

“...the Village Rolling Forward”

CHAPTER 12. NEWCOMERS TO KERSEY

TO THOSE WHO WERE BORN AND BRED IN KERSEY AND HAVE LIVED here all their lives, anyone moving in from elsewhere used to be considered a ‘foreigner’ or ‘stranger’. ¶ Even now, people who have lived in the village for forty years are often seen as new and, if they are wise, adopt a respectful approach to the dwindling indigenous population!



On page 237 in this chapter, Sue Griffiths says that the village is going through a major change, and most people in Kersey would agree with her. Fortunately though, many aspects of this revolution are positive. In the six years that I have lived here, four of the Victorian terraced houses on Church Hill have changed hands several times among tenants on short lets. These rapid substitutions have given no time for people to become established or take pride in their homes and, often, neglected gardens and litter have been the result. Now however, with every property sold, we anticipate pride of ownership especially as so many of these newest of newcomers seem delighted with their acquisitions.

Also in the past six years, no less than seven new properties have been created out of or erected on the site of old ones in the centre of Kersey. Two more are now nearing completion and again these latest additions will have evolved from an old building – “Stay Barn” – which lay behind the Ancient Cottages opposite the White Horse pub. Not all the designs of these new dwellings please everyone in the village, but it is generally agreed that using reclaimed materials on an existing plot is desirable; far better than cramming in buildings where none has been before.

As for the pubs, these have changed hands a little too

often, and many residents wish that dedicated publicans would commit themselves to running true village establishments without too much sophistication or too rough an ambience, preferably with good food! A tall order, but we live in hope.

It is fortunate that some things never alter – the exterior of the village hall for example. This year its 65th anniversary was celebrated with a luncheon and, as the very attractive tickets for the event showed, it looks much the same now as it did on the day of its opening.

Without doubt the happiest change to the village has been the arrival of younger people, and children. On long summer evenings, at weekends, and during the school holidays the village often rings with the voices and laughter of youngsters, bringing it full circle to happy times recalled from the youth of those who have spent their lives here. Just as, when farming jobs became fewer, people in their twenties left the village and moved nearer to towns where work was available, so now young families seem to move in almost monthly. The car has made this possible, carrying breadwinners to work or at least to the nearest station.

Meanwhile, computers, e-mails, the internet and mobile phones ensure freedom from isolation. Modern technology may be a mixed blessing but it enables many



people to live in the country while they are young enough to enjoy it.

EARLY NEWCOMERS;

Owen Gillingwater: I often think my dad must have been the first “newcomer” to the village. He got called up in the first world war and was injured in some way which affected him mentally. The Firm he worked for in London had contacts in Kersey so when he was discharged from the Navy he came to convalesce and live here.

He was single and worked on Jackson’s farm at the Priory

until his mental health improved and then he applied for and got the job of book-keeper with Jack Stiff Senior. Then his father, who was an inspector in the Metropolitan Police, retired and he and his wife came to live at “Saddlers Nap” which is near the White Rose at Lindsey. They brought their daughter and the other two boys with them and eventually moved to River View, now “Market House”, in Kersey. So you see they were the forerunners of what happens now but, at that time, his family were the only ones who hadn’t lived in the vicinity all their lives.



Peter Vansittart: My stepfather was, as they say, “in oil” like a sardine! His stamping grounds were in places like Iraq and Iran and my mother would be with him most of the time. They only came to Kersey in the early fifties, when he retired. He went back to the Middle East for a bit after a time, just for contract jobs. The reason they came to Kersey was that East Anglia, in those days, was a great deal cheaper than what they would have preferred – Kent or Sussex.

At that time houses like mine, though they weren’t exactly given away free, cost I think about £2,000. And whereas £2,000 in 1953 was substantial, the same sort of thing in Berkshire would have been something like five or six thousand. My mother never really accustomed herself to life in England because in the Middle East you just clapped your

hands and servants would come running.

Her housekeeper here, of course, was Mary Holden who died a short time ago. And Charlie, her husband, came over every morning at about half past six to do the fire, and probably all he got for it was a bottle of beer at Christmas. They were both marvellous friends. He could talk quite a lot about pre-war Kersey if you could get him going but he was a shy man, rather diffident, and during most of the term time I wasn't here a great deal. I was abroad quite a lot and I had a job teaching.

