

“...Nobody Worked Harder”

CHAPTER 7. FARMING AND OTHER WORK

WITHIN LIVING MEMORY, KERSEY HAS BEEN A FARMING community with farms run either by owner farmers or tenants. ¶ At the time of writing there are still several substantial farms around the outskirts of the village – those belonging to the families of Partridge, Stiff and Arthey. ¶ Certainly up until the second world war most men in Kersey were employed in agriculture. ¶ The work was physically demanding, and the pay poor.

*Women and children
picking flax which,
Ada Wyatt said, really
hurt the hands*



As we saw in the second chapter many labourers lived in tied cottages. A few perks went with the jobs and every able-bodied family member would turn his or her hand to gleaning or wood gathering.

During and after the agricultural depression more men turned their hands to jobs other than farming. Also, despite the general view that the married woman's place was in the home – several wives undertook additional outside work in an effort to balance their budgets. Without the benefit of labour saving devices, housework was back-breaking but women took great pride in the cleanliness and tidiness of their homes and family. Although times were often hard and comforts few, most people remember a happy family life.

Today, modern machinery and technology has taken the place of large numbers of farm workers, though some are still so employed. Quite a few men find work in the building industry but the majority of now middle aged Kersey people have moved out of the village to work and bring up their families. Some of the remaining indigenous village men and women earn a little money by helping “newcomers” of their own age or less with gardening and housework. Almost every unattached person over the age of twenty, seeking employment and making use of further education, now works outside the village.

It is cheering to record that, over the past few years, the village has seen a very welcome influx of young people and families, with breadwinners commuting various distances to work. (See the final chapter)

ASPECTS OF FARMING:

An excerpt from one of Miss Alice Jackson's letters to Michael Harbinson: *“My father died in 1930 and it was after that that Kings College sold Kersey Priory. Farming was in a very bad way then – you couldn't sell what you grew – a very difficult time for my dear mother. I know my father owed a lot of rent money to Kings College – but they said as he had farmed it so well they would not demand it. Which was very kind.”*



Ruth Gleed: My husband Clifford used to be cowman at Kersey Priory – he loved the cows he did. He was also a tractor driver and every Tom, Dick and Harry really, so he had plenty to do! He worked nineteen Christmases without a break, but he loved the animals.



Leslie Williams: There've certainly been a lot of changes in the village. I was born in Edwardstone and came here to live in 1946. There were no foreigners in the village then – they

were all local village people. Most of the houses were owned by farmers and, in those days, farming was hard to make a living at. The corn round here was some of the best grown in Suffolk, yet sometimes they couldn't get a bid for it.



Jim Gleed: Life was hard in the country then and money was very, very scarce. Farm labourers' wages were only just over one pound a week. A certain woman used to come in my uncle's shop and say, "How much are the sausages today Mr Goymour?" "A shilling a pound madam." "I'll have a quarter." That was two sausages between her, her husband and son for dinner.



Ted Martin: I was one of four children and I was born at Kersey Tye, my parents both originated from Kersey Tye. When I was about nine months old we moved to that house right opposite Kedges Lane in Kersey and that's where both my parents died. My father was a farm worker, he worked for Bobby Partridge and then he went from there to Letts in Semer and then from there to Stiffs on the farm. That's where he retired.



Naomi Partridge: My father-in-law lived in "West

Sampsons Hall" and his father before him and, I think, his father before him. We lived there for years of course, and now it's passed down to my son, Robert, so that's been in the family for quite a long time. In fact, in 1955 we celebrated a hundred years of the family farming here. That was when my father-in-law planted the avenue of oak trees down from "West Sampsons" across the meadow.

Some of those got damaged in the 1987 hurricane but the oak avenue is still across there and, if you look down from "West Sampsons", you can see "Bridges Farm" where my son Chris farms, and the avenue joins the two together.

Yes, there's really a tradition of farming in the Partridge family but for how much longer I don't know because it's not so easy now – the youngsters don't follow their fathers like they used to, do they? Our boy Peter must have taken after my father because he's into building and that sort of thing.

