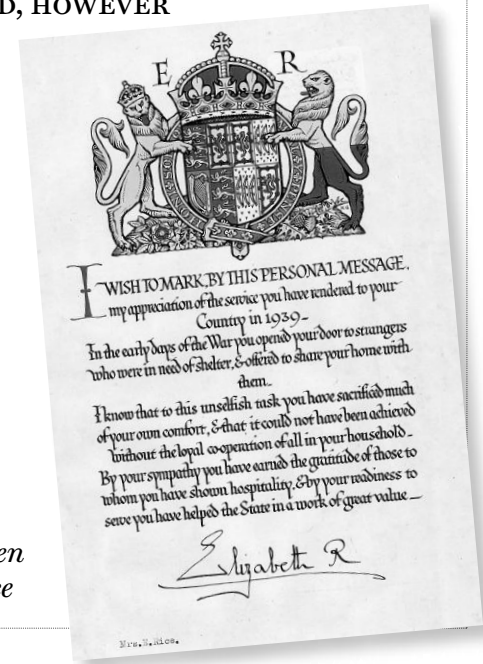


“... That Was Different Then”

CHAPTER 9. THE EFFECTS OF WAR, INCLUDING EVACUEES, P.O.W.s, THE READING ROOM & THE VILLAGE HALL

NO PLACE IN A COUNTRY AT WAR REMAINS UNAFFECTED, HOWEVER far from the main action it may appear to be. ¶ Kersey, seemingly snug in the Suffolk countryside, was no exception because there was an airfield at Wattisham (now used by army helicopters) and an anti-aircraft battery with its searchlights at Wickerstreet. ¶ In fact – no doubt because of its routes to seaports and proximity to London – the whole of West Suffolk came under quite heavy attack by the enemy.

*Message of
appreciation
from the Queen
to Gladys Rice*



Alfred Gillingwater was Kersey's reporter for the East Anglian Daily Times, amongst other newspapers, but his research extended well beyond the village. In 1944 he wrote a long "retrospect of air attacks on West Suffolk by enemy aircraft" which began by revealing that the county had "been affected by 178 raids and had 1,852 high-explosive bombs and 13,624 incendiaries showered down within its borders, resulting in the death of 43 people and in the injury of 130..."

Quite a few children and some women were evacuated to Kersey from London, and there are several stories concerning them. Also, Sheila Zurbrugg tells of her time as a young teacher in charge of cockney evacuees near Maidenhead.

Although they do not apply solely to wartime, I decided to include memories concerning the reading room and village hall in this chapter because a lot of the camaraderie which took place in them seems reminiscent of the blitz!

However, the most obvious effect of two world wars upon Kersey was the loss of young men, and in so small a place the loss seems great. The names of the fallen are inscribed on a marble memorial tablet found on the left hand wall as one enters the south door of St Mary's Church. Each Remembrance Sunday, these names are

called out, two minutes silence observed and a poppy wreath is hung below the plaque. Needless to add, in the hearts and minds of their remaining relatives, the young men return far more frequently. I am privileged to record them below:

1914 - 1918

Sidney W. Arthey	Frank H. Baalham
Sidney J. Briggs	John A.W. Glead
John Green	Arthur Holmes
Charles Jarvis	Stanley J. Martin
Archer E. Martin	Frank R. Martin
George P. Munson	Ronald Partridge
Leonard Pattle	Horace E. Piper
Percy S. Robinson	George S. Southgate
Alfred Willis	

1939 - 1945

Robert F. Holman	Sidney J. Pryke
George W.C. Spraggons	Vernon T. Squirrell

EVACUEES – FROM BOTH POINTS OF VIEW

Verena Manning: My mother didn't really have a lot of room for evacuees in our house, but I can remember them coming here and, on the Sunday when war had been

declared, the evacuees had been to church. We saw them coming down the church steps, crying, because they'd heard we were at war. But afterwards most of the evacuees seemed very happy in Kersey. They made friends. Not that I've kept in touch with any of them, but some have.



Victor Biebuyck: My mum and I were both evacuated here about 1944 for a year and I loved it. I still correspond with Ruth Gleed – Ruth Towns she was when we were billeted with her parents when they lived in Noaks Farm. We had to have thick blackout curtains at the windows and once we heard a big bang and they said it was a rocket had landed – you never heard them until they exploded did you? The doodle-bugs before the rockets, you used to hear them going over and it was only when they stopped you knew they were going to come down! I used to hear those in Barking but we never actually heard them here of course. There were other evacuees here at the same time as us – I can't remember any of their names but I know there was a girl staying somewhere behind the village hall.



Evacuee Patsy Holland (centre) country dancing with left to right Joyce Spraggon, Norah Farthing, Doreen Wyatt, Grace Spraggon, Ella Wyatt and Gladys Spraggon

Frances Whymark: I remember Mary Holden's mother and father lived in "Woodbine Cottage" as it's called now. I remember going there, and the black grates they had. And there used to be a little cottage called "The Corner Cupboard"

right at the back of those cottages – Denny Holland still lives in Kersey and they were evacuees there. He had two sisters, Patsy and June, and I think his mum was a widow and she used to be school cook for years and years. The garden of that little house ran right along the back of “Old Drift House” garden, so I saw quite a lot of them.



Grace Farthing: I know my parents took evacuees – three little boys and their mother. And when their father used to come to see them they’d stay on one side of this big table we had in the middle of the room because they were so terrified of him. And funnily enough, about two years ago, I happened to go up to the church one day and one of these children had actually been. He’d left a note in the visitors’ book which said he used to be an evacuee in Kersey. I took the address and my sister wrote, but we never got any reply.