For many years my mother got on well in Kersey because she had a lot of friends. She was very friendly with the then Vicar, Reverend Mumford, and his wife. And there were quite a few people of her own age about, not necessarily in Kersey. There was a lady called Alix Gardner who lived at the Priory and she was very friendly with her, and there was a lot of bridge played which she loved. But then, gradually, people either left or died and she began to get old and rather lost interest.



Irene Hasler: When I came here on my last leave from Hong Kong I thought, well, I'm either going to live in Suffolk or Scotland! But I had a great friend who lived in Lavenham – she was my second home really – and we spent that leave going around having a look at villages in Suffolk. So that by

the time I came back to England for good I thought, “Well you're an East Anglian so it would make more sense to go back to your own countryside.”

Much as I love Scotland, I decided to be in Suffolk. Then, one morning at breakfast, my friend and I saw something advertised at Kersey. Now, I knew of Kersey because I knew the daughter of the vicar here – she was nursing in Great Ormond Street with me. But I hadn't seen the village or anything, I just knew it had the reputation of being a very pretty place. When I did see the village and then this house, I thought it would do very well indeed. So that was that, and I moved in in 1960.

There were very few “incomers” then. Ethel and Buster Beeton and I came within a week of one another, imagining that each had been here for years before! The Zurbruggs had bought “Church Steps” but they were not here, they were still in Switzerland while the house was being altered. And there were one or two others about but they were scattered. And we new people were very much resented, very much, which tended to create a division in the village; they were concerned lest we should sort of try and “take them over.”

People on the Parish Council then were true country folk, used to running their gardens and their jobs. It was right for them to be on the council and they were wonderful to do it, but when they saw these outsiders come in they were very apprehensive.

They thought we were toffee-nosed and didn't want to know them. I'm very fond of the village people, I like them and I like to be friends with them and right from the start I wanted to be, though they never would believe it. But bit by bit, you see, they've begun to accept us. Although only last week somebody said to me, "Well of course, these newcomers who come in, they don't want to know the likes of us."

I suppose I'd been here about eighteen months when a woman said to me, "Well, of course, you've been accepted in the village." But I think it's usually about 7 or 10 years before you are, and even then you're not! Really you need to be Kersey-born, and Kersey-born is in the village, not "up there" (**on the outskirts**). To be Kersey-born you've got to be born in the village!

For years, Suffolk people have always looked upon anything or anybody not originating in the County (or indeed, in this case, in Kersey) as foreign! Naturally, I see it from a newcomer's point of view but I've got the advantage of being an East Anglian myself, and my Grandmother always lived in a village. In fact she was Suffolk-born and I can remember her, when I was a child, referring disdainfully to a piece of cloth as "no good, well, it's foreign" and I knew it was a cotton print made in Manchester!

I feel I'm more village than otherwise probably, because I'm used to villages. But of course newcomers can be very insensitive. "Good Lord, look at the traffic here – let's have lines

down." And then someone wanted to have a public loo here.

But there was an open meeting to discuss the siting of a public convenience and it was very hard to think of a suitable place to put it. Down by the allotments seemed to be the best, but then that could be seen from Hammond Innes' or something. Well, naturally the village didn't want it – who was going to clean it for a start? So the idea was abandoned in the end.



Ray Goymour: I don't think you'll ever find that a small place will accept strangers – we don't know them. And I don't think they'd have me back – born and bred here! "You're a Hadleigh boy," someone local said to me, "you're not a Kerseyite – you went and left us." You've got to live here for about twenty-five years before you're accepted. There's been so much trouble, you see. It's a wonder nobody's complained about the bells ringing. Did you know that on some places they sell near churches there's a codicil where you cannot object to the bells ringing?

What country people don't like is strangers coming in and trying to run the place! I told a particular newcomer who was a friend of mine – I said, "Don't you go into a Parish Council Meeting, David, and propose anything because they'll shoot you down! Talk to one of the locals, tell him your point of view and get him to propose it.

That'll go through." And he took my advice.



Sheila Zurbrugg: After living here thirty years (and much longer than I have stayed anywhere else) Kersey has become very much home to me. But, if asked for an opinion on a village matter, I still say, "Well, as a newcomer, I think..."



