

“...*Life & Activity*”

CHAPTER 11. MORE ABOUT VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

I’LL BEGIN WITH THE STORIES I HAVE ABOUT THE VILLAGE PRODUCE Association, the allotments and gardens in general. ¶ These will speak volumes on the passion for gardening and nature shared by many residents of Kersey.

*Georgie Wyatt,
Norah Farthing
(now Orriss) and
Doreen Wyatt ready
to pick fruit on the
allotments in 1950*



Gladys Rice: I joined the Village Produce Association when I lived in Elm Farm. Mr Mowles came and saw my husband and me and said if he could get enough people to join he'd like to get a Produce Association started and we said yes, we'd be interested. He started that because he and Mr Mann, Rachel's grandfather, had a smallholding and used to buy a lot of seeds and seed potatoes. And if you had a VPA you could get them cheaper. But he did say that he'd get them for other people as well, you see. He and Mr Mann got them off the Suffolk Seed Stores for us all, and got them at a bit of a reduced price. But that didn't last long because they had to be bought in bulk and people didn't want the trouble of bagging them up. I expect Mr Mowles carried on getting them though. The VPA went on of course and after a few years we started the annual shows. We had some keen competitors then – Harry Buckledee, Lewis Mowles, Stanley Norman and Clifford Gleed were very good gardeners.



Gladys Rice has a large garden with her corner plot at the end of Vale Lane. For many years she has managed it single-handed and has won the Fruit and Vegetable cup at the annual shows 10 times. Only in the last few years has she stopped competing but her garden still flourishes and she is always generous with seeds and cuttings.



Gladys Rice receiving cups from Rev. Gerald Harrison at the 1981 Kersey Flower Show



Rachel Wells: My father, Lewis Mowles, and a few others started the Village Produce Association in 1947. They always used to have the Flower Show up on the vicarage meadow – the Glebe as they call it now – every July. We used to hire the tents for that but then the VPA bought two themselves and started hiring them out which they still do today. That's how the VPA accumulated its money and keeps going, you see. It was then decided to form a Trust which they called the Lewis Mowles Trust because he had helped them to start the Association. In the early days there was my dad, Stanley

Norman and Mr Partridge, Pete's grandfather.



More than fifty years since the founding of the VPA there is a pleasing sense of continuity, with Rachel Wells as secretary and Peter Partridge chairman. Both also play a large part in the organisation of the annual Flower Shows which include classes for cookery, flower arranging, handcrafts, household, preserves and children's entries. The remainder of the VPA Committee provides invaluable help, and "The Show" is still one of the highlights of Kersey's year. A popular VPA outing to famous gardens also takes place. Non-members are welcome and often the coach is full; it certainly was in 1999 when, on a beautiful June day a visit was made to Geoff Hamilton's inspiring gardens at Barnsdale.



Rachel: As well as the Kersey shows, I've been entering flower shows in Sudbury for about twelve years. Mr Buckledee was secretary of Sudbury Horticultural Society Show and he said to me, "I wish you'd come down to Sudbury. We need some extra entries in the flower arranging



Marianne's award-winning photo of the cows in the Splash

and cookery classes." So I went, and I've been going twice a year ever since. I've just been making chutney for our show this year and for Sudbury. It's two different sorts, you see! But Sudbury don't change their schedule a lot and ever since I've been going they've had a Dundee cake on the schedule. I've won that class eight times I think!

I've only won the Kersey flower show household cup three times, but the Flower Arranging and Handwork classes I've won quite a bit. People say to me, "Oh, it's not worth entering – you're sure to win!" But I only enter to make up the numbers. If more people entered I wouldn't. Anyway, I don't always win, though people seem to think I do!



Marianne Lash: I exhibited this photograph of the cows in the flower show one year, and got a prize for it. It was probably taken late 1980s because it took me several years to get a picture of them when they were being moved! Lance Arthey is leading them through the Splash, and very likely that's Reg Farthing when he was Lance's cowman.



From the Kersey Village Organisations' booklet:-

"NIGHTINGALE TRUST AND ALLOTMENTS:

The Nightingale Trust was founded in 1580 by the will of Robert Nightingale. The income, mainly derived from garden allotment land, is distributed at Christmas to the elderly of the Parish. The Vicar, Churchwardens and three appointees are trustees. The allotments are situated down Kedge's Lane and are owned and managed by the Nightingale Trust. They are let, as available, generally on first come first served basis."