Frances: My father’s mother lived in “Bridge House” Kersey years ago, but my parents evacuated here from Acton in London in the second world war. My father wanted a child born in Kersey which was why I came quite a few years after the others! My mother was really a typical cockney – quite sharp, said what she thought – they say I take after her! The village children didn’t take to Ronnie and Leslie very well –

mother said they used to pinch Leslie’s cap and throw it in the stream– things like that!



Verena Manning: I learnt Frances’ mum to ride a bike! There was a searchlight on the Boxford road and that was where we used to like to go with the bike, up as far as the searchlight, because the road was nice and flat. And I used to run beside her holding onto the saddle!



Gladys Rice: I had an evacuee – I had a letter from the Queen afterwards to thank me! I got married in July 1939 and I hadn’t been married more than a few weeks when the evacuees came here, and I was forced to have one. So I had this girl called Lily Bloom. She was ten years old and she came from Bethnal Green. Oh, but she was in a state, poor little thing. her head was absolutely running with lice and she’d got the scabies. And she was undernourished because she’d got the hugest tummy.

I used to do her head with paraffin and she used to cry, poor little girl, and then they told me to get special stuff from the chemist, so we managed to get rid of the lice. Then I had to have the whole house fumigated! Everything was new – beds, eiderdowns, everything – and they all had to be done. I got five shillings a week for having her.



Evacuee Lily Bloom ready to return to London with her mother and brother

then anyway, so she didn't go to anybody else.



Eileen Gleed: My mum had evacuees and they were alright. But their friend was staying at the Gidney's house and she said she couldn't sleep because she'd got things crawling all

She loved being with us and I used to have her mother down to stay for the weekend sometimes. Lily would tell us that her mother used to go and play the piano for the pubs and that, you know. And she used to say, "My mother always keeps her feet warm – she opens the oven door and puts them in there!" Lily was with us over two years and then I was having Paul, and I wanted that other bedroom, so she went then. But they were going back to London by

over her. The Gidneys tried to tell her she'd brought them with her but when she said she was going to see Mr Fairbrother about it they said, "No, don't do that", because they must have known they were in their beds before.

Anyway, she did see Mr Fairbrother and he found that it was the Gidney's house what had got the livestock! She didn't go back there, she stayed at my mother's in the end and slept with one of the other evacuee girls.



Ted Martin: My mother didn't have any evacuees in the war but I'll tell you what we had – some relations, a man and his wife, from London. They were getting on in years and they come out of London and stayed with my parents during the war. They stayed on here – as a matter of fact they both died down here with my parents.



Sheila Zurbrugg: I had only been teaching three weeks in 1939 when war broke out and I was sent off to an unknown destination with three or four other staff in charge of about thirty evacuees. We ended up in the wrong place – a small village near Maidenhead called White Waltham. They were expecting mothers with babes and we were teachers with children – tough little Cockneys aged three to fourteen, being several in a family. We had to billet them, in some cases de-

louse them, and escort them to a school set up in an aerodrome some distance away.

In the bungalow we teachers were given I had the job of blacking out windows, cleaning up and feeding us all. I had just completed three years at a domestic science college learning to teach cookery, laundry, housewifery – not expecting to be left in charge of these children. But I managed to feed all the other teachers until they left me to go home to London.

Then, the task of caring for my young Cockneys! They taught me a lot. I moved from one billet to another and eventually stayed at Touchen End in the home of a descendent of Thomas Hughes – the headmaster of Rugby who wrote “Tom Brown’s Schooldays.”

We had tough times. It was a poor little school and a very cold winter. The headmistress was a Cornish woman – dour and unfriendly. There was only a small ration of coal for the fire – the only form of heating – and the lavatories in the playground were rat infested.

The little children were so frightened to go out they often had accidents. They were so cold in the afternoons when all the coal had been burned they could hardly write. Luckily, Mr Hughes was a school manager so I said to him, “It’s just not right – you can’t leave the school open in this freezing weather,” So, through the worst of it, they shut it each afternoon.

PRISONERS OF WAR IN KERSEY:

Jack Stiff: During the war we had prisoners of war and they’d help on the farm. There was a big prisoner of war camp near Boxford and they’d bring four or five men over from there. You’d pay so much a day for them. One of them’d brew the tea up and if they were there long enough they’d have something to eat. We had all sorts – one chap was on the U-boats. Some of them were artful and some were perfectly alright.



Jill Stiff: Well of course, you get that in every nationality, don’t you? I know you said there was one you sent some cigarettes. He had to go back and he didn’t want to be under the Russians.



Jack: No, and he came back and saw us once or twice. Some of them really enjoyed it here. And then after the war one of the chaps, from East Germany near the Polish border, moved back to England.

Owen Gillingwater: My dad was the prime mover in organising the cricket team, he being a sportsman, so I was roped in for that! The cricket pitch was on the big meadow in

front of the Priory and it was my job, with my dad, before the start of a match to cut the grass and get the cow pats off! In the wartime when the yanks were here, a Roy Van Heusen used to come and watch us play cricket and football, and he's written and made a drawing of a jet in my autograph book. Also, there were Italian prisoners of war stationed in "River House" and I got some of them to autograph my book.