Michael Harbinson: My first wife, Mary, was Suffolk born and bred but, when we first came here, I was working in London and because of that it was assumed that she was a Londoner as well. And I remember that very early in our life here Mary Moles said to her about something, "Of course, you wouldn't understand because you come from London." And my wife's reply was, "I was born in Suffolk and have lived in Suffolk nearly all my life." After that she was almost accepted!



Peter Vansittart: I've found the Kersey people very friendly. I was told, before I knew anything about Suffolk, that Suffolk people were particularly unwelcoming to strangers and that you had to live here for eighty years before they even called you by your name. I didn't find this at all. I think, like most parts of the world no doubt, if you're reasonably polite and

don't put on airs and are friendly yourself, most people will respond. Not everybody would believe this, but I've never met anybody here I've disliked. There might be some people one likes more than others, of course, but I've met nothing but friendliness. I think that if one had any touch of arrogance or condescension it wouldn't go down at all well. Not that, as far as I'm concerned, there's anything to condescend about! I can think of one or two people in the past who did tend to be a bit high and mighty and they were exactly the sort of people who would warn you against unfriendliness! But, looking back, they simply asked for it.



Sue Griffiths: When I first came to Kersey in 1969 I wasn't used to being part of a community. In a big city you choose your friends who might live fifteen miles away, and often don't know your neighbours, whereas here you get on or don't get on with everybody around you. Being out at work all day I didn't see many people and, anyway, I think Suffolk people wait to weigh you up; they hold back a bit until they've sorted you out. But I've found people in Kersey very nice and that's why I've stayed here because originally I only intended staying two years before moving on.



David Griffiths: The village people that I've got to know

have been very friendly. Reg Fletcher was lovely – very, very uncritical and would chat for hours. When Sue’s dad moved into number two Bell Cottages he was immediately accepted because he made an effort. He was president of the quilts club, and had a greenhouse in the grounds of the pub. Also the gardens behind those cottages are very communal and if you were a gardener – which he was – you were accepted at once.



Sue: I think the village is going through a major change at the moment. Take the row of cottages going up to the church and the ones on up from the Bell: They were all rented, but by people who’d lived here for years, and a move was a rare event. Whereas, over the last few years – apart from Gladys Warren and Cliff – I don’t know anybody in those cottages near the Bell.

KERSEY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY :

As a fitting end to this last chapter, I invited people who have come to live in Kersey within the past ten years to write about their impressions of the village. Ideally, I would have maintained my method of talking with contributors and recording their thoughts, to be reproduced as they were spoken.

However, time did not allow me this luxury. To comply with the proviso of our sponsors, Millennium Festival Awards For All, the book has to be printed within a certain time from receipt of their funding. I have already overshot this deadline and greatly appreciate the extension I have been granted. In any case, these newcomers have provided me with valuable paragraphs, for which I give my heartfelt thanks.

Natalie, Adrian, Hayley and Katie Blyth (*below*) and **Sparkle the cat.** We moved to Kersey on 1st June 1991 from Earls Colne in Essex. We chose to live in Vale Lane because



we all wanted to live in the countryside again, it still had a primary school for the girls to go to and it was nearer to Adrian's work in Sudbury.

Soon after we moved in work started on the house and garden – renovating and repairing. It still goes on today. We also took on an allotment in the village as we are both very keen gardeners and enjoy growing our own fresh produce. In 1998, we rented another one to grow more veg, fruit and flowers. We both hope that the allotments will continue to be used in the future and that they will not disappear due to lack of interest.

We have always been made welcome and have been encouraged to join in with many village organisations and events. In Vale Lane the atmosphere is very friendly with neighbours willing to help each other and look out for each other. That is what village life is all about.

When we first came to live here, there were not many young people with children, but over the past few years this has changed and now the village is a good mix of both young and old. Kersey lacks facilities for teenagers, but now that more people are living here perhaps that will change soon.

Hayley: Kersey has changed since we first moved here! There are more children here now, a playground, the school is bigger and has more children that attend it.

Kersey lacks things for some of the older children. There is a playground but we are not allowed to use it as it is only for

children up to twelve years of age.

Overall Kersey is a nice well presented village and I am proud to live here.