Ted Martin in 1999 scything, to prepare the ground before farming his new allotment



The following is an abridged version of an interesting account of the Nightingale Charity for the Poor written by Joan Hattrick:

"This ancient and rather quaint Charity has endured in some form or another since it was founded in 1580, and derives its income from the allotment rents and investments. Robert Nightingale, amongst other bequests, left arable land to be let to farm by the Churchwardens. Also a cow being well seasoned by

calfto be let by the Churchwardens to some honest, poor man in Carsey. The rent from both land and cow was to be paid to the poor of Carsey on the Friday before Easter. The cow no doubt expired in the normal way of things but there is no record of it being replaced! Money is now distributed at

Christmas to some pensioners in the village. There is in existence, and still in use, an old-fashioned cash book, long and narrow with a hard back, which was used from 1875 to record brief minutes of meetings, receipts of allotment rents and payments made to the poor. Mysteriously, the book has a hole through the front cover and most of the pages, as if a butcher's hook or something similar had pierced it. Maybe it was then hung up with other account books in a shop as was the custom! The allotments are let for most of the time, and up to now no other way of letting the land has been used – except to graze a horse for a short while. In these days of greater affluence, longer life, pensions and the welfare state there are fewer people in the village who can be defined as “an aged person in conditions of need, hardship or distress” – the modified distinction of the trusts of the Charity as set out in 1996. The Charity endured and has been relevant during the 19th and 20th centuries, but will it still be relevant in the 21st?”



Rachel Wells: I suppose gardening came naturally to me. I always liked the flowers, but we used to have to go potato picking on the allotment. Other children used to come as well because we always grew so many potatoes. We had this old plough which my dad called his “iron horse” that he used to walk behind. My parents had two allotments, one of the

“acre” plots which were beyond where the present ones are and one of those which were on Parks Meadow where the footpath runs now beyond “Ayres End”. There was about ten there I suppose. That ground belonged to Mr Partridge. Mary Holden’s father always had a big piece of ground at the top and kept chickens. We used to walk through from one of our allotments to the other. We always grew strawberries on Parks allotment – loads of strawberries. I can remember pushing them up the hill on an old cart.

As well as two allotments, my parents had their own garden of course – not the field then, though – Grandad used to keep his chickens on there and he had his garden down by the side of the field. We used to supply the school, you see – they used to buy our produce for their dinners when they cooked them in the village hall. And we always used to go to Frances’ mother when they lived in “Old Drift House” and take her vegetables.



Eileen Gleed: Luker had an allotment for years and years and he was always down there. That was where I found him when he’d had a heart attack, down there sitting on the shed step. **(When John and I first came to Kersey we used to enjoy chatting to Mr Gleed when we met him passing our cottage on his way to and from his allotment. He was always very generous with his produce and I often used to**



Luker Gleed with a box of peas

That's Roger Partridge's land now, the other side of that field gate. And there used to be some acre-plot allotments up beyond where the allotments are now. That land used to belong to the Nightingale Trust until they sold it. My husband never had an allotment because we had such a big garden. I've always loved gardening but I can't do so much now of course.

stuff one of
Luker's marrows
for our evening
meal. We missed
him a lot when
failing health
eventually
prevented him
from tending his
patch and we no
longer saw him
almost every
day.)



Gladys Rice:

There used to be
allotments up
behind Mr Innes'.



Ruth Gleed: Like many other men my dad had an allotment and grew all his own vegetables. Father made gallons of wine; parsnip, mangel and dandelion which I had to pick and it took ages! (Beer was sixpence a pint in the pub). He also kept some pigs, mostly for the manure as there were no artificial fertilisers then. When the pigs were about two months old they went to Hadleigh market, which was thriving in those days.

The garden that Clifford and I had with the cottage in Kersey Street was huge – right back to the field behind – and we also had four allotments and a greenhouse! We grew everything under the sun and gave it nearly all away – well you couldn't charge anybody much could you, not really. We used to grow a lot of flowers and put them on the step, and I remember one day we went to Felixstowe and we left twenty jars of sweet peas out at sixpence a bunch. And the money was all there when we came home.

Clifford was working in the Priory and he used to rush his dinner so that he could spend some of his break in the garden. We missed the garden when we came to Hadleigh – all the fresh vegetables and especially the greenhouse and the tomatoes and cucumbers.