ASPECTS OF WAR:

An extract from one of Alice Jackson's letters to Michael Harbinson:

"My eldest brother Stephen was in the first world war and wounded in his right arm. At first they thought it was a slight wound but it got worse and he lost the use of his arm. Luckily he got a job at Pye's in Cambridge. He was always very keen on anything electric, and they were very good to any man wounded in the war."



Ted Martin: My father was disabled from the first war. His left arm was like that, he couldn't get his fingers straight, he couldn't get his arm down. That was from a war wound. He got a disability pension, not a full one – he used to work you know – but he'd do most of his work with his right hand or arm.

Maisie and I were married in Kersey Church in 1941. She

was in the airforce and I was in the army, and Rev. Tempest didn't charge anything to marry us in appreciation of us both being in the services.



Verena Manning: I was in Mrs Vince's garden the day the shell went over and caught the corner of the school, and she was out there with me. I said, "Oh, get in!" because that whizzed – we heard it go over – and a thud. My sister was at Hadleigh school then, and Reverend Tempest came down to say he'd had a phone call telling him that all the children at Hadleigh school were alright, because they'd dropped some small bombs quite near it.

He was a dear – he took three of us to Blythburgh and Southwold and Walberswick to see the churches. Oh, and that was a great treat! Then, when my dad was in the convalescent home, he took mum and me in his car to visit him. They were such big things to us in those days.

When I was eighteen I went to work at Ipswich hospital, in Anglesea Road. I lived in there for a little while helping in the kitchen, and dishing up and putting the food into the containers for the wards. We didn't see an awful lot because we were in the kitchen, but there were so many brought into the Accident Ward in the war, you know. I remember hearing gunfire and bombs when I was there, but in the distance, nothing that I can remember really close.

After I time I worked at Churchmans cigarette factory because I didn't like living in at the hospital. To get to Churchmans I used to leave home at half past six in the morning on my bicycle with half a light because you used to have the top half of your lamp covered up because of the blackout. Nora Garrod lived down the village in "Market House" and she was a bus driver so I knew I'd be alright to catch the bus because she and I used to cycle there together!

We used to pay Mr Lemon a little every week to leave our bikes with him in Hadleigh and then go by bus to Ipswich. The bus used to get crowded and more so coming home, but I was alright because I was able to sit on the men's knees!

**"THE BUS USED
TO GET
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THE MEN'S
KNEES!"**

Verena Manning

You got to know all the workers on the bus and they were all so friendly.

Then I used to cycle home along the road and I often had company because Miss Springet the school teacher's sister used to sometimes work in Ipswich as a nurse and I used to cycle with her. Or, if there was gunfire or anything and I felt a bit nervous, I sometimes used to cycle with Mr Warren who lived in Lindsey, so I'd go Lindsey way and then come up home through the village.

My first boyfriend was Jimmy Squirrel – his name is on the war memorial tablet in church. He was killed on a tank landing craft and he died the day after D-day. We never really knew what happened to him – he was "missing, presumed killed." Then I met my first husband, Stan Fearis, through his sister Doris who came to work for Mrs Samson as cook. Stan and I were just friends at first and he went on a boat to Canada and also to Ireland, and he went over to Singapore when the prisoners were coming home. He went right through the war and never knew what it was to have a headache and then in 1949, three years after we were married, he went down with leukemia.



Ivy Tricker: After I was married I lived in Wickerstreet Green 'til my husband was called up. But there was an army garrison there and searchlights, and I was scared living there with the baby. So I moved back into the village and rented a cottage near mother again. But all through the war I lived down The Street with one of my sisters so I wasn't on my own.



Cherry Chalmers: When I was eighteen I lived at Leighton Buzzard for a while and I used to lodge with an army officer and his wife. We got bombed out – fire bombs you know – so

dad said come home and I did. And that's why Robbie was born in their cottage. Dave and I got married but he was still in the army and then he was posted to Burma for two years. I stayed home and lived with mum and she helped me with all the nappies and things!

There was just two bedrooms, quite close, and to keep Robbie quiet I was still feeding him when he was two. Dad used to say, "Keep that baby quiet," you know, and that was how I did it. When Dave came home he said, "Whatever are you doing?" Anyway, we moved to Hadleigh and lived there a little while. Then all of a sudden all his family came there – eleven of them from Scotland! It was a bit of fun really, ever such a big house, lots of rooms. But I got fed up with it after a while so dad put us into 6, Church Hill and I've been there ever since. **Soon after telling me this Cherry moved into a modern bungalow at Hadleigh. She is comfortable there but misses Kersey very much.**



Ray Goymour: You see, I was brought up in the war more or less, and that's when your life is fixed, isn't it, when you're about eighteen? It was love 'em and leave 'em then, that kind of thing always went on. I didn't marry – I thought better of it! I nearly did once. It was shortly after dad died and I never regretted it at the time but, looking back, I think I did the wrong thing.

I went in the Air Force when I was twenty. I was with the Tactical Air Force, "Typhoons", a name they want to use now but the Germans won't let us call our new aircraft that, will they? I admired the fellows who flew them, but I only saw action from the ground myself.

My downfall was getting Scarlet Fever just before we were being posted to a flying school, Boundary Bay near Vancouver. They put me on the train and dosed me up with quinine and I felt awful, awful. When we got to Winnipeg, which is about a day and a half's rail journey, I was taken off in the bloodwagon (ambulance) to hospital.