Linda and Bruce Newbigging, Katie, Alasdair and Thomas and Macduff the Gordon Setter, cats Leo in the photo and Lily, and the hamster whose name changes weekly:

We decided to live in Suffolk because my work moved to Semer from London. We moved into Kersey in 1991 and, like everyone, we were initially taken with the sheer prettiness of the village. But then we realised that there was more to Kersey than that.

We were impressed that so many people were born, bred and still lived here, giving a sense of continuity and community. Even the “newcomers” had stayed for decades. Everyone seemed committed to life here. This was important to us because our own families had been well-established in the towns where we grew up, so we understood and wanted to be part of a real community.

Katie, Alasdair and Thomas are particularly thrilled that they can walk to school and play outside with their many friends who have moved here. They especially love bombing down the hill on their bikes and go-kart. It's a childhood very much like our own in a friendly village of people from all walks of life.



Maraday and John Robinson and Gerald the

Dalmatian: Whichever politician said “small is beautiful” must have had Kersey in mind. We arrived here six and a half years ago to a particularly warm welcome.

We were entrusted with “Corner House” by “the old Robinsons” – Joan and Dennis – who could hardly bear to depart, and showed us immense kindness. They introduced us, “the new Robinsons”, to friends and neighbours by asking everyone around to meet us one Sunday morning after church. Our continued friendship with “the old Robinsons” was something very special.

We both feel very fortunate to live in this small and beautiful place and think of ourselves as current caretakers. Hopefully it’s a long term appointment!



Anne and John Maltby and their three Yorkshire

Terriers, Em’ly, Bel and Zoe: As a newcomer myself, I feel entitled to record my own first impressions of Kersey! I was in love with it of course, and so was John. For some days, we simply walked about in a state of euphoria from which we emerged occasionally to force ourselves into another burst of activity, emptying boxes and arranging furniture or driving out to buy something essential for the cottage. We found we

naturally exchanged pleasantries with anyone we met and we were only too delighted to listen to those who would talk to us about this Nirvana which we had so effortlessly attained!

We were fortunate to have Cherry Chalmers and Mary and Charlie Holden, indigenous villagers, living one and six houses up Church Hill from us. And also to have true village folk like Ted Martin, Luker Glead, Verena Manning and her brother Reg Fletcher passing our door regularly. On the other side of us in “Leys House” were newcomers Jeanne and Snowy le Breton, who kindly arranged an after-church drinks party especially to introduce us to their neighbouring friends. I attended St Mary’s from our first Sunday and there is no doubt that the blessings of church-going are social as well as spiritual!

But, if we had to decide what drew us into the “real” Kersey, I’m sure both John and I would say it was joining the Village Produce Association. No more than a month after moving in we saw a notice on the board outside the Reading Room announcing the AGM of the VPA “to which all are welcome”. We thought we may as well go along since the village hall is a mere stone’s throw from our door.

Nonetheless, the meeting was starting as we arrived and we crept self-consciously into the back row where we sat as quiet as mice or flies on the wall! At the end, the new committee was being announced when someone said, “Well Mr Chairman, there are two new faces here this evening and



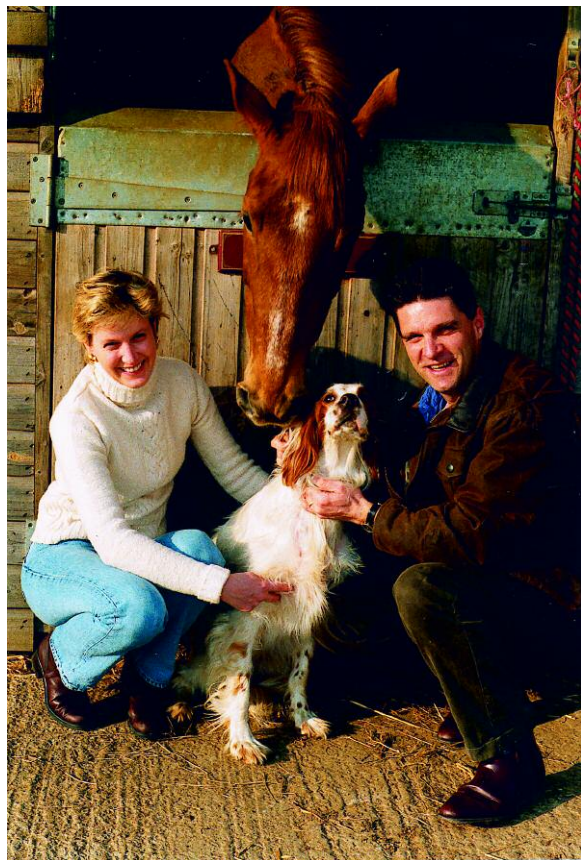
The Newbiggins



The Robinsons



The Garbers



The Williams



The Hanlons

I think we should invite them to join the committee.” The shock to us was great and such a degree of early involvement the last thing we wanted, but rather than appear churlish we sheepishly agreed and have never looked back.



