

A Walk Through Glemsford



On Thursday 14 May, 1998, over 40 members and guests of the Glemsford Local History Society took part in a gentle stroll down the main street of the southern half of the village.

Guided by lifelong resident, Doris Bullingham, they were shown all the familiar sights of Glemsford in the earlier part of the century.

The walk started at the Church Hall, which is the old school room of the National School. Dating from the 1850s, this building fell out of use as a school when the Board School on Lion Road opened in 1873/4, after the passage of Forster's Education Act of 1870.



Doris also caused much interest by pointing out the various fields and meadows which have succumbed to the builders in the course of the last half-century.



Early in the walk, we crossed the entrance to Drapery Common. Some people have suggested that the

At Harpur's Road, Doris pointed out the now-invisible site of the intriguingly-named Box Iron Row. These more recent buildings stand just to the right of the originals.

Doris showed us the site of her birthplace and her father's butcher's shop (next to the present-day social club). One of the fascinating parts of Doris' commentary was the number of shops she identified. As she pointed out, the village used to be self-contained. In fact, each PART of the village was self-contained, with at least a butcher, a baker and a general store, not to mention tailors, coal merchants and the inevitable pubs.

At various points on the walk we were also able to pick out the variety of workers' cottages, (these nearly opposite Harpur's Road) normally situated close to one of the many matting factories in which the ordinary villagers made their living last century.



"common" was an open area of ground for the use of cloth makers to stretch their products out for sun-bleaching.



On the corner of Drapery Common, is this long-disused graveyard, formerly attached to the Providence Chapel, which was demolished in the 1960s to make way for Unity House.

Beyond The Angel, is a house which



used to be a shoemaker's shop; the name Chinnery can still be made out on the wooden sign above the door.



"The Cock Inn" is just beyond, on the left hand side of the road, and



The area around Flax Lane is of particular interest. The road name itself is an indication of the linen industry which had its ups and downs at a number of points in Glemsford's past. There is a strong local tradition that the road used to be "Workhouse Lane", for what are taken to be obvious reasons. Some research suggests however that Glemsford never had a workhouse, and that the building on the Croft often thought to be the workhouse was only a linen factory. It is even more likely that the word "workhouse" has to take on its original meaning of "FACTORY".



displays many traditional features.

The group of houses by The Cock is another example of a community within the community. The right-hand (southern) end of the pub itself used to be a butcher's shop, while Wong's Chinese takeaway used to be a major general stores. Opposite, what is a now a fairly neglected footpath is known to older residents as Pump Lane, with all its obvious connotations.



Beyond The Cock, another area of mixed origins emerges. On the right (west) side of the road is the grand building known as Greyhound House, but always called "The Greyhound" because it was yet another pub until the early years of this century. Richard Deeks, in "Glorious Glemsford", describes how, at the time of its closure, a mock coffin was despatched by the angry regulars to the owners of the brewery.



These familiar shots of the area between Flax Lane and Angel Lane show another selection of vernacular architecture. The right hand picture shows the otherwise-unnoticed meeting point of Hunts Hill and Egremont Street. In passing, it is worth pointing out how much improved this view of the village is since the plethora of overhead cables have been removed.



This fascinating house, to the right of Angel Lane, was for a long time known as "Miss Free's House", since its long term occupant was a familiar respected figure in the village, a schoolteacher and granddaughter of one of the original board members of Glemsford School. When she died in 1993, aged 94, the house was left to a distant relative and has now been sold on. It is possibly three cottages in one, and Miss Free's long-term occupancy of the house meant that it retained many very old features. It is now being modernised sympathetically.



Opposite The Greyhound, at the top of the surprisingly-named Greyhound Road, there used to be a horsehair weaving factory.

Below The Greyhound are more examples of cottages from a range of dates.



Our walk finished near the top of Skates Hill, where there is yet another fascinating collection of houses.

On one side of the road is this delightful terrace of 19th century

cottages, built presumably to serve the employees of yet another coconut matting factory, directly opposite, on the site of Holdsworth Close.



Just beyond, on the opposite side of the road, beyond the tyre shop (built in 1930s cinema-nouveau style) are these gems of much older houses of some opulence.



With a classic H-shape, and examples of pargetting in the exterior plaster-work,



these houses are typical of so many in Glemsford, that people pass by so often with barely a second glance.



At the end of the walk, the participants returned to the church hall to view a display of photographs and other memorabilia, including comparative aerial photographs and a copy of the 1841 tithe map.



Our grateful thanks to Doris for all the effort she put into making the evening such a success, and to all the other people who worked so hard - and to the committee of GLHS in particular.