I was seen by a lady doctor who immediately whipped me off to isolation hospital – and then you're in isolation for about six weeks. One little English bloke with Canadians, Yanks and God knows what else. Broke my heart! Couldn't get news through to mother – I eventually got a nurse to write, and the letter was delivered months later.

And then I was pushed out into Winnipeg and didn't know what to do or where to go or anything. You got no help. One of the sisters took me home for that night, and I had a travel warrant to continue on to Boundary Bay – another two days travel – no money. All my mates had gone. I finished up doing my flying with Canadians, but I never qualified, never got my wings. I did about eighty hours and then they decided that I was "not the Service type." I kept in flying but as an Airfield Controller. Eventually I was whipped down to

Montreal and flown home. I had fourteen days leave and was then sent to France with 123 Wings, 2nd Tactical Air Force for the rest of the war.



Gladys Rice: My husband wasn't in the war because he worked on the farm with the threshing machines, and they said his job was too important. But he was in the Home Guard.



Harold Seggar: I was on HMS Formidable as a boy, then two or three other ships and then I was instructor on HMS Osprey, the boys' trainer at Portsmouth in Dorset. I went all over the world, some of it was pleasant and some of it weren't. I've got six war medals and two more to come, but I don't think I'll bother now. I can't be bothered.



Jim Gleed: I was in the Fire Service early in the war. We only had a little hand pump but we'd practice with the water in the Splash, and we used to get it right over the roof of the Bell! That pump used to be kept in the shed of the house nearest the water but I never knew what became of it in the end.

We had a Mr Vaughan Wilkins, an author, living in the

priory in the war, and he took charge of the Home Guard. They used the church tower as an observation post until one night the parson went up and found them with some bottles of beer up there, and that was the finish of that of course!



Claude Munson: I didn't have to go in the services in the war because I worked on the land, but I was in the Home Guard and we had to do that two nights a week – up all night and work all day! I worked then up at Semer Common in the Gate Farm what Arthey's have got now. That used to be a separate farm owned by Mr Price who also owned Hadleigh Brett Works where they made kit bags and all army stuff. That's just been pulled down.



Owen Gillingwater: Various people lived at the Priory during the war, and sometime at the beginning of it, there used to be the author, Vaughan Wilkins. I don't know what age of man he was but I remember that when a child was born to him and his wife, every child in the village had sweets given to them because he was so pleased that his wife had produced this child. You can imagine how the sweets were appreciated in wartime!



Jim Gleed: In 1941 I was called up and didn't see much of Kersey for the next four years. I sailed from Liverpool on my sister Joyce's birthday, November 14th 1942, and we went to North Africa.

THE READING ROOM:

The following is an abridged version of some written information which Churchwarden Joan Hattrick gave me on the reading room: As usual, any words presented in bold type are my own:



Joan Hattrick: This small red bricked building on the west side of Church Hill, between Market House and The Cottage, is a listed building and is owned by the Grays Charitable Trust. The Vicar and Churchwardens were named as Trustees in the Will of Revd. William Brice Gray.

It is generally believed that he provided the reading room and the supply of books and periodicals to keep the men of the village out of the pubs! It is interesting that despite the later provision of a snooker table and darts boards the Minutes of the meetings of the Mens' Club records their changing choice of daily newspapers to be placed in the Reading Room – a laudable effort to keep to the original idea of Revd. Gray.

A bakehouse containing a large bread oven extends out



The Reading Room – the brick building on the left of the road. Also shown is “Pax” in its early days, and the shoe-maker’s opposite

behind the house, and the oven originally opened into the downstairs room.



Nobody seems sure of the history of this oven but Chris and Sue Briggs, the present owners of Market House, point out that their property seems to have had direct access into the north side wall of the neighbouring house at some time in the past. They are confident that the

reading room was purpose built as a bakery with the bread being sold from the larger building which was a shop.



Joan Hattrick: The following (heavily abridged) record was prepared by Leslie Cockayne in 1993 in his capacity as Village Historian, and was a response to a Survey on Suffolk Reading Rooms. “... *A boost to the Reading Room’s fortunes was given by the will of Harriet Dora Gray, dated 24th January 1922 ... by a trust sum of One Hundred Pounds, supplemental to that established by her husband. But the Reading Room’s main source of income was from the rent of an adjacent substantial ... cottage sold during the 1960s ...*”



Having written about Rev. Gray and his successor Frank Benet Phillips, Leslie goes on, “... *With the passing of Rev. Phillips (1907 - 15) more festal times arrived under the joint aegis of Stanley Jackson and of Rev. Daniel Kent Ambrose... Jackson’s farming activities got into grave financial disorder, not helped by his habit of giving jobs to every unemployed farm worker. This generosity despite adversity is still remembered by Kersey people.*

The Reading Room’s decline began with the opening of Kersey Village Hall in the 1930s equipped with a full-sized

billiard table. The upper crust then deserted the RR in the hall’s favour ...

Snooker, and whist drives continued after the war. The repair and necessary renovation costs of the cottage made the income inadequate to sustain both buildings and so the cottage was sold and the proceeds invested to answer the terms of Gray’s Will which were: “... *As to the house which I have converted into a Reading Room, to keep the same for the purpose of a Reading Room and other parochial purposes ...*”

... An attempt to sell the Reading Room initiated c. 1960 by the Vicar was blocked by the Churchwardens. ... In the 1970s the priest in charge, Canon J. R. Johnson, attempted to broaden its use but the rump of original users would not cooperate ...