Ann Walls: I’ll always remember our first Christmas here. Albert hadn’t yet come home for the holiday when the village carol singers came round. It was a very cold, frosty night and the moon was full a they stood in a little circle at the end of our path singing. It was just magical. I was only sorry that Albert wasn’t there to share it. They all came in and sat around a big roaring fire and had a drink and mincepies with me. And then Chris Briggs asked me which carol I’d like to sing with them. I think I chose The Twelve Days of Christmas and we all stood up and sang it together. Everyone was so nice and so friendly and I really felt that our welcome to Kersey was complete.



Steven and Emma Garber, twin babies Henry and George, and Thomas the Lhasa Apso dog: Emma and I have lived in Kersey for almost five years now. This is a wonderful traditional village with many residents having spent their whole lives here. However, rather than being standoffish, everyone is incredibly welcoming and friendly.

This is part of the reason why the village is thriving. New residents are quickly incorporated into the community and therefore develop a sense of belonging and village spirit.

The picturesque houses and idyllic setting in rolling Suffolk countryside speak for themselves.



Mark and Sarah Williams and animals, Rotan, Meg, Harry and Poppy: Born in Cumbria where my family has their roots I spent my early years in various towns “over the border” in Essex. Suffolk was a place of school trips, weekend breaks and generous amounts of Adnams Ale!

Having made my career in London and developed a passion for riding and sailing I always had an inkling that I’d eventually settle here. Sarah and I married in 1997 and, along with our horse Rotan, moved to Kersey Upland in the same year. Meg the Irish Red and White Setter, Harry (the illegitimate offspring of an unidentified Kersey tomcat and Poppy the “rescue cat” joined the gang shortly afterwards.

Kersey has certainly lived up to our expectations although the growing contingent of Kersey commuters will no doubt agree that it takes longer to put down roots when you leave the village at 6am and return sometime after 8pm. But, as an antidote to the “dog eat dog” mentality of the City you can’t beat Kersey.



Martyn and Lorna Hanlon, Harry and Patrick: Since moving to Kersey two years ago, we have been amazed at how everybody has made us feel so welcome and very much part of the community. Any fears we may have had about the village being too quiet have been completely unfounded.

With our oldest boy Harry attending Kersey Primary School and our youngest son Patrick starting school in September, we consider ourselves extremely fortunate to be able to just stroll through one of the loveliest villages in Suffolk, to take them up the hill to school.



Robert, Nikkie and Joanna Glen: It seems very presumptuous for residents of less than one year standing in this delightful village to make any sort of pronouncements, when ‘new’ people have ‘only’ been resident for ten years or more. We moved here from Colchester after more than ten years there, living in a distinctly urban setting. I had always lived in a city, but Nikkie grew up in the countryside of Northumberland, and had memories of open spaces and rural life, despite many years in towns and cities starting when she went to college. So, we came in search of a change, more space for the combined contents of two households and newly arrived Joanna, aged two and a half. We didn’t

target Kersey – indeed we had been all over Suffolk and Essex in search of a period property. We found “Cressland”, and immediately recognised its beautiful location and spacious interior as being different to other houses which we had seen. It needed a lot more work than we had planned, having been through the mill on our previous Victorian property in Colchester. But this was different. We have learnt a lot about timber framed properties very quickly, and no doubt will continue to do so.

Living in Kersey is a bit unreal in its period character, peaceful environment and the ducks which prompted Joanna to christen “Cressland” as the “Duck house” during the time before we moved in. It’s gorgeous at the height of the summer, where the sun gets trapped in the garden, but we live in fear of the first serious snow fall, although the tobogganing must certainly be wonderful. Everyone we met, even before we moved in, was very friendly and we received many offers of help.