Viney Bigg: We had half an acre of garden when we lived in

Wickerstreet Green and I loved it; it broke my heart to leave it. We made a wonderful garden – in my opinion! I wasn't one for bedding things out much but I had bits and pieces everywhere. My “Dorothy Perkins” and all the other roses scrambled all over the place. Frank was able to take lots of rooted cuttings for people.

Mine was a real cottage garden and things kept springing up where they liked. We had a little piece of lawn at the back and a great big piece at the top where we had apple trees, quince and blackberries and primroses and violets. That wasn't kept as a lawn exactly but Frank did keep it down a bit. He had his bantams up there. As to the rest of the garden, I did the flowers and he did the vegetables and he used to grumble because I kept taking a little bit more of his space! I had Cosmos and white Japanese Anenomes, Poppies, Delphiniums, perennial Salvias and Periwinkles. There was a rose which had really green flowers but I never knew what that was called.



Terry Bond: When Michael and Mary Harbinson bought “Wickerstreet House” in about 1962 or '63 the fields behind our house and “the dog leg” as it's referred to, and the mere all belonged to them. The mere was looked after by “Wickerstreet House” but all the fields and dog leg were leased to Mr Alleston the farmer, or Tickle as he was



*Jill Bond
planting trees*

affectionately called. When Tickle died in 1978 the lands reverted back to the Harbinsons and we subsequently bought it from them. We also purchased an additional five acres when Mr Harbinson sold up and moved in 1994. Since then we have planted that up as woodland and also dug another pond!"

"Hollies Cottage" used to be surrounded by trees. Certainly before the storm in 1987 you wouldn't have seen it from the road. There were several hundred poplar trees planted around the mere, we reckon after the second world war. Who planted them I don't know - it might have been Tickle's father - but it was the practice in those days to plant poplar trees on pieces of waste ground. They were used for the production of matchsticks but



Trees destroyed in the storm of 1987 with "Little Paddock" in the background

that use petered out and these were left and really grew too big. When we came here there were also two large groves of elms but they succumbed to elm bark disease and then the storm finished them off. All the trees were destroyed and it was a terrible mess.

We bought the mere in the spring of 1988 and changed it completely. We deepened it and separated the dry area from the wet because before it used to slope all the way down from our drive to the right of way.

Jill is the gardener. I like the way she does the garden, but I'm more for trees and natural environment. Jill loves the garden and the fish. There's a couple of dozen I suppose in what we call the house pond, but in the mere and the meadow ponds there must be thousands. Even our new pond by the road must have a couple of hundred in it by now. All sorts of fish – goldfish, perch, tench and a few carp.

We find it very hard work to keep our piece of land going because we don't have the help of a gardener, though we do use quite a bit of machinery. After all, we're all getting a bit older aren't we? We've discussed it in recent times and decided that when it becomes impossible for us to maintain we'll either employ a gardener or we'll move.

I don't mind either way – I wouldn't mind going to the West Country – but Jill wouldn't like to move at all. She says it takes a long time to get a garden established and she couldn't do it twice!



Ann Walls: Mr and Mrs Symonds were here for many years before we came and neighbours told me that she was a very polite quiet little lady. But she left behind clues about herself too. She did some painting and when we came here there were several of her pictures still dotted around the cottage. I've kept those of course. A lot of jars of jam she'd made were left, and home made liquor of various kinds. It was obvious that she was a lover of the countryside and she loved the garden even though she couldn't really cope with it in the end. There was layer upon layer of bulbs with plants on top of them right the way down – it was so congested – but you could see that she had been a plantswoman. They had made good use of the vegetable plot that they rented at the back too. And she was also on the Parish Council! When I became the Clerk and took over the archives, I was surprised to find an "Acceptance of Office" for Alison Symonds.



Margaret Needham: I've always liked gardening but I didn't have the time to do much before I came here. Larry Kirwan couldn't see and Stella was frail so this garden had been very neglected, and bringing it back to life has been hard but really exciting. I was very set on keeping the rambling look but friends and I have opened it up and we've

now got through to the little wooded area on the edge that we didn't even know about! That's now my "secret garden". There are roses there which have never had a chance but now we've let light in I think they'll bloom again.



Fred Bramham: The garden behind the pottery is lovely. Joyce Tarling who had been here from 1968 before we came was a keen gardener so she'd put in quite a few plants and roses, but Dot added to that. It's just a nice enclosed shell – horseshoe shaped, with a view down the valley, so it's a protected garden. Here, being at the bottom of the dip, there's a sort of pocket against frost and it's very sheltered because of the buildings. Dot used a lot of native species, that's the basis of it I think.

