

# GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Free to members,  
50p where sold

WINTER 2020

## So this is Christmas...



So, where has the year gone? The Festival of Britain, 1951, Curious Suffolk and Whistle-craft, then our year was done! Late March, the threat of Covid 19 announced, not here yet, but no more meetings, all socialising curtailed. At least the enforced cessation of our society, along with other village groups and clubs has led to more free time, indoor pastimes and new hobbies. It also allowed more time for three of us to finalise the preparations of the new book – now selling well.\* I hope you enjoy this final Newsletter of the year, being a Christmas issue you will find a quiz and a Christmas related word puzzle along with three articles. One of these is from Margaret King our secretary, and that has a slight Christmas connection, while the others are nothing to do with this time of the year but I hope you will find interesting. The history of the village telephone exchange and something about an artist in the garden! The trees decorating this front page are reminders of the Christmas Tree Festivals held on, almost, alternate years in Glemsford, shared between the Methodist Chapel and St Mary's; the first being held at the Methodist Chapel in 2010, the last in 2018. A few years saw Cribbs as the focus rather than Christmas Trees. Enjoy your Christmas, however strange it may seem and look forward to a better New Year.

My very best wishes to you all, Jenny

*\*Hunts Hill Stores, Glemsford Library and Willow Tree Farm Shop*

GLEMSFORD  
LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY

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Printed and published by Glemsford Local History Society **Editor:** Jenny Wears **Design and Production:** Pete Coote  
The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Society as a whole.

## A message from our Chairman

Well, here we say a not-so-fond farewell to 2020. It ends with some optimism as a vaccine is in sight and, of course, the hope of a better, brighter new year. The push goes on for major improvements to the village hall and as the days begin to draw out and the first signs of spring appear, we can all feel that very human response of hope. Certainly the GLHS committee has not been idle and Margaret has performed her usual miracles with a fine list of speakers already lined up. We would also like to organise meeting up with our fellow members in a relaxed social setting as soon as possible, probably in someone's garden. By then you will have bought, read and inwardly digested the new book on Glemsford shops or perhaps your copy will arrive via Santa and his sleigh. Questions may be asked!

Like everyone, I have greatly missed our monthly get-togethers. I have missed the speakers, their presentations, the teas and coffees, the conviviality, the trips and the sunny summer social occasions. (Interesting to note that my comment on the weather for our non-event in July was "dull, soggy", Every cloud...). So it is with mixed emotions that I truly wish all you members a healthy as well as a happy Christmas and New Year and greatly look forward to seeing you all in 2021.

**Rowan Cain**



# 24 Christmas Related Words

Any which way!

P H M T D C H P L O D U R G K  
U G I A N H N X L D S T T S H  
D I V E I R E A M E S T L I E  
D E Y C H I M N T R S E A F O  
I L U O Y S P A E I G N R R T  
N S L R U T G K N N V A I D E  
G L I M I M C N A G N I C T L  
Y A H S Q A K U I K E A T K T  
F G W X R S V Q I K N R T Y S  
B I S C D T F N J D E K W V I  
E N F Y B R C C L D G E G K M  
L I W O C E X E N D H R R Y M  
L B B E N E S C A R O L S H N  
S O E S U A L C A T N A S V T  
J R E S T O C K I N G C R I B

Angels  
Carols  
Crib  
Holly  
Mistletoe  
Pudding  
Santa Claus  
Stockings

Bells  
Christmas Tree  
Fairy  
Ivy  
Myrrh  
Robin  
Sleigh  
Three Kings

Candles  
Crackers  
Frankincense  
Manger  
Nativity  
Rudolph  
Star  
Tinsel



# The Artist in the Garden: William Oliver 1804-1853

Memorial stones are usually found in churchyards or cemeteries, not private gardens. Well that's what I thought, until some thirty two years ago. Having moved to Halstead we had a very overgrown garden to clear at our house in East Mill. The greenery had been dealt with and husband was clearing a pile of soil and rubble when he noticed pieces of stone with lettering on.

The work ceased while we searched for further inscribed stones and we were rewarded with an almost complete memorial. Once the soil and moss had been cleaned away the total inscription was quite legible, it reads as follows :

IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM OLIVER,  
Of OVINGTON SQUARE, LONDON. ARTIST  
FORMERLY OF HALSTEAD WHO DIED  
NOVEMBER 2nd 1853 AGED 49 YEARS



Conversations with the near neighbours at the time, revealed that the broken stone had been in both our and the next door gardens for at least the past 20 years. Just how it came to be there remains a mystery.