My father was a builder – Jack of all trades really – so farming was new to me. When we first married we farmed about 480 acres and then we sold some and bought some and now the two boys farm about 780 here – I can't tell you exactly.

No, we didn't really get that very early start in the mornings because we didn't have dairy cows. As far as I can remember we started at around half past six and then stopped for breakfast about nine, and the horsemen used to come round and feed the horses who worked on the farm.

The men always brought their own breakfast. It's never been a habit to feed the workers, not in this part of the country.



Claude Munson: My father was second horseman at Trickers Farm, and the blacksmith was a-running then at the forge. The horsemen had to keep the horses going – even if it rained. The men would put corn sacks over their heads to keep some of the wet off and they'd just keep walking behind the horses, guiding the plough. But they loved it – it was a real skill that job – and the horses knew where to go. You'd have to make straight lines and there were ploughing matches, you know.

In my day I used to go in for ploughing matches but I never won a prize! In my job I used horses but not for ploughing. I'd go a-harrowing. With a cambridge roll they'd have two horses pulling, and one for a light roll and that's what I used to do. I weren't good enough to use two horses.

The farmers, they used to give you beer to drink at the harvest because that was real hard work you know. And they weren't allowed to sit on the horses – they might just sit on them to take them into the field to work but after they'd done their work they weren't allowed to ride – they'd got to walk 'em. Ted Martin's legs are still good – better than mine!



Ted Martin: Before I went in the army I worked at a blacksmiths at Kersey Tye and when I came out of the army I went to work for Arthey, Kersey Priory, using horses. If I could afford it, and had the ground – but you want a bit of a meadow – I'd have a horse, I'd have two, if that was only to look at. I mean, I'd be with horses on my own, day in and day out, ploughing or whatever the case may be.

You'd see nobody, only the horses, you was on your own in the field, but you could talk to them. And they used to know what you say 'cos they used to flick their ears. Well, you can't talk to a blinking tractor, can you?

I used to love horses. I've been at work with them on the plough and we've had a heavy downpour, really rained hard, and I hadn't got an overcoat nor nothing, I used to stop the horses and I used to sit underneath their bellies, like this, and they used to stop the rain going on me! That was the only way to keep dry 'til that eased up a bit.



Naomi Partridge: Going back, I don't think we did much ploughing with horses because by about 1950 there were tractors, but we kept some horses for various odd jobs. A horse and tumbrel were quite useful with stock – feeding the cattle and sheep in the fields – and also they used them to

cart off the sugar beet. One horse could usually pull a tumbrel unless it was a very heavy load or across a very muddy field.

There was quite a different way of harvesting sugar beet then. The horse would go in with a plough and lift the beet out of the ground and it would be all hand done after that. The men, and sometimes women, would go along and pick up two beet and knock them together. They'd probably leave them in the row but knock the dirt off and then chop the tops off and throw them into small heaps and then they'd come in with the horse and tumbrel and a sugar beet fork and fork them into the tumbrel.

The tumbrel would take a load back to the yard and there it could be tipped out because tumbrels would tip up, as opposed to a wagon. After that, the beet would be thrown into lorries, using forks, and driven to the factory. Now the beet's all done by machinery straight into the trailer and then loaded mechanically into lorries.

At that time the wages were often worked out by piecework – so much per hundred yards for hoeing and that sort of thing, and each man had his patch. Some of them used to get up quite early and do so much before the ordinary day and so they'd put some extra hours in. And perhaps a stockman would have a patch to work as well as looking after the animals.

By the early 1950s we had two small combines and an

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Claude Munson

for factory farming or anything like that. Yes, our sheep and cows look very well, I think. We're still mixed farming, stock and crops.

outfit for drying corn which was very up to date in those days. My husband used to be the relief combine driver and he'd drive one from 12.30 to 1.30pm and the other 'til 2.30pm. Then he'd go on again at tea-time, so he'd be nearly all day relieving the combiners to keep going and get the crop in. And he used to do quite a lot with the animals as well, although we had a shepherd, because we had a lot more sheep than we do now.