It’s been surprising to find a thriving group of child residents, and Kersey seems to be undergoing a changing phase as some younger families move in and the older buildings get renovated, maintaining the character yet keeping the village rolling forward. I can’t think of anything that I’d want to be different, except maybe that the postal collection was half an hour later in the morning, and that one of the two pubs finally succeeds in generating a proper



The Glens

local atmosphere. Now that is presumptuous!



Hugo and Gillian Sacker, Alice and Mary: Hugo first came to Kersey more than fifteen years ago after meeting Chris Partridge at Shuttleworth agricultural college. They became firm friends and Hugo has enjoyed numerous visits to Suffolk ever since.

We had been thinking of moving out of London for some time and following the birth of Alice and with Gillian completing her MRCGP we started looking. Gillian's family

hailed from South Norfolk, and with Hugo working in London, Suffolk seemed the ideal location.

Invited to the Hadleigh Show in 1999 by the Partridge family, we saw "Row View" being advertised as for sale by Frost's, the local estate agent. "Huge potential" was the description given. The following day we viewed the property and instantly fell in love with it. The garden was in full bloom, a sea of lupins sat proudly at the end of the lawn.

Later that year we moved in. We immediately felt very welcomed. Alice our oldest daughter loved the freedom of the garden and our frequent walks to the Splash to see the ducks. Our second daughter, Mary, was born just before Christmas.

We all feel very happy living in Kersey and are proud to be part of a village so embroiled in history. We have a significant amount of restoration and renovation to do to the house which we intend to start later this year. We look forward to being part of the village community for many years to come.



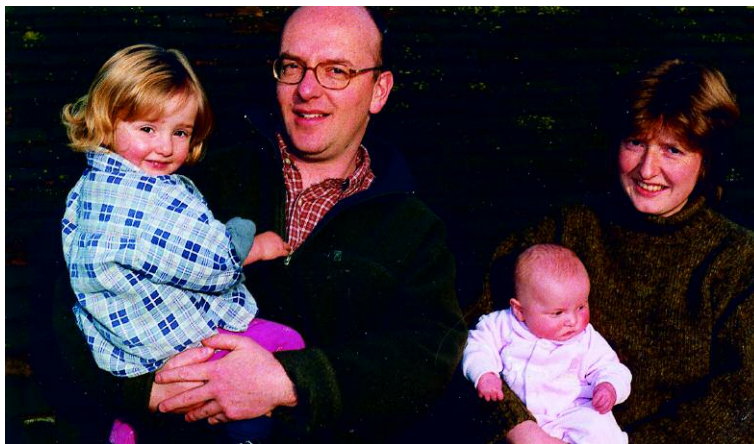
A few final remarks from residents of long-standing:
Irene Hasler: The incomers are accepted better now and we early ones worked hard on this really – it was never our wish that there should be a divide. There is no doubt that some

changes for the good have occurred in Kersey. None of us was on mains drainage when I came. The Tuesday club is a good organisation and there are the Forget-me-Not parties for older people. They are especially welcomed by those who can't get about easily – a chance to keep in touch with old friends and meet new ones. More young families are coming in again now, so the school has every chance of remaining open. There's even a thriving Mothers' and Toddlers group.



Rachel Wells: I've never really thought about my opinion of strangers coming to live in Kersey. You soon get used to them, don't you? Some people fit in better than others. Some just come and then go and you don't see them.

If somebody was really enterprising they could make a go of a little shop in the village. Years and years ago I can remember saying, "We ought to have a tearoom on this bit of ground here." (That was where the last bungalows were built afterwards in Vale Lane.) "We could do cakes and scones and that sort of thing." I think Kersey should have somewhere to sell things to the many visitors who come. We sell more and more in church now – there's all the cards and the cookbook. We took more money up there last week than any week this year. Joan Hatrick and I have often thought we could do



The Sackers

fund raising in the Reading Room, but we're limited by what we are allowed to do there. But I think Kersey's still a proper village – after all there's plenty going on, isn't there?



Ray Goymour: I think newcomers are being accepted more easily now – well, they've got to be, there's so few of the old people left. We have become a dying breed, and you know the old Latin proverb don't you?

*"De mortuis nil nisi bonum –
Let nothing be said of the dead but what is good!"*