There follows a December 1999 Update by Joan Hattrick. I have again had to abridge, but the key points are retained:



Joan Hattrick: By 1996 the Mens’ Club had not played snooker for almost 2 years, and the remaining three members agreed it should be disbanded. They kindly donated the proceeds of sale of the snooker table and the balance of their Bank Account to the Trustees and this has been added to the accumulated income of the Trust.

The Charity Commission have agreed upon the broadening of the building's use under the terms of Rev. Gray's Will in which he specified using the Room "*for other parochial purposes*".

Presently, planning permission has been obtained to convert and extend the bakehouse to provide kitchen and toilet facilities... . The building will then provide two rooms of similar size which will be available for use by organisations in the village. The Grays Trust capital funds (formed by the original Grays' bequests and money from the sale of the house) are invested in perpetuity, and cannot be used for the renovations. Only the income from the capital is available to us, and grants for the remainder of the money required will have to be sought from other sources. **(In this regard)** we are pleased to have the support of the organisations in the village ... and are getting ready to submit grant applications to various bodies. We hope that as we go into the new Millennium we can provide the village with a restored and revitalized Reading Room.



A number of older villagers remember the Mens' Club held in the Reading Room, and Mrs Eileen Gleed, widow of member "Luker" Gleed, very kindly gave me the minute book for September 1938 to October 1957. Her son Kenny Gleed, known as "Sup", was one of the last few

members of the club. When quoting from this book, the original wording and spelling is used although the text has sometimes been abridged.



Ray Goymour: I was born in 1920 – there was just me – my father served in the first world war, you see. He was in the Royal Irish Fusiliers and finished up a prisoner of war. He was born in 1888, one of seven children. His parents later lived opposite the river in River View (**now "Market House"**) next door to the Reading Room, and my grandfather was a kind of caretaker there. All the old magazines were brought in and there was a snooker table downstairs – a lovely meeting place. River View used to belong to the church then, and my father started his butchering from there before he married and moved to "Leys House", or Homeleigh as we called it then.



Gladys Rice: Well of course the Reading Room was left to the village by Reverend Gray. It's a pity the church sold "Market House" really because, in the will, it was left that the rent from there should provide the money to keep the Reading Room going. Originally, that must have been a little house, I think, because it's got the big bread oven in there, hasn't it?



Extracts from the minute book of the Reading Room Mens' Club:

“The General Opening Meeting for the Season was held on Monday 19th Sept. 1938. The Rev. R.E Tempest presided and about 30 members were present. The Chairman Mr F.Seggar and Secretary A.R.Jarvis were re-elected. Re-election and election of Officers and Stewards took place. Mr R. Spraggons kindly undertook the maintenance of the Wireless, for which we are very grateful. It was unanimously agreed to take “The East Anglian Daily Times” and “Film Fun” as last year, the “Daily Mirror” instead of the “News Chronicle” and “Everybody’s” instead of “The Leader”. The Secretary proposed and G. Gleed seconded that when members’ names were given in for the Outing a deposit of 2/- be paid to stop “backing out” at the “last minute”. That was carried.”

“At a Stewards’ Meeting held on Feb. 6 1939, it was decided to reduce the charge for Billiards from 4 pence to 2 pence. At the same meeting it was decided to go to Yarmouth for the Annual Outing, via Norwich.”

“A General Meeting was held on Wed Sept 27th 1939. The members agreed to open the Room on Oct 2nd in the hope they would be able to carry on in spite of the difficulties caused by the War.”

“At the General Meeting held on Monday September 30th

1940 it was agreed that if any Service men were billeted in the Village they should be invited to become a Honorary member but pay the same fees for games, and if they were willing to appoint some of themselves as stewards. It was agreed to open the room from 6.30pm till 9pm from October 1st 1940, and Mrs Gleed was reappointed cleaner.”

“A a General Meeting held on Thurs 13th March 1941 the President, Mr D. Lemon, asked the members if they would like the Room open a little longer, or would they like to close it, as the nights were getting longer and the People wanted to get on with their Gardening. It was decided that the Room should be kept open till the end of the month. It was agreed that we should have a Whist-Drive to Close the room up with. Mr Arthur Towns said he would give one Prize of 6 bottles. Beer. The Rev. R. E. Tempest said we could go to his Pockett for another one, and Mr Clifford Gleed said he would also give one.”

“A meeting was held on Thursday the 21st January 1943 at 8 ‘clock, there was a small attendance ... The members asked could they have the Room open for two nights a week Mondays and Fridays and the fee 3d. And if fellows in Uniform wanted to come in the Room they could without paying there subscription long as they payed for the Games they played, it was carried ... Proposed by Mr G. Gleed and second by Mr H. Frost that we should pay the cleaner Mrs Gleed 1/- the first night, and after then 6d, because she

couldn't be hard on the members..."



Owen Gillingwater: My dad and I spent a lot of time together. During the war there weren't many men about to use the Reading Room, but in 1944 my dad – together with others – thought they would start it up again. He was the secretary and I think he roped me in as assistant treasurer. We used to play dominoes, cribbage and darts and they used to have whist drives there. Dad was the librarian too. Every Friday afternoon he and I used to go down to the Reading Room where the books were kept in boxes and we'd lay them out and display them for people to go and get their reading, which was quite right really, because that was the Reading Room!