We were always very busy at lambing time and I used to warm up some lambs in the Rayburn bottom oven sometimes, or put them in the sink to give them a warm bath!

We used to keep a couple of cows for the house, and we kept pigs at one time but gave those up because you either did that or go in for them in a big way and we've never gone in

It's a way of life, that's the thing about farming, it's just a way of life and you either take it or you don't. And you've got to take it if you're married into it! I never worked on the farm. I've had the family, and I didn't need to. Well, I wasn't strong enough to do farm work, I wasn't made that way and my husband didn't expect me to.

I always helped, and I still do the farm books and wages and help with recording things, so I keep in touch! I used to have Tuesday night off when I went to the Hadleigh Church Guild. That was the only time I went out, and then I used to go alone. We didn't have baby sitters in those days. We rarely went out together unless we took the children.



Jack Stiff: Jill and I met through the Young Farmers Association. There were Young Farmers at Sudbury and at Bury and Clare. You'd meet up with people and have competitions and various things. There's Animal Feed people and all sorts in it now but originally in Suffolk it was just farmers because that's where the work was – on the farms.



Jill Stiff: Farms used to be so much smaller. I mean if you had a 500 acre farm you were quite comfortably off weren't you?



Jack: There were really small farmers as well – plenty of 100 acre farmers then, but now you won't find many. People say farmers are well off. Well, they are if they've got cash but how many farmers have got cash? You can't say to a man at the end of the week, "take a half acre of land." They want the readies.



Jill: Well, not only that, land's not replaceable is it? It's not like a table – "Oh, I'll sell that and buy another one" – when it's gone it's gone. People guard every inch of their land.



Jack: If they'd got a hundred acres of land it became a way of life – they'd been brought up to it from children. Now, the children don't want the farms. They've seen so much on television, and hear about people earning £150 to £200 a week. They're not going to work for £70 or £80 a week.



Jill: And the sorrowful part is that it doesn't go to another small farmer. It's the big farmer who comes in and outprices everybody, so they get two thousand, two and a half, three thousand acres. They don't have the same feel for the land, though. A farmer years ago would walk round his land, you

know. He'd know his fields intimately.



Jack: They get bigger and bigger and less people get employment. The big farmer does it all by computer or satellite and probably thinks he's better off than the old farmer who used to do everything in his head. The average small farmer and his family worked long hours, but these days these big farmers with a large combine they'll work from seven in the morning 'til midnight. And a big machine today can plough perhaps thirty or forty acres a day – more in a long day because that can keep going. But a man with a horse, if they did a couple of acres they'd done well.



Neville Whittle: Farming used to be fairly labour intensive, didn't it? Forty people would have worked on the same size farm where there are three people now. Someone who knew how hard the work was was Fred Mussett of Bramford. He was about ninety-eight when he died. He had a twenty-three acre farm at Hintlesham and it used to take him six weeks to plough it with a horse, just after the first world war! That's the difference. Things have changed.

MORE JOBS THAN ONE:

An excerpt from “Memories of My Life”, written by Ivy



Mrs Sampson (centre) with Miss Cook on her right

Martin who is Cherry Chalmers' aunt: *“In the 1930's my husband was a farm worker. His wages were thirty shillings a week so I had to pay all the expenses out of that and I found we had to live as cheaply as possible. So I decided to go out to work and earn some money to help buy my clothes. I heard that there was a lady living in the village that needed help in the house, so I decided I would give the job a trial.*

She was a lady with two daughters living at home, but they were still going to a secondary school, so I had to be at work by 7.30am in time to cook the breakfast, but first I had to clean the fire place and light the fire in the dining room if

necessary. While they were eating breakfast I had to prepare the vegetables for their evening meal and after breakfast I had to wash up and clean the dining room and the girls' bedrooms daily, in turn. Mrs Roberts did her own bedroom. I was paid two shillings an hour and left at 10.30am, so that gave me plenty of time to get home and get my own work done and dinner cooked by the time my husband came home.

