

Glemsford Local History Society

President: George Grover Chairman: Patrick Currie Secretary: Margaret King

Newsletter - Autumn 2009

FREE TO MEMBERS (50p where sold)

The Case of ?????

What does the Dragonfly and the once Railway in Glemsford have in common? I apologise for keeping you in suspense for such a long time as this question appeared in the Autumn 2008 issue, but here goes. I call it "The Case of the Moving Boundary. '

As I mentioned in the Spring editorial, the late Keith Morris had acquired twelve acres of meadowland on the Essex side of the River Stour. He gave the name of "Foxearth Meadows" to this area and successfully turned it into a nature reserve for dragonflies and damselflies. Upon examining the deeds to the meadows, he found that a wedge of land near the old railway bridge and close to the Philips Avent factory lay in Suffolk.

Upon enquiring how this had come about he discovered that it was common practice for railway engineers to build a bridge over dry land and then to divert the course of the river under the bridge. The boundary line between two counties along a main river lies equidistant between the two banks and so a tiny slice of Suffolk has crossed over into Essex. This has been excellent news for Suffolk dragonfly recorders as all the species found on "Foxearth Meadows" can claim to be included in Suffolk survey lists. Incidentally, a similar diversion was carried out downstream at the next rail crossing.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed a wealth of wonderful articles which we have used in this present newsletter and will definitely use in future newsletters. Please keep the contributions coming!!!

In this issue we have included the story of Frederick John Cradock G.C. by Val Ost, Jenny Wear's research on the mills of Glemsford, and Brian Smith's addition to our ornithological records.

(Web note: Much of Val Ost's account of her search for Frederick Cradock is already available elsewhere on the site.)

Despite having received so much material, both myself and Val Huestis haven't forgotten about a possible "Railway" edition of the newsletter but we also need your help. Do you have any special railway reminiscences? If so, we would love to hear from you.

Robin Ford, Editor

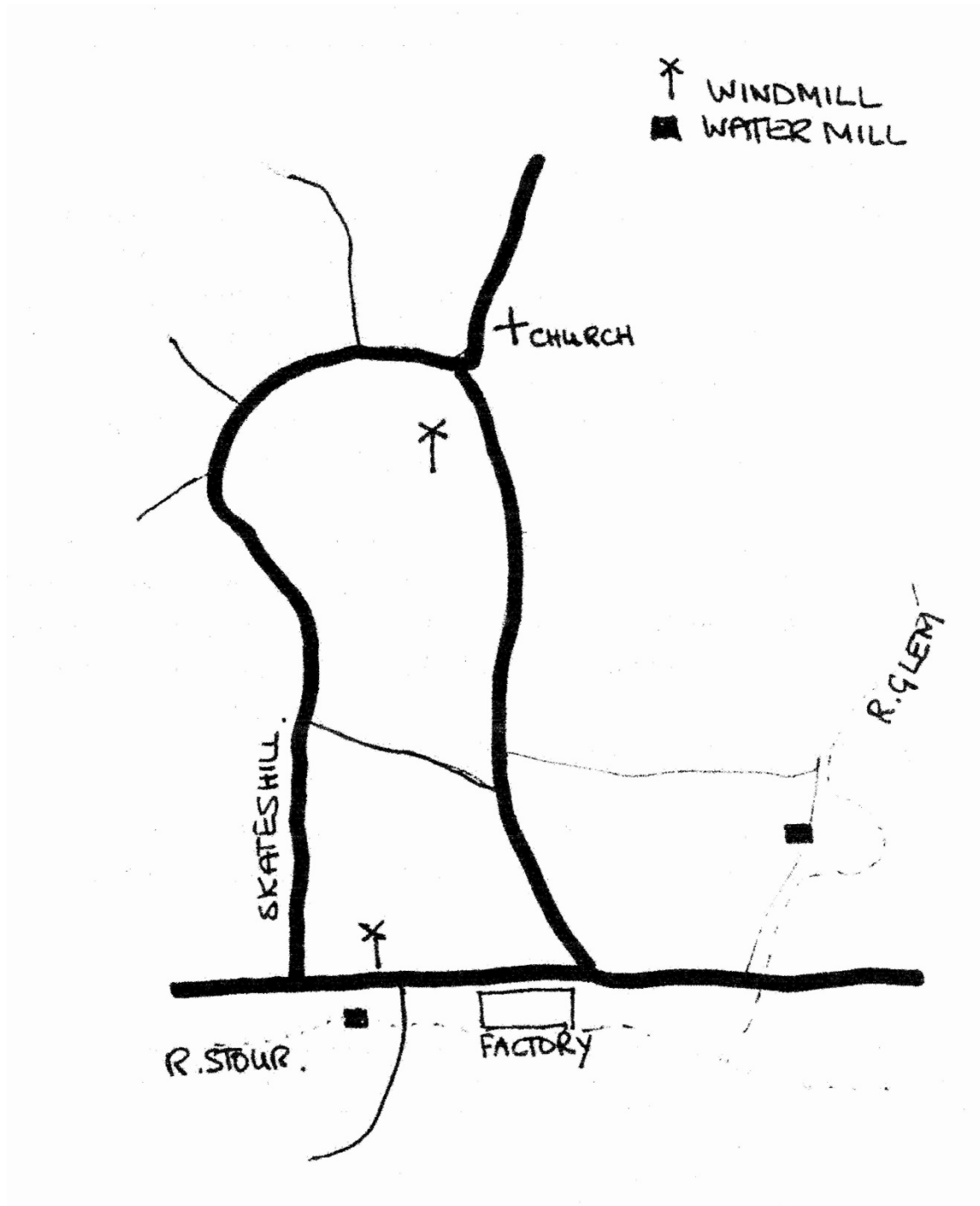
LOST MILLS of GLEMSFORD

In 1840, when the Tithe map and apportionment list were completed, there were three mills in Glemsford, and one on the border, beside the Stour. By the late 1800s only one remained and that exists to this day. Windmill Row, off Bells Lane, was probably named after the windmill that stood at the end of that piece of land for at least 40 years, according to records. The Tithe records the owner of the mill, paddock and land, as Jephtha Twinn, whilst the miller was Josiah Spark. A year later on the census taken in June 1841, Thomas Langham, with his wife Elisabeth and three children, was the resident miller. In 1881, when William Lore and his family were living there he was described as a corn miller - the third household of Churchgate - no mention of Mill House as in the 1861 census. There are no further entries in the census return or trade directories.

Down on the Lower road stood another windmill - just to the west of the causeway, on the north side of the road. (Tithe map 1840) A sale notice of 1819 gives details of its position. 'All that substantial water corn mill in Foxearth, also a substantial freehold windmill, erected within a few years with a round house, upon a plot of ground containing 70 rods, more or less situated in the Parish of Glemsford, nearly opposite the above property.' The tithe shows the mill being owned and occupied by Robert Lanchester, who also worked Foxearth Mill Farm.

The enumerator of the 1851 census went down Skates Hill, recorded a property on the Lower Rd as being occupied by one Joseph Woollard –a 45yr old miller, with a wife, Elisabeth and four children, and then returned to Skates Hill, the household being given no name or number, no later census details could be found.

The only surviving mill is a watermill known over the years as New Mill, Town Mill, Glemsford Mill and on the 1901 c/r as Mill Hse. This is a 1/4 mile from the Lower Road, on the west side of the River Glem.



A William Bowtell was miller here for over 30 years, according to census returns. The tithe (1840) shows a Robert Death to be the owner/occupier but when the census was taken in June 1841, William Bowtell, listed as 15yrs, with Mary, 45, probably his mother, were the only occupiers. William was described as a miller. By 1851, William had a wife, Mary Ann and two children and was a miller/farmer. Daniel Aiston aged 32 was shown as miller and farmer of Glemsford Mill, with a wife, Elisabeth and four children on the 1881 census return and was still the miller in 1896. Kellys' trade directory lists him as such between 1875 - 1892. He was followed by Benjamin Richardson who was still there as miller/former at the time of the 1901 c/r.

Just across the Stour (strictly Essex) stood the water corn mill mentioned in the 1819 sale notice. It was known as Weston Mill, built c1760, the property included more than 60 acres of meadow land, stabling, a brew house, hop ground and garden with house. Now the only evidence is a leet, mill race and some brickwork, all hidden by nettles and other vegetation.

Lastly, based on a farm and some field names, mentioned in early Rentals, Glebe Terriers and tithes, I suspect Glemsford had a very early windmill, out to the northwest of the village. However, further more elusive research is needed to prove this!

Jenny Wears

(Web note: I've always wondered about "Mill Hill" SC)

WILDLIFE IN GLEMSFORD

Before I write about my latest exciting wildlife encounter, I would like to explain a little to any members who wonder why this article should be in a History Magazine. Without plants for medicine, trees for building primitive dwellings, wildlife to sustain life with food, and tools made from bones, there would be no human history to talk about in our area. I think it is important therefore, that a few of us write occasionally about our area's wildlife, as the next day it becomes history, and in years to come will hopefully be interesting to future members in finding out about our past.

On 20th March, 2009 my son stood outside my back door and called me, as he pointed towards a bird hovering high up, and then soaring in the wind. He asked 'was it a hawk,' and my first impression was no, because it was too big, and the large wings and shaped tail looked like a red kite to me. I have seen these birds many times in Wales and Cornwall, and thankfully they are fighting back from near extinction and are beginning to be seen across the country. By the time I had found my binoculars, the bird had gone, and I started to doubt myself. The next morning, however, I was out early behind Plum Street and there above me was the bird again, and on looking through my binoculars I confirmed it as a red kite. I then met a local hawk keeper and he also confirmed that it has been flying around the fields near his property for a couple of days and he had been told by another local person, that it had been seen quite a lot down near the river in Lower Stanstead.

Throughout Tudor times, the kite helped to clear London's unsavoury streets of offal and carrion, and to this day, it will live on any dead sheep or other animals it finds, rather than kill first. The kite was wrongly thought to be a threat to gamekeepers' birds from the early 1900's, and by 1970 was nearly extinct. Apart from carrion, the bird eats small mammals, birds and insects. Children's toy kites were so named after the bird because of the way they glide and hover slowly over the countryside.

I will finish by saying once again, this is a little piece of history for me in Glemsford: my first sighting of a red kite here, and I hope there will be many more for us all to see.

*Brian C. Smith
29th March, 2009*

GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

Considering the heavy snow falling on the evening of our February meeting, it was heartening to see such a good audience turn out to hear Chris Miller's talk on the subject of the Suffolk Punch Horses.

Together with the Red Pol cattle and the Suffolk black faced sheep, the Punches make up the Suffolk Trinity. Whilst the horses' pure blood line can be traced back to 1768, it is gratifying to know that of the 400 horses alive today, a quarter of them are still in Suffolk.

In former times, the horse was an essential farm animal with many hundreds working in the fields, however, the Suffolk Punch also featured prominently in the Great War during which many were killed. This decline in their numbers further accelerated during the 1940/50s with the arrival of farm mechanisation in the form of tractors which left the horses somewhat redundant. In 1966 there were just twelve horses remaining, thus a concerted effort was made to halt the tide of extinction.

Effective fundraising has resulted in a successful breeding programme and the establishment of the Colony Stud at Hollesby Bay. Seasonal Open Days, school visits, use in weddings and funerals, ploughing contests and regular participation in the county shows are all helping to once again bring the Suffolk Punch horses to the fore. Many thanks to Chris for such a fascinating insight into the history and life of our county's very own breed of heavy horse.

St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Past and Present was the title of the fascinating March talk by Sarah Friswell and this overview was generously written by Sid Watkinson.

Originally built as St. James' Church in the Abbey Grounds in the 12th century, the Abbot, unable to make a pilgrimage to Spain dedicated it to the town. Extensive rebuilding over the centuries, culminating over the period of the Reformation, ensured it was one of the earliest Church of England churches.

Further Victorian improvements led to it being created the Cathedral of the Diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich in 1914 and with the help of the Stephen Dykes Bower Trust and the Millennium funds, a magnificent tower was completed in 2005. Other additions followed and with the proposed visit on Maundy Thursday of H.M. the Queen, the Cathedral is well set to serve the people of Suffolk for many years to come.

In April, Pip Wright came to talk about the Transportation of Suffolk Criminals. With his visit, given in front of a very large audience, he also brought his songs with a guitar accompaniment.

In the late 1700s the country's prisons were at a bursting point and the problem loomed as to what to do with the never ending flow of offenders. In 1787 when Joseph Banks, Captain Cook's botanist, suggested that Botany Bay in Australia might be an ideal place to send convicted criminals - to a vast country in need of young fit men to establish settlements - he little foresaw that the first few years of transportation would be so traumatic, worse in fact than the slave trade!

Long waits for ships were followed by appalling living conditions on them, the predicted result being that by the time they arrived, many convicts were dead and those who did survive the arduous voyage were malnourished and far from fit. It soon became clear that such chaos was partly due to the lack of foresight on the part of Parliament, but also to a dire shortage of suitable ships.

The defeat of Napoleon in 1815 released more ships, whilst some tentative moves towards prison reform ensured better planning, adequate food and medical services, gradually conditions improved and with a much fitter work force the colony of New South Wales emerged.

During the 80 years of transportation, Suffolk criminals numbered two and a half thousand. Many born and bred in farming communities found they had the necessary skills required even though hard physical labour was expected.

Eventually the more reliable convicts built up a bond of trust between the governors and the 'freemen' and so began to enjoy a more relaxed regime.

The fact that men outnumbered women 10 to 1 posed another problem. This was eased only in later years when voluntary emigration, along with better monetary prospects, was promoted for young women aged between 18 and 30.

By 1850 New South Wales was full; Australia itself was becoming far more selective; added to which British penal reform brought in new rules and regulations for prisoners which resulted in greater expense all around. All these factors contributed towards the demise of transportation by 1867. However as Pip told us, at least 90% of convicts, once their sentences were completed, decided to stay in Australia feeling that it offered a far greater quality of life and certainly better weather!

The last talk of the season saw around 50 members and visitors attend.

David Posse came to tell us many interesting and informative facts about the 19th century Silk Industry in Essex and Suffolk.

The history of silk making can be traced back to 2640 BC in China but by 300 AD despite efforts to preserve the secret of the cocoon, a silk industry had reached central Asia. The 14th century saw both silk and wool industries developing alongside each other in England, the main centre being at Spitalfields.

The later arrival of 50,000 French Huguenot refugees, all experienced silk workers, saw the industry expand greatly. The Industrial Revolution brought further progressive strides including the building of water-powered silk mills which necessitated plenty of land, a ready supply of water and both male and female labour. Essex and Suffolk were together ideal counties to fit the bill for the new mills. Thus the industry moved to our area. George Courtauld, a Huguenot descendant apprenticed to the silk trade, was appointed to manage the first mill in Pebmarsh.

He and his descendants went on to found the Courtauld tradition of silk making, building houses for the workers and encouraging other manufacturers to come to Essex and Suffolk. The Glemsford Silk Mill was built around 1800 and Alexander Duff moved here to run it.

Other well known names followed including Vanner, Kipling and Walters.

Although the work was often long and hard for many men, women and quite young children, it did offer reasonable living conditions along with in secure trade, thus by 1861 when the industry peaked, it employed nearly 6000 workers.

The 21st century sees Vanners still in the forefront as Michelle Obama showed when she wore a dress made from one of their silk designs on her recent European visit.

Margaret King

History Society Programme: 2009 - 2010

Return to Glemsford History

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