From the minute book: *“A meeting was held at the Reading Room ... to discuss the re-opening of the Men's Club. The Rev. Lillie was appointed Chairman... Mr A. W. Gillingwater ... secretary ... Owen Gillingwater ... Assistant Treasurer in view of his age... It was agreed after some discussion that no one below the age of fourteen be admitted to membership. Some of the members felt this was too young, but agreed to the proposal when the chairman expressed the opinion that possibly at some future time, when the men now serving in*

H.M. Forces returned, it might be necessary to revert to fifteen or sixteen as the lower limit.”

May 4th 1945: *“...The secretary informed the meeting that Mrs B Squirrell had cleaned the room following the distemping of walls and whitening of ceilings and that she would do the job of cleaner for the season ... she was willing to do it for 5/- per hour ... it was thought the last cleaner had about 3/- per week which was in pre-war days ... Mrs Squirrel offered to do the initial cleaning for nothing but the secretary felt she should accept payment of 10/- as the floors had not been scrubbed for four or five years at least. Mr W Arthey provided the boiling water for this. The members expressed their appreciation of Mrs Squirrells work in the usual manner ...”*



Jack Stiff: They had the library in the Reading Room – fiction and non-fiction and bloody murder stories and all the rest of it! It used to be well attended, a lot of people used to go and get books. I did myself, though I never used to be a regular reader.

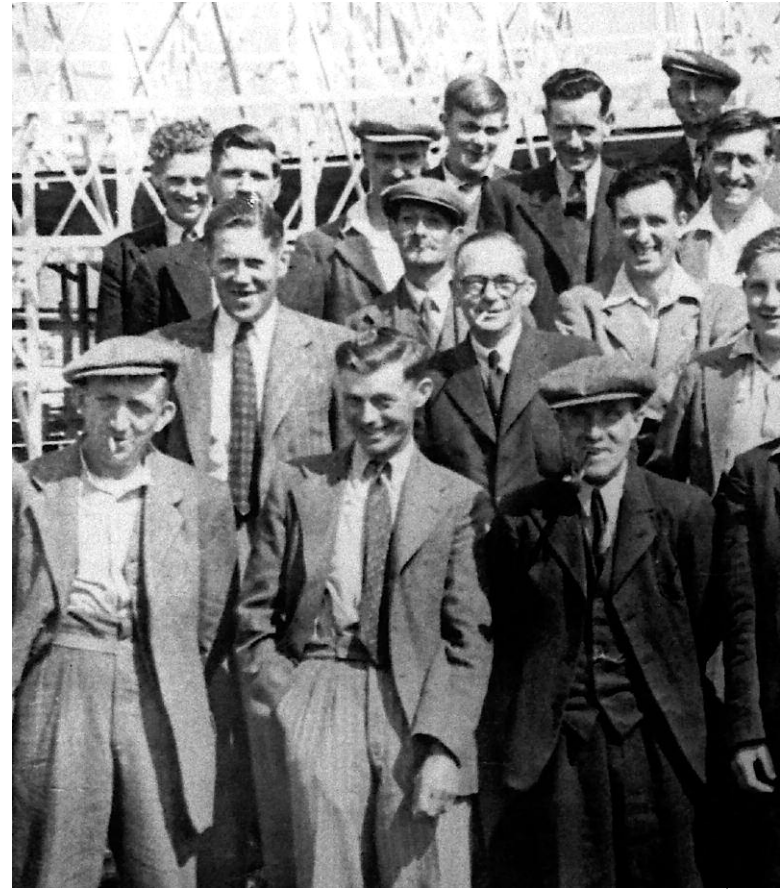


Jill Stiff: Well, we didn't have motor cars and we didn't have television and we did read. So few people today actually read.

Jack: I sometimes think that's why I've got bad eyesight because we only had a candle, no electricity, and yet sit there reading a book.

From the minute book: *"A general meeting was held on Wednesday 31st of March 1948. In addition to the Rev. Mumford who took the chair, Vice President Mr Beckford, the Secretary Mr G. Williams, Assistant Treasurer, Mr W. Stiff, 17 members were present... The OUTING was proposed to start at 7.30 by Mr F Segger and Seconded by W Stiff this was agreed. It was also proposed by Mr F Seggar and seconded by Mr W Stiff to take 6 doz bottles of Beer on the coach if obtainable this was carried."*

Jack Stiff: I've been on several of the annual meetings. It used to be Yarmouth one year and Southend the next, something like that. Owen Gillingwater would have been secretary then. And Geoff Williams was one, and Billie Segger. We'd leave quite early about seven a.m. from the Reading Room because those old coaches didn't go very fast. And then half way we'd pull up and have a sandwich and





*Post-war Mens' Club members on one of their outings
at Southend-on-Sea*

some beer!

When we arrived some of the men didn't go far from the coach, but we youngsters used to wander around and go and get something to eat. You could get fish and chips, even just after the war in Yarmouth, very cheap. There was nothing to pack up and take from home, it was all rationed wasn't it? Better to buy something out for a few coppers.

We'd have a look at all the sights and go and have a drink, and then have a look at the Front or go on the pier, have a run around on the beach and meet the bus again at about five or six p.m. And stop at a pub somewhere on the way back! All men, yes, men only. Anything organised inside the club was only for men.



Eileen Gleed: My husband Luker was always down the Mens' Club in the Reading Room, 'til his hands went so he couldn't use a cue. He was down there one night when I was pregnant and I wondered where he was. It was nearly twelve o'clock and in the end I went to the Reading Room and him and Billy Segger were still playing snooker!