Later, we moved from one house to another in Kersey and our new landlady was Mrs Samson at "Ayres End", a very big house. I went to work for Mrs Samson there on Fridays, three hours in the morning and two in the afternoon, and my wages there were three shillings and sixpence an hour. I was never really happy because, when I had to do Mrs Samson's bedroom there was a very large rug by the dressing table and underneath I always found about half a dozen hairpins which I picked up and put on the dressing table.

I felt I was being put to the test to see if I had picked the rug up or swept over it. However, I was glad of the money so I didn't make any fuss about it."



Cherry Chalmers: Miss Vince, a wonderful dressmaker, lived in the house next door to The Bell when that house was two cottages. If you wanted a dress made you'd go and she'd fit you there, and there was always a smell of antiseptic or something.



Gladys Rice: I was born in Boxford. My father had a smallholding in Stone Street there, nine acres of land, and he went in for cattle – pigs and bullocks – because there was a huge barn. And then he used to go out thatching. He thatched "Old Drift House" in Kersey, and quite a lot of others as well.



Mary Holden: I can you tell you who this is (*see right*) – my father. He used to go down to the river with that tank and fill it up for the animals – pigs which he looked after and also cows. He didn't earn a lot of money. Well, no one had a fantastic wage. I sometimes sit and think about it all. It was quite hard for my mother in those days.

On a Tuesday my grandfather used to go to Ipswich and get some fish in boxes and then my uncle would go round and sell them for a penny, and that day mother used to go and do gran's work for her and we used to have to go there for dinner. While mother was doing the work, grandmother got the dinner. I can picture it now. She used to make a big apple pie and we had brown sugar with it, a huge thing it was. And she used to save a bit for grandfather when he came home from work.

My grandfather used to cart coal – sixpence a



Back view of Mary Holden's father with water tank

hundredweight it cost then! I can remember in school holidays going round with him in Kersey Tye selling these bags of coal, sitting up in the cart. I liked it. You thought you was grand, these others looking at you!



Cherry Chalmers: When I was a child, a Mr Frank Gage

used to have a little chicken business at the back of “Market House” and he employed several men in the village to help pluck chickens and skin rabbits. Frank Gage used to go out and get chickens, pet rabbits and goats and he used to take them to London market. It was horrible really – nevertheless I used to watch out my bedroom window the other side of The Green, and you’d hear them screaming. You could see them all hung up and then he’d go off when he’d got a load. He used to have this machine that he plucked the chickens with.



Ray Goymour: The townees always think we’re swede bashers – half way round the twist. I had that when I used to work in London. I used to say, “You want to come down to Suffolk and do some business with a farmer, you’ll find who’s dim then!” My cousin – dad’s brother’s son – used to send a six or seven ton lorry loaded with strawberries to Covent Garden and they offered him such a ridiculous price that he brought the lorry back, and all the strawberries with it. Then he started selling them at the farm gate, now Banham Zoo.



Claude Munson: I did farm work ‘til I left my wife and then I worked in the sugar beet factory at Ipswich for seven years. I went off sugar, working in there, because I saw what sugar’s

made of. It's what they put in it! The sugar beet is brown, you see, and they used to process that in Bury and send the sugar for refining, by putting lime in it, to Ipswich and to London. Tate and Lyle's had a lot. There was a lime quarry right near Ipswich but they never used that because it wasn't white enough. They used lime from Germany.

Anyway, then I worked at Wattisham building runways, and then in another firm at Nedging building a reservoir under the water tower there. When the Wattisham job was finished I could have gone on with them anywhere – lots of jobs – because when you're single you can do what you like can't you? But it's a good job I didn't because I'd have been dead now. A couple of my mates at Wattisham went with them and they're dead. We used to drink ourselves stupid you see. They were nearly all "Paddys" you understand.