The biggest thing in the garden is a really super apple tree. We sent off apples and leaves to the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley. Harry Baker, the fruit man there identified the tree as a Lady Sudeley which is a very early red desert apple – shiny flame red. It's called after Lady Sudeley because she used to wear a red ball gown and Lord Sudeley's gardener grew this tree at Sudeley Castle. You eat the apple in September because after that they're terrible, they go soft. It's a prolific apple tree, marvellous – in early September it's absolutely studded with red apples. Of course it's not our garden any more – it's completely private.



Irene Hasler: When I came here in 1960 the garden was nothing. At first my friends would come over and say, "It's terrible, like an allotment!" Because the people who were here previously were not gardeners, they weren't interested at all, nothing had been done about it. So yes, I suppose you could say I created it. **(In her usual way, Irene has completely understated her achievements. Her garden behind "The Mount" lies on a slope running down to the house, so it has been laid in a series of informal terraces with a great variety of trees, shrubs and perennials, mixed with bulbs for every season. Although she has the invaluable help of Ronnie Martin, the gardener who is employed by several Kersey folk, she is usually to be seen working with him rather than merely directing him.**

More than once when she has been invited out during the day she has said, "My dear, I can't, I must garden," but one always feels that the work, though hard, is a delight to her.) Update – As I type on the 10th February 2000, Irene is recovering from a fall which broke her leg. However, in her usual indomitable way, she is making good progress and I don't doubt that we shall see her gardening again.





The front garden at "Pax", summer 1995

Marianne Lash: We have had a few Open Garden days in Kersey, proceeds to the church. The people in the village street whose gardens were worth seeing would open them to the public and then, later on, visit each others gardens.

One day during our second summer in Kersey, John and I opened our garden at "Pax" in support of "Compassion in World Farming". A lot of villagers came to look around and many friends, both old and new, helped with the

preparation and serving of tea and cakes. The result was that we made £90 for the charity in a single day and this encouraged us to open our garden when others did, for the church. Only those who have done it can realise the amount of work involved in opening a garden to the public, but of course there is plenty of fun to be had as well!



Peter Vansittart's garden, hidden from the road behind "Little Manor" is well worth mentioning, although he didn't talk about it during our interview. He regularly opens it on Open Garden days and it is one of the most popular among the visitors. Despite elements of formality there is something mystical about it which is enchanting. Long and comparatively narrow, it is full of shade and light, enclosed by trees yet illumined with patches of colour from subtle flowers.

With the help of a close friend Peter created this sanctuary out of a wilderness, planting many of the trees as saplings, and carving out of the grass a series of garden rooms. These are divided by rose-covered arches and characterised by their often box-bordered beds. Although the periphery of the garden is allowed to run wild, a lot of work is involved in keeping its central shape and Peter undertakes this on his own.

Another legendary gardener was Ada Wyatt's mother. Ada told me about her magical green fingers. She lived in one of the three cottages which have since been made into one house - "Boutells" on the South side of the White Horse pub. Roses were her favourite flowers but people warned her that she would never grow them in her bit of garden which was quite unsuitable, they said. But she carried on undaunted, planting slips and cuttings and was rewarded by the prolific display in this photograph.

SOME OTHER KERSEY VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS:

Important organisations such as the Church and Bells, Kersey School, the Parish Council, Village Hall and Reading Room have featured in other chapters and will not be elaborated upon further here. I apologise for the lack of other villagers' own words in this section – mine are a poor substitute I am afraid!

A Kersey Village Organisations booklet gives details of each and every organisation in the village and includes a Kersey Goods and Services list. A free copy of this is given to each new resident to welcome them into the community. It is invariably received with surprise and gratitude.



Ada Wyatt's mother in her rose garden

THE KERSEY NEWSLETTER:

To quote from the Organisations Booklet: "Kersey Newsletter is sponsored and distributed by St Mary's Church. It is produced by an independent Editorial Committee and contains details of ... recent and future events in the village etc. The ten issues per year are usually published at the beginning of the month and distributed to every household in the parish. Finance is

by voluntary donations, a grant from the Parish Council and from advertisements.”



Marianne Lash: Michael Harbinson, Rachel and I took over the Kersey Newsletter from the vicar, Gerald Harrison, in 1988 and I believe it had been going before that too. He had trouble with his typewriter and I'd just got an electronic one so I gave him my old electric typewriter and, only a month or two later, he came and said, "I'm sorry to say that I'm leaving the parish – would you like your typewriter back?" I said no, he could keep it and then he said, "Well, how about doing the newsletter on your new one?"! It was supposed to be just until the new vicar came and that took a year, and then when he did come he didn't want anything to do with it. So we've been stuck with it ever since!