Although our house was close to the public cemetery, that was not opened until 1856, William had died two and a half years earlier. There is a memorial to William in the churchyard of St Andrew's, the parish church of Halstead. (This also records his mother, who died ten years before him, at their home in Manchester Square, London.)

The idea that the stone may have been a damaged article from a local stonemason has been discounted. I could find no record of there having been a local craftsman, apart from a fleeting reference in an old book entitled *Halstead Old and New*. I found nothing at Chelmsford Records Office and Halstead History Society knew nothing

of William Oliver. I had been researching both family and local history for some years so decided to 'investigate' the man. The West Suffolk Records Office at Bury St Edmunds had plenty of entries for Sudbury 'Olivers', however, with many names and dates matching up more than twice, it made the drawing up of a definite family line difficult. I decided to continue with what I knew for certain.

William had been born at Sudbury, Suffolk in 1804 but was baptised in Halstead some two years later. His parents, William and Sarah (nee Baker), had married here on New Years Day, 1800, both services taking place at St Andrew's.

His childhood and youth remained a secret, until this year, but he did work as a warehouseman, possibly at one of his mother's businesses. His name comes to light in 1829 when he exhibited some of his paintings at the Society of British Artists in London.

He became a founder member of the 'New Watercolour Society' in 1834, exhibiting his work there for the next twenty years, the last few showings being posthumous. Ironically, he disagreed with a number of their ideas as time went on and even attended an exhibition under the attempted disguise of another name.

As with many artists, he was a teacher of art, one of his pupils being an Emma Eburne, daughter of a coach-builder. William and Emma married in 1840 and lived in London for most of their married life. Their first child, William Redevious was born in 1843 followed by a daughter Emma Caroline in 1846. The Olivers continued to live mainly in London and in 1851 they were at Ovington Square, Kensington, William described as 'Landscape painter' on the census return. They travelled for artistic purposes, the majority of William's work depicting continental scenes such as the Pyrenees, Tyrol and Italy. Among his English scenes were Kent and Yorkshire, for example Richmond Castle.

It was his wife, Emma who painted English scenes, particularly Dedham Vale on the Essex/Suffolk border. Although a lot of William's work was of a topographical nature, they exhibited almost a thousand works between them, the majority being landscapes.

I have been unable to discover why, but William was in Halstead when he died in 1853; his address being Langley Mill House, next to the converted mill on the Colne, just outside Halstead. His wife and children were presumably at home, in London. The medical attendant and informant of his death was Benjamin Gilson, who came from a family of Halstead doctors, and is buried across the churchyard path from William.

William's memorial and presumably his grave, are beside the eastern path, walking towards Parsonage Street, of St Andrew's Church. It is this stone that also gives details of his mother, Sarah Martha Oliver. She is buried at Kensal Green cemetery, having died in London in 1843.

The reason for the details being given on her son's stone, may well be because she owned several properties in the Halstead area. I could find no documentary evidence of her having lived in the town, apart from her marriage. The records at Chelmsford Records Office show that she made several leaseings; she owned a barn and messuage in Sible Hedingham, let to Richard Britton, husbandman for a few years from 1838. For a similar period she let to Jos' Oxley, a Halstead clothier and grocer, a shop that was adjacent to the George Inn, this stood at the top of the town's hill on the Hedingham Road.

William may not have achieved the national and international recognition of J.M.W. Turner, but he is detailed in the majority of biographical dictionaries of artists. His works have passed through the salerooms of Sotheby's and other well known establishments. Examples of his work are held by the City Museum in Bradford, The British Museum, and art galleries in Sheffield and Dublin.

This article, now slightly altered, first appeared in the H&D LHS Newsletter,



*Richmond by William Oliver*

about 1990. When we moved from Halstead to Glemsford in Suffolk (2007), we decided to take the discovered stone with us (thinking any new owner might decide to use it for a rockery). We still have it, in a shady but green corner of the garden.

In 2014, I received a postcard from the great, great, great, grand-daughter of William Oliver! She had managed to find me through a third party. A writer, who had contacted me about William Oliver, in about 2001/4. The descendant was pleased with the information I was able to give her, including photographs of the churchyard and 'discovered' stones. The lady is descended from William and Emma's daughter, Emma Caroline, and was able to email me photographs that told me just a little of William's childhood.