Owen Gillingwater: My dad married in 1926 and their first home was the cottage next door to where Ada and Lance Wyatt live now, though at that time it was Lance's father who lived there. He had a pony and trap and used to go regularly each week up to Ipswich to sell his produce from the allotment.

A WOMAN'S WORK . . .

Another extract from Miss Alice Jackson's letters to



Lance Wyatt with Ada in the background (Andrew Lemon is sitting on the donkey.)

Michael Harbinson:

*"Mrs Ada Wyatt's mother was such a nice person. She used to help my mother at the Priory. Each day had its set job:
Monday - washday - the small copper heated the water for everything and the larger copper was used for boiling clothes.
Tuesday - ironing. Wednesday - tidying the house.
Thursday - churning and making the butter. Friday - the brick oven heated with faggots and all the bread etc cooked.*

Saturday – getting ready for Sunday! They did have to work hard in those days.”



Cherry Chalmers: I’ll tell you what, my mother worked very very hard. She used to light a copper in the washhouse and fill the tin bath with pails of water. And she used to cook on an oilstove with an oven on top – so did everybody else, before electric. Those stoves used to make the most marvellous batter puddings but they was filthy things. Mum used to have an old kitchen, and you’d go in there and sometimes that would be black. Then all that had to be washed off, and it was greasy, it was disgusting really. She worked far harder than I ever have done.



Claude Munson: Well, nobody worked harder than our parents – they worked a lot harder than we ever did. There was no electricity and no washing machines – that was all hard work. And the women worked harder than the men – you could say their work was never done. Darning! Look, this was my mother’s “mushroom” as they called it for darning socks. And she used to knit them with the four needles. Everywhere was the same though, every family. My mother was only fifty seven when she died – she had tumour of the brain.

A lot of women did piece work on the land – stone picking, pea picking, potato picking – anything what come along. There was always women on the fields, they’d work right round to harvest time – hoeing the corn and chopping out sugar beet. That all had to be cleaned because there was no sprays then.

If they didn’t do it for themselves they’d help their husbands and the children would help as well because the work was priced beforehand and if you didn’t finish what you’d been set you didn’t get paid. The fields would be full of people, wherever you looked (*see photograph at the beginning of this chapter*).



Jack Stiff: I suppose about sixty percent of the village at that time of day used to help the farmer keep his hedges tidy and he’d provide them with free firewood, you see. The farmer would say, “Right, you have that hundred yards of hedge this year, and next year take the next,” and they’d go and cut it all out in faggots and then borrow the farmer’s tumbrel and horse and two or three of them go together and help to bring it home.

The women and kids would help then to stack it up in the yard and then it’d be sawn up. But they couldn’t go when the birds were nesting and they couldn’t go in the shooting season because it was too dangerous.



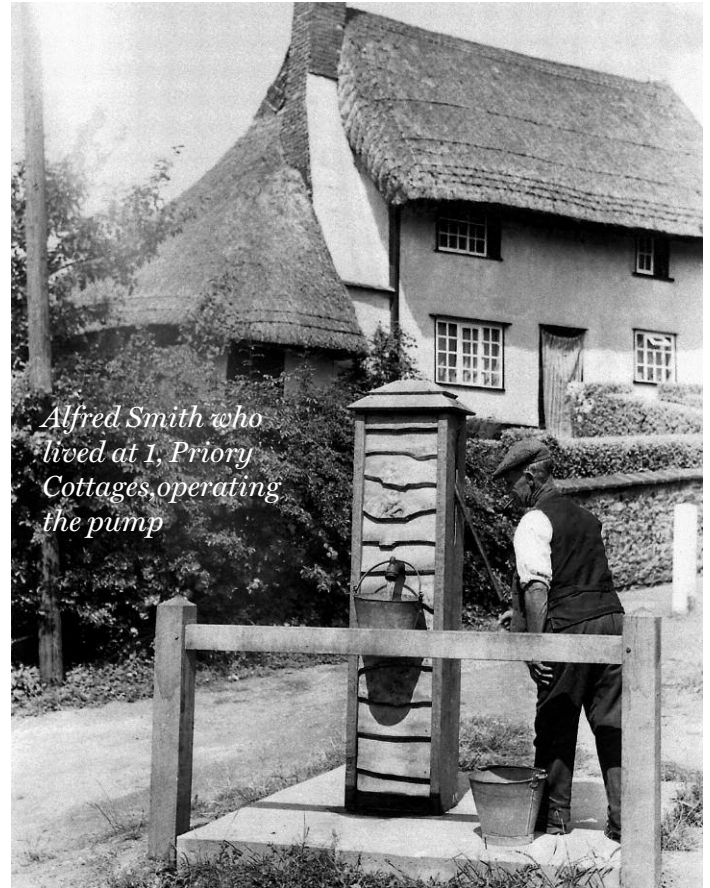
Jill Stiff: Yes, and there were a few other perks besides the houses that went with the jobs at low rents – various bits of food and wood and that sort of thing, and they'd go gleaning for their chickens. We always used to stack corn on the bottom of Bellfield and thrash it. Then we'd store the straw in the barn, so it was always in the dry.