A last extract from the minute book:

“A general meeting of the Mens club was held on Tuesday Oct 22nd 1957 to see if the club could get enough support to reopen... it was decided that it should be opened on Tuesday and Thursday nights. The following officials were elected Chairman Mr N Williams; President Rev Caller; Treasurer Rev Caller Secretary Mr G Williams; Games Organizer Mr P Seggar... Subscriptions 2/- per 4 weeks, boys under fifteen 1/- per 4 weeks. As the boys of the Village had very little to do in the winter evenings it was decided to let boys of 12 and over become members at the above fee. Providing they did as they were told and behaved themselves, any boy not behaving would cease to be a member...”



Leslie Williams: At one time there were forty members regularly in the Reading Room but in the end there were only three of us meeting there for a game of billiards or snookers, so we gave it up. It's the television that's done it, I suppose.



Anson Stiff, second left, “One of the prime movers in the village hall ...”

KERSEY VILLAGE HALL:

Kersey village hall which was opened in 1935 stands just beyond “Hall House” on The Green. It is a pleasant building with a suitably rustic door. Included within are a very large dividable area, the stage, committee room, and kitchen and cloakroom facilities. The villagers are justifiably proud of their hall and make use of it for a variety of classes and social functions, as well as a

meeting place for several committees.

As mentioned in chapter six, the village school children's lunches were cooked and served in the hall up until 1998. School P.E. classes still take place there and school concerts and plays are put on, to packed audiences. Paul Ryde, who lives with his wife Nora in "Wormwood Green", is chairman of a very enthusiastic Village Hall Committee. Paul, over a number of years, has initiated several improvements to the building and ensured a high standard of maintenance. It is kept in fresh decorative order both inside and out, largely through the efforts of volunteers from the village.



Owen Gillingwater: As village halls go, Kersey's is a very purpose-made building. It's been the focus of social life because it started off on the right basis. It's very much an important part of the village and always has been. Anson Stiff was one of the prime movers in the village hall getting off the ground. He was the eldest and perhaps staidest of the senior Stiffs and very much a business man, very straight. He was in the first world war. Anson did a lot for Kersey, very Kersey-minded, though he wasn't entrepreneurial like Jack Stiff senior, his brother. (Incidentally, when there was only one street light in Kersey, Jack Stiff senior was responsible for its installation and upkeep!)



Membership card for the Kersey Village Hall Social Club, sadly not dated.)



Eileen Glead: When my children were small I used to take them out to all these Kersey functions, all through the war. But there's not much to take children to now, is there?



Leslie Williams: My father used to do no end for this village – dances, whist drives, Christmas parties in the village hall. He used to live down at Rushes Farm. There's not the spirit in the village now that there used to be. Well, the older villagers can't get out and about and mix the same can they? And there's so many new people here, like yourself. No disrespect, but you come from different environments, don't you?



Gladys Rice: There was more going on then, you see. We used to have quite a lot of socials and there used to be “sixpenny hops” in the village hall! And Nelson Williams used to get up concerts and the village people used to be in them. I remember Mrs Lemon and Ruby doing, “There’s a hole in my pocket dear Liza”, and Ronnie Cauldwell used to like dressing up as ladies and he used to come and dance, and say different jokes. And May Squirrel, she used to love to take part!



Cherry Chalmers: We all used to get up and do a turn. And laugh, well we used to laugh so much! We even had a little dance troupe where they used to come on tap dancing, dressed up. And I was learning to play the piano at that time and I used to play for them and they used to sing.

There was a little man playing the trumpet, I can remember it now. There was another lady who used to live at “Chapel House” – all her children are still alive. She originated from London – Minnie Segger her name was – and she used to sing “Burlington Bertie” and all that sort of stuff. That was really fun. But that was different then, you see...

Before that, there were shilling dances in the village hall

and dad always used to raffle a bottle of port. I used to sit and watch mum putting on this lovely gown, and it’s a thing we wouldn’t think of doing now isn’t it really? Mother’s friend was Mary Wrouth in Boxford, the people who used to keep the buses, and she’d come and call for her and they’d go over to the hall together.

Mr Caffyn was a very good artist who used to live in the little tiny house behind “Woodbine Cottage”. He painted the big picture of Kersey Mill which is in the hall, and he made a poster for the whist drives which they used to have regular, and he was the one who drew all the prizes. There always used to be a joint of beef for a prize!

They used to have this billiard table there and the old chaps used to love to play. There was two who always wore spats over their shoes. Frances’ dad Mr Cockayne, who used to live in “The Old Drift House”, wore these spats with a pin striped suit. And another old boy Mr Jarvis, who used to live up at “Priory Holme”, he used to really dress up, you know. Always had a rolled umbrella as if he was going to town or something!



Irene Hasler: When I arrived here in 1960 the village hall was having a difficult time because so few people then were willing to serve on the committee. Paul and Nora Ryde had very little support, though they worked tirelessly and still do.

Some of our Parish Council meetings were wonderful. They were very sensible – if there were a knotty problem they'd call a public meeting and, by jove, that village hall would be full – and they weren't afraid to speak up. I remember once a notice was put on the board saying that there was a possibility the village hall would have to close due to lack of support in running it. Everyone was up in arms at once – “Close it – they can't close it! We'll have a public meeting.” So we did and almost the whole village turned up and, of course, people then started volunteering to help to keep it open! And there's been a wonderful committee ever since.