He attended Christ's Hospital School in London for some of his education, receiving an award from the governors twice – once aged 13 for being the 2nd Proficient in Drawing in 1817 and then 2nd Proficient in Writing the following year, aged 14. Perhaps the foundations of his artistic life were laid here. While William attended the school it was in the middle of major rebuilding, a project which lasted 43 years (1793-1836). The school's move to Horsham in Sussex started in 1902.

**Jenny Wears**



*Awards for writing and drawing presented to William Oliver in 1817 and 1818*

# Glemsford Telephone Exchange

by Gillman Game (2007 Newsletter)



In his article on Glemsford Post Office, Mr Game writes about the Telephone Exchange as he remembers it, from the 1930s. Unfortunately I cannot discover when it was established.

To the rear of the Post Office was the passage to the house... 'A short distance down this passage was a door on the left leading to a small compartment about four feet square. This was the Glemsford telephone exchange. Light was provided through a window into the shop. That window still existed in Mr Chubbs' time.

As I remember it, there was a panel opposite the door with I would think about 16 or 20 switches rather like human eye-lids. These 'eyes' were connected to a subscriber or another exchange. There was also an old fashioned telephone. The phone would ring from the exchange to be answered by grandfather or grandmother who would then be asked for a number. It was usually my grandmother who spent hours in that telephone box. He or she would then pull down the appropriate 'eye-lid' and then I

think they had to turn a handle to ring the bell. This was easy. The problems came with outgoing calls. A Glemsford subscriber would ring and ask for a number.

Grandmother then called the exchange to ask for a line to the next exchange, that exchange might have to put her through to another exchange which had the required number which they would ring. If any of these lines were engaged they might hold the line for a short time. But if not the whole procedure would have to start again.

'One of the first persons to have a telephone in Glemsford lived at Tye Green. I have heard his name but it is now long forgotten although I think it may have been a Mr Fenn. Grandfather allowed a few privileged customers who were acquainted with Mr Fenn to enter the phone box. He would then ring Mr Fenn and pass the telephone to the customer who would then be able to share the miracle of modern technology whereby someone at Fair Green could speak to someone at Tye Green without even shouting.

'There was a considerable amount of telegram business, much of it to Goulds, and Downs. There were a number of people around Fair Green who were willing to deliver telegrams sometimes as far away as Fenstead End. A Glemsford lady made her first foray to London, leaving by an early train. Later that day a telegram arrived at the post office addressed to her home. It contained just these words: "Lost in London. What shall I do."

'I believe the telephone exchange moved to the purpose built automatic exchange in Egremont Street about the time grandfather retired – the long single storey building with one end facing the entrance of George Lane on the opposite side of the road, That in turn became redundant in 1968 when the present exchange was built in Angel Lane.'



# We're off to see the dragon!

During the October half-term holiday, we took an exciting pilgrimage with the grandchildren to Bures to find and explore a chapel and a dragon! Closed roads and numerous diversions did not deter us from reaching Bures, and upon locating the steadily upward-climbing track, aptly named St. Edmund's Way, we reached Cuckoo Hill and Fysh House Farm. Turning into the farmyard, and following a long gravel track to the end we found the chapel in a quite secluded location.

When it was first built, I have been unable to discover; nevertheless its claim to fame is that the young Edmund (probably just 14 years old) was on Christmas Day in A.D. 855, anointed by Bishop Humbert of Elmham and crowned King of the East Angles. It must have been a magnificent occasion, and if Edmund did indeed come from the Bury (later St Edmunds) area it would have been a long, tiring journey probably by cart or wagon in the very depth of winter. We wondered, was it snowing, raining or very cold and frosty – who knows?

Complete authenticity of these early historical events is forever in doubt, however the lonely Suffolk field on which the chapel stands must have had real significance because some 350+ years later the Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Catholic church, Stephen Langton, was moved to visit the chapel and, on St. Stephen's Day in 1218, to consecrate it as St. Stephen's Chapel. Presently it houses three very large effigies on the tombs of the de Veres – the 5th, 8th and 11th Earls of Oxford respectively. These tombs are rescue relics from the former Earls Colne Priory, now a ruin. The chapel, after a chequered history of miscellaneous uses and utter neglect, was not restored to its present enviable state until the 1930s. Today I believe a service is held there annually and possibly others. It appears to be generally kept open and for the casual visitor it makes a fascinating trip back into history.