THE FOOTPATH COMMITTEE, AND FOOTPATH WALKS:

Under the chairmanship of John Maltby, the Footpath Committee does an excellent job of maintaining the many footpaths in and around Kersey. This includes keeping grass at a manageable length with the help of a petrol-driven wheeled strimmer purchased through a



A group of walkers before an autumnal excursion

county footpath scheme but operated by volunteers.

Before relinquishing the task of Kersey footpath warden which she had performed for twelve years, Marianne Lash achieved her long-held ambition of producing a tourist leaflet of footpaths in Kersey. In the final production, Marianne was assisted by Adrian Blyth,

David Griffiths and John Maltby, and the attractive yellow, brown and green map is a credit to them all. The project was funded by the Suffolk County Council Parish Paths Partnership (P3) – a Countryside Commission Initiative.

Very popular monthly mid-week walks are arranged by Marianne and John. These invariably lead to a pub where a good lunch is eaten before the walk back to central Kersey. Some villagers who are no longer able to walk far, drive or are driven to the pub where they enjoy the lunch and add to the camaraderie.

THE TUESDAY CLUB:

As mentioned in chapter 3, this club evolved from the original Mothers' Union and is open to women of any age and any or no religious persuasion. Members meet once a month, usually in the village hall, where they enjoy talks, demonstrations, fashion shows and the like. Occasionally they visit places of interest and then men are welcome to join in, as indeed they often do when a speaker's subject interests them.

MUMS AND TODDLERS

This group includes the villages of Lindsey, Boxford and surrounding areas, and with ever increasing numbers of young families coming into Kersey, it has a strong

following here. The once-weekly afternoon sessions are held either in Lindsey Village Hall or in the homes of one of the mothers. Sessions serve the dual purpose of preparing toddlers for the social aspect of local primary schools and allowing their mothers or carers to get to know one another.

A Keep-Fit class is held once a week in Kersey Village Hall and, as one who has tried it, I can vouch that this is not for the faint-hearted! However, as is the case with all our village organisations, each class is a thoroughly enjoyable and sociable occasion.

KERSEY STUDY GROUP:

Another enthusiastic group, which meets weekly in the Village Hall on Thursday evenings during the Autumn and Spring terms. It was originally started almost twenty years ago by a few people who were keen to research the history of this village. Since then the field of study has widened considerably and some students travel from other villages to take part.

Subjects are chosen by members from a list sent by the Cambridge Board of Extra-Mural Studies, who also supply the tutors. Over the past few years the choice of subjects has been diverse, for example, "The Philosophy of Religion", "Social Anthropology", "The 19th Century Novel" and "Law and Order in 18th Century Suffolk".

A Forget-Me-Nots party held in 1998 at "Pax". Vivien Bourne is kneeling by the table

Needless to say there is much class participation, and stimulating and convivial evenings are enjoyed by all!

THE FORGET-ME-NOTS:

The somewhat other-worldly name of this group belies its liveliness. I'll quote straight from the Village Organisations' booklet in the words of Vivien Bourne who is the glamorous and very popular leader of this organisation: "The Forget-Me-Nots hold tea parties approximately once a month in different homes in and around Kersey. The parties differ in size



and can range from 6 to 18 people. Both sexes are welcome and tend to be sprightly senior citizens. The parties are always happy occasions and often celebrate a birthday.

All are collected by car and then delivered safely home. There is always much chat and tea is laid on by the hostess. We nearly always have a small raffle; people bring flowers and vegetables from their gardens or any small present.

Proceeds raised go either to a Charity or into our Forget-Me-Not funds, which are used mainly for our outings. We try to have two of these, one in Summer and one in Winter. Suggestions are always gratefully received.”



Add to the organisations mentioned above a vigilant Neighbourhood Watch group instigated by the Parish Council in 1992 and we get some idea of the diversity of Kersey's activities. For seven years the Neighbourhood Watch was co-ordinated by Dr Roy Webb, but now newcomer Martyn Hamilton has taken over the task, helped by four others.

At the last official count there were 278 residents of Kersey on the electoral roll: a small population by any standard, and yet the village buzzes with life and activity. On days other than Bank Holidays, it may appear quiet but this place has hidden, very vigorous depths!