AFTER THE WARS WERE OVER:

Another extract from Alice Watson's letters to Michael Harbinson:

“I was a boarder at Ipswich High School during the first world war and we had gone home the week when the Armistice was signed. I am not sure if the buses were running then or if we returned to school by train – Hadleigh to Bentley, change there and get the main line train London to Ipswich. (How things have changed in one life time.) But I remember when we got back to Ipswich all the street lights were on as the blackout had ended!”



Terry Bond: As you know there's an airfield at Wattisham and there used to be a searchlight station here at Wickerstreet during the last war. John Symonds who lived at 2, Hollies Cottage, told me that one year in the early nineteen sixties when the mere dried up, miles and miles of barbed wire were exposed. It must have been dumped in there with other rubbish when the searchlight station was disbanded. And, down at the bottom of our garden, there's a huge septic tank system which must have served the barracks.



Norah Orriss: Chubby (Charles) Jarvis and Charlie Holden were both Prisoners of War in the Far East. And when they returned from the war The Street was decorated with flags to welcome them home! They both then married local girls, Jean Partridge from Lindsey and Mary Segger from Kersey, and lived in the village until they died.



Ray Goymour: When I came home in 1945 Kersey hadn't changed much – same old people, same old pubs! They had parades. They used to march them from the market place all the way up the hill to the church on Armistice Day. I went to the school with the four who are on the cenotaph up in Church. After Ruby Gleed died I got the job on Remembrance Sunday of reading out the names of the fallen



Phil Darby, right, with the late Dennis Robinson who lived in “Corner House” until 1993. They are weighing pumpkins outside the village hall to decide the heaviest in class at one of the Kersey Flower Shows

from Kersey. I get nervous doing that – I’m not a public speaker.

You’ve read Phil Darby’s book, “Press On Regardless” about his time in the RAF and how he escaped three times as a prisoner of war? Marvellous! He published it in 1997. They’ve got it in the libraries, but I don’t think it’s had the publicity it deserves. **(Phil Darby is a man of many talents. His garden behind “The Old Drift House” is one of the loveliest in Kersey and he works tirelessly to maintain its beauty. An expert carpenter, he designed and crafted the Kersey village sign which was erected in 1987 at the bottom of the church steps. Phil also took on the task of replacing the worn base of the ancient lectern in the church itself, and the “join” is indistinguishable!)**



Jim Glead: When I came home from the services in 1945 I had 101 days paid leave, and strange to relate, I started work on the 101st day. That was in Ipswich power station at two shillings an hour. There were five of us from Kersey and we

used to cycle to Hadleigh and then get the bus – one shilling return. So if we had a shilling and a penny in our pocket, we could buy a paper! But do you know, I didn't recognize half the people walking round Kersey, there had been changes even then.



Ted Martin: There've been tourists in Kersey ever since the end of the war and there've been more and more every year. But after the war – once they got a few motor cars and coaches on the road – I should say the real tourists started coming into Kersey in the 1950s in a fairly big way.

LEGENDARY CRICKET MATCHES IN KERSEY:

In October and November 1991 Leslie Cockayne published in the Kersey Newsletter some of his memories about post World War 2 cricket in Kersey. Extracts from his accounts are given below:–

“UNDER THE NINE TREES ... It is probable that cricket in Kersey began when Abraham Hume was vicar (1849 - 1878), for he had been a Cambridge cricket “blue”... I don't know how many deaths and revivals the game has witnessed between that time and its resumption after world war 2. The Croft, the very large meadow overlooked by the Priory,

became its venue.

Soon after the war an inaugural meeting was held in the upper room of the Reading Room... and in due course bats, balls, stumps etc were procured via the commercial network operated by R. Stiff & Sons. An early patron and president was Colonel Granet, tenant at the Priory, to whom several of us boys owed also our first introduction to musketry on a .22 range improvised in the Priory gardens.

...It is instructive to set the scene of those sunny evenings and Saturday afternoons of forty five years ago on the Croft as surveyed from the Nine Trees, then reduced to five, which served as our pavilion.

Here Geoffrey Williams deftly manoeuvres a cow pat intact onto a shovel. There Herbert Thrower lightly pats back a practice ball. Here Bill Seggar and Dick Squirrell hurl a ball, as it seems almost vertically into the air, to the admiration of the girls and village elders grouped about the makeshift pavilion... .

Kersey's opponents were Milden, Edwardstone, Elmsett, Newton, Great Waldingfield, Hadleigh (when they were short of a fixture), Hintlesham, Sudbury Grammar School and Hadleigh Farmers. Most of these grounds were a delight. ... I particularly remember the wonderful teas provided at Edwardstone by the Williams family, relatives of our Kersey Williams.

There was always a lot of humorous backchat and on

occasions anger flared. Hintlesham had an umpire... who, in times remote, had sometimes played for Essex. When he gave “no ball” after the wicket had fallen Freddy Spraggon (may his memory be always cherished) hurled abuse. Then there was the time, under the Nine Trees, when members of the Kersey team helped themselves unasked to the beer brought by the Hadleigh farmers, doubtless to share...

Those who played regularly or when they had to, were

Geoffrey Williams (captain), Leslie Williams, Ted Martin, Herbert Thrower, Freddy Spraggon, Bill Seggar, Dick Squirrel, Mr. Gillingwater, Clifford and Lewis Gleed, the vicar Lillie, H. A. Cockayne, Leslie Cockayne, Ronald Partridge (a mighty hitter he), Reg Farthing, Nibby Fletcher, Owen Gillingwater and several boys.

*‘But past is all their fame. The very spot
Where many times they triumphed is forgot.’*”