Ivy Tricker: My grannie had a well in her garden opposite and we used to get our water from there. There was a big old copper out the back here and a mangle, and if the weather was bad, mother would hang the clothes up on the airer in the living room. And that was washing for a family of twelve! But she managed somehow and we were happy. **(In about 1937 the water-pump was installed just outside the Trickers' cottage which must have made things quite a bit easier by comparison.)**



Eileen Gleed: There used to be one wash-house between three houses in Church Hill. Our wash-house used to be shared by number 5 and number 6, but Cherry in number 6 never used it – she did her washing in her kitchen. Mrs Spraggon used the wash-house, and she made sure I never



Alfred Smith who lived at 1, Priory Cottages, operating the pump

got in first! I had to wait ‘til she’d done her washing, so I done mine Tuesdays. You had to go and get the water from the well by the church steps to fill the copper and then find some wood to make your water hot.



Jill Stiff: Oh yes, washdays were hard, but you just accepted it you see. It was like having the little hut down the end of the footpath! Your mother used to get her water from the river didn’t she, Jack? Because the lady who lived in “Ayres End” complained about her having nappies on the line on a Sunday. Apparently mother said, “Well my children get dirty on a Sunday the same as they do any other day!”



Jack Stiff: That woman used to do a bit of business with the shop and she threatened to do no more business with us if we insisted in having washing out on a Sunday. Father blew his top and turned round and said, “Good Luck to her!”



Ruth Gleed: During the war when I was in my twenties I thought I’d like to do a paper round so I went to Mr Willis at Martins in Hadleigh. I had to go on my bike and pick the papers up myself and learn what everybody wanted.

Then I did all Stone Street, right up Windmill Hill and the

whole of Kersey – of course there were no council houses in those days. And they all had a paper – I mean if there were four in the family everybody had a paper.

The Red Letter and The Red Star were twopence each. Most of the papers were only threepence, like The Herald and The Daily Mirror or the “Daily Liar” as we used to call it! I enjoyed that job really.

While I was living in Kersey, what Mary Holden and I did on the fields, working for Mr Stiff, was nobody’s business. We did everything – fruit and vegetables – and helped do the corn up in stocks, and pluck the turkeys. Mary didn’t like that job very much but I used to pluck them! Turkeys aren’t too hard on your hands but geese are dreadful because they’ve got two coats you see.



Eileen Gleed: After Tim started school, the farmer where I used to go apple picking said to me, “You’ll be going in the barn next week.” I said, “I’m not.” And he said, “You’ll have to – either that or you finish.” I dreaded going in the barn but, as it turned out that was the best place, wrapping apples, because you got longer work. And the more boxes you filled, you got more money.

ALL IN A DAY’S WORK

Jack Stiff: I went into our business right from school in 1945.

We continued to cure and smoke sweet cured bacon, hams and chaps after the war. Before we had electric that was only in the winter time but afterwards we could do it all the year.



