio at Kersey Mill, with the original Suffolk bricks from the Yard re-used

to preserve them and put them to good use.



Claude Munson: Years ago, the floodgates would hold the water up because the mill was worked by the water wheel, you see. They're restoring it back now to what it was originally, I think. When that did run out of water they had a huge paraffin engine to drive it. But we had more water for some

reason then, with all the snow I suppose, and they used that nearly all the summer.

They had to regulate the water there for the mill at Paton Hall and the one at Hadleigh Bridge which was burnt down, and another at Topplesfield. The hedges grew high in the

damp, and at harvest they used to scythe before they could bind. Once, when Kersey Splash flooded Ted and I saved Gladys King's mother's chickens. They were on their perches just above the water and we got them for her!

When I was a boy we moved from Trickers Farm, after my father finished there, up to the top of Windmill Hill because



The Mill in Mr Mason's time

my mother used to work at Kersey Mill as a servant. There was two cottages there and Mr Mason who owned the mill knocked them through, so we lived in the two.

At the back of the mill there was a big yard with white bricks and my dear mother used to scrub them once a week on her hands and knees.

She used to do all the washing for the Masons and she had to bring that home to wash in the copper and we had one of those old wooden mangles to turn and we used to help her when we got old enough. That was all hard work and only for a few shillings a week. I don't know how she done it – no wonder the poor dear died early. But Mr Mason at the mill was a good man, a kind man. If people with a big family hadn't got the money to pay for the flour he'd let them have it and pay when they could.

Teddy Martin and Stanley Norman – whose father was head horseman at Bridges Farm – and I used to play up at the mill. Lovely old place it was then.

And we used to sledge down

Windmill Hill – it used to be a meadow. Mr Gage was the farmer at Ivy Tree Farm and the farmers then were different entirely to what they are today – they used to let you sledge on the land and they’d come with you. Lots of people used to come up from Kersey. Because we used to get hard winters – the snow would lie for weeks and weeks and weeks. Mr Mason what owned the mill, he was also a good carpenter and he made the sledges for us.

Mr Mason made a boathouse too at the back of the Mill opposite the flood gates and he had a boat with four oars and six or eight could go in it. Then from the mill they could go under the bridge and right on as far as Overgang at Semer. The fish – I’d love you to have seen them – eels, roach, perch, pike. They ain’t there now because the farmers have killed them with spraying.



Christina Mellor: The swans were doing a dance earlier on today! When they had all their babies it was such a joy to see them hatch. And one night I came out, literally in the moonlight, and they were swimming in the river here with their babies on their backs. There was the moon and it was misty – I can’t tell you. I took some photographs but they somehow didn’t capture what I could see. It’s the sort of thing that only happens once in a lifetime.

I’ve been here twenty-one years and have received no

grant for anything I’ve done – it’s all been my own money. I do have a good relationship with the River Authority, though. I welcome them onto the land instead of resenting them and, when they asked if I’d mind if they cut a few trees down, I said, “No, but I’ve got a terrible problem with stuff clogging under the mill wheel. It used to have a grid – is there any chance of you putting a grid back?” And they were pleased to put it up to the budget and we got the grid back, so now the water flowing under the wheel is perfectly clear and they just come every so often with a special tool and clear the debris out from the grid. They’ve now put it up to the budget to give us automatic sluice gates to control the water, which is to their advantage as well as ours of course. It will be lovely to be able to control it because we’ve always had no water in the summer and too much in the winter.



Rodney Kerr: We want to rebuild the boat house sometime. I think there were about 8 inches more water there before, so it was quite a bit higher. Otherwise, everything is nearly complete. The scaffolding’s now off the mill, there are new windows and everything is painted. And the ground floor is repaired so now it can actually be walked on. I’ve got my own office in the Maltings where I do my consultancy work for Rail Track, London Underground and Swiss Railways. We’re Internet connected here at Kersey Mill!



Christina Mellor: As you know, we let out the Maltings as offices and have five high tech. companies in here. But we've retained the central bit and the kiln, and created a cafe and a kitchen out of that so that caterers can provide a service for the people who work there. Half my old kitchen went out there, and for months I've had nothing of my own except the Aga, while we decided on a new kitchen for ourselves! It's lovely letting out the Maltings because the buildings are being used. There's a reason for keeping them up, and the

people who work there love it. When I got my first tenant I was terribly worried about it and didn't think I was going to like it but it's actually been really nice.

Now that the mill building is restored, I'd like to convert it, obviously retaining all the interesting machinery. The trouble is it's so near to the house, so we go on having various ideas but nothing definite as yet. You can't just live here and keep all these buildings up – you've got to develop it in some way. You see, there's always been light industry here – it's always been a work place. We're just bringing it into the 21st century.