What about the dragon then? A legendary figure lost in the mists of time, yet having some slim factual truth according to a 1405 chronicler (who was doubtlessly writing and describing a much earlier period) when a dragon emerged from the murky depths of



the Wormingford Mere to devour a herd of sheep and generally terrorize the entire neighbourhood. Arrows fired by many a villager failed to kill the dragon, until finally after one such battle it retreated, slithering back into the River Stour, never to be seen again! Research has shown that this just could have been the grown-up version of a baby crocodile brought back from the Crusades as a 'present'!

Fast forward a few hundred years when a distant ancestor of the original landowner, along with family members, decided to honour the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 by sculpturing a dragon on the sloping hillside virtually opposite the back of the chapel, yet far enough away to command a spectacular view. With an ochre-coloured earth body outlined by chalk, the Bures dragon is an enormous creature sporting a huge crested head and an elongated, curled, forked tail. He does more than justice to the legend; in fact, you almost expect to see billowing smoke erupting from the hillside! It was certainly a fitting end to our history pilgrimage.

**Margaret King**



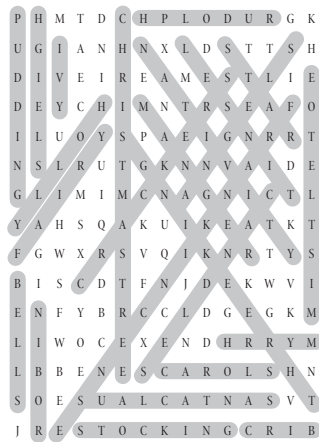




# Test Your Glemsford Knowledge

Sorry, no chocolate rewards this year!

1. Which six road names in Glemsford reflect the industrial history of the village?
2. Who went to Hawkytown (Hawkedon) and only sold a box of matches?
3. Which road is named after a twentieth century vicar?
4. Wong's was the Cherry Tree public house, but what was the name of the previous public house ?
5. Flax Lane was previously called what?
6. It measured 63,000 square feet, and was made in Glemsford for the Arena at Olympia Exhibition in 1906. What was it?
7. In which year was the first Glemsford Christmas Tree Festival held?
8. Name the four 15th century (visibly) timber-framed houses in Glemsford.
9. What is the connection between the Margaret Hitchcock Cup and Mr Witgar Hitchcock of a house once called Mt. Lofty Lodge? (with panoramic views of the Stour valley)
10. What useful items were made in the area known as Silk Factory Row?
11. Which village public house marked its closure with a mock funeral?
12. How many times does the road that loops through the village – from the Lower Road to the Lower Road – change its name?
13. Where in Glemsford were Judges' wigs made?
14. The silk factory that was in Chequers Lane processed silk for which four Royal occasions?
15. What crop was grown and utilised in Glemsford to make, among other things, equipment strapping for the 'Forces', in both world wars?
16. Which 'road' in the village shares a name with an apple and a town in Cumbria?



Word puzzle solution



**Quiz answers:** **1** Weavers Drive, Silk Factory Row, Holdsworth Close (Matting Factory opposite New Cut), Flax Lane, Drapery Common. **2** 'Shocking Smith' Charles Smith, trader of Brook Street. **3** Harpurs Way. (Rev. Alexander Harpur) **4** The Hardwicke Arms. **5** Workhouse Lane. **6** A very large coir mat. **7** In 2010, at the Methodist Chapel. **8** Angel House, Chequers, Monks Hall, Peverells. **9** Mother and son. **10** Umbrellas and parasols. **11** The Greyhound. **12** 9 – Skates Hill, Egremont Street, Hunts Hill, Tye Green, Lion Road, Broadway, Bells Lane, Park Lane, and Hobbs Lane. **13** The Horsehair Factory, Bells Lane. **14** Elizabeth II Coronation Robe, Princess Anne's Wedding Dress, Prince Charles's Investiture Robe, and Princess Diana's Wedding Dress. **15** Flax. **16** Egremont Street.



## Newsletter | Winter 2020/21 edition

**Annual Subscription:** £12.00 **Visitors:** £2.50 per time

We meet on every 2nd Thursday of the month in Glemsford Primary Academy at 7.30pm.

We welcome your continued support and that of others. Please encourage your friends and