Jill: We had a week's honeymoon and a week the following year but after that we didn't go because if one part of the business slackened another part was busy.



Jack: And with twenty staff, each entitled to a fortnight's holiday a year, that was nearly the year gone! And you had to be available if you had staff on holiday. There were some things I didn't do, but if a lorry driver was away I had to drive the lorry, and all those things I knew something about.



Jill: The basic reasons that a lot of the workers had time off wasn't so they could go away, it was to do jobs that they needed to do. Like Charlie Holden, he would have his holiday at the time he wanted to dig his potatoes up in October, and in the spring time when he wanted to sow.



Jack Stiff, right, with his brother Bill - late 1950s / early 60s



Norah Orriss: I was a comptometer operator in Ipswich for six years. In those days you didn't work once you got married, but after I'd left there about a week they got in touch with me and for about the next twenty years I worked for them from home! When I finished there I did some casual work and, of

course, I've run the Post Office here for sixteen years, so I've always worked really.



Grace Farthing: After my Hadleigh job as a nanny I went to Levington to a family and looked after a baby, and another one came along. Then, by that time, Reg and I were courting and I wanted to come home. So then I worked in Stiff's Post Office for a couple of years and then I married and worked in there afterwards until Christine was born and then that was about it. (Apparently Grace discounts as "work" the valued help she gives some Kersey people in their homes!)



Verena Manning: Mr and Mrs Hammond Innes moved to "Ayres End" in 1947. I always remember the first time I met her – and that was in Stiff's shop. My mother's sister had been down to visit and she'd brought Brian a lovely white pram suit, and I'd taken Brian out of the pram (which we'd bought at Stiff's) into the shop and Mrs Innes said, "Oh, what a lovely baby and what lovely white woolies!"

Then I lost Stan at Christmas with Leukaemia when Brian was five and a half years old. There was no help for one parent families and I had that three bedroomed council house, so I had to go to work. My sister Marjorie and I were two sisters who had married two brothers, and she had been

working for Mrs Innes but she was leaving as she and Bob were moving to Groton.

Well, I had done little bits of washing and ironing for Mrs Innes and she asked Marjorie if she thought I'd go and work for her. And that's how I came to start there about the first week in January 1953, and I worked there for forty-five years. My brother Reg had already been working for Mr and Mrs Innes as their gardener, so we were there together.

When I first went to "Ayres End" I did mostly washing up. I used to wash up and wash up and wash up! And I used to do all the vegetables. Mrs Innes usually made their beds, but she loved gardening so she'd be out in the garden mostly. And of course they used to go sailing sometimes for near on two months at a time.

Mrs Innes' mother, Mrs Lang, lived there then, and she had the big room which was later his study, so we used to look to her. And we used to go just the same whether they were there or not because they always had dogs you know, one dog followed another.

I think it was just about the time I met my second husband Wilf that I started doing the dinner parties. I used to cook – sometimes it would be salmon, or ducks served with orange sauce. And then I would serve it and wash up. Wilf used to come and get me, which was nice, and sometimes he'd help me if I hadn't finished washing up, but I mostly had. Sometimes it was half past eleven, quarter to

twelve when we got home and then I'd be off down there again the next day! But she did appreciate me, and so did Mr Innes.

She has told me how she used to bring people out into the kitchen to see how I'd left it. Of course all the best cutlery came out – not what we used daily – and I used to lay it all out on trays ready to be put away, and she'd put it away next day.



*Verena cooking at
"Ayres End"*

Their first Aga used to be Mrs Samson's and that used anthracite. Of course it was ever so dusty because you had to shovel this very fine stuff and it would fly up. There was a place at the top that you used to pour water in and a tap, and when I first went there I used to get my water from that to wash up in!

I used to find the slow oven a boon doing parties because you could heat all the plates in there, and if you'd got anything cooked, you could keep it hot. They

had lovely Christmas Eve parties too. Jim and Nora Anderson used to help me with those and, later on, Mary Smith helped.



Rachel Wells: I left Grimwades in Ipswich when I was expecting Louise, though at odd times I used to do a little work for them at home. Even while I was at work I'd do alterations and things at home for people in the village but I didn't make dresses and things for them like I do now. Everybody knows me here, and knows I sew, so they all come to me and then go and tell somebody else and I now have people come from all over the place!

Louise and Duncan like living in Kersey but I don't know whether they'll want to continue living here. Duncan's doing a business studies course at college now. It's good that Lousie can drive – she likes her job what she's got now in Ipswich. They're structural engineers and she's in Building Control. She's got her word processor at home and she'll say to me, "Do your news for the East Anglian and the Free Press on there." And every week I say, "You'll have to just tell me what button I've got to press." And she'll say, "Don't you remember?" But I keep saying, "Well you can't shorten a pair of trousers!"





*Bill and Mildred
Mann with Mary
in their garden
behind what is now
“Hall House”*

Mary Gage, who wrote the following poem, was the aunt of Mary Mann (later Mowles) who was mother to Rachel Wells. Rachel, now 52, still lives with her family in part of “Vale Corner” where her grandparents Bill and Mildred Mann and her parents Lewis and Mary Mowles lived before her. The poem gives a detailed description of the daily grind experienced by one young couple in Kersey in the first years of the 20th century, but also captures their unquestioning contentment. I am sure we can take this as an example of how the majority lived at that time.

A Married Life

BY MARY GAGE

MILDRED Partridge
wedded Bill Mann,
That is how the tale ran.
Then they on a
honeymoon went
As far as London, not
to Kent.

THEN THEY returned from
their pleasure
Bill went to work, not at his
leisure,
He went to Raynham’s to
toil all day
This he did to get some pay.

EACH NIGHT he came
home to his wife again,
Not in a carriage nor in a
wain,
But walked on his two
stalwart feet
In the cold and in the heat.

MILDRED, whilst her beau
was away,
Was toiling through the
long, long day
To keep the house so clean
and nice,
And also to keep it free
from mice.

MRS RAYNHAM left
Sampson’s Hall –
This made Kersey people
bawl –
Mr Elliston came in her
place,
His mean ways he’ll
never efface.

BILL THEN WENT to this
man’s to work
Because his duty he did
not shirk,
But soon he was given

notice to leave,
I cannot tell whether he
did grieve.

FOR SOME time no work
had Bill,
This was all against
his will,
A job at Mason's he did get,
Now he works there
if fine or wet.

MILDRED, of course, was
busy always,
Her work was never done
by fays,
If you go to her house
I ween
You will find it tidy and
clean.

SHE MAKES the bed for
her dear father,
But for Bill she would
do it rather.
The dinner is cooked

when he comes home,
Then from her he'll
hardly roam.

AT TEN O'CLOCK they retire
to bed,
Mildred is by Bill then led
Up the stairs for their
nightly rest
Which, when said, is
always best.

BILL ALWAYS rises at five
o'clock,
Mildred also puts on her
frock
To get his breakfast and
lunch quite ready,
Then off to work he goes,
so steady.

THE DAY of toil has then
begun
But he'll return at set
of sun
To amuse his own dear

sweet wife,
This sums up the routine
of his life.

THE FOURTEENTH of
April's a noted day,
At least this is what Bill
will say,
For a baby girl was born
to them
Whom they think a
perfect gem.

MILDRED'S sister's now
an Aunt,
To say much more I
really can't,
Mary will be the dear
child's name.
Isn't it funny that
mine's the same?

TAKEN to the Church
she'll be,
Kersey people will
flock to see

Her baptised by the vicar.
After that I'll come
and see her.

FROM THE christening
they'll return,
Many things she'll have
to learn.
Mildred must correctly
bring her up,
Teach her to sew and
hold her cup.

NOW I HOPE they'll
happy be,
And take her down
by the sea,
And that their family
will increase,
And that it may not
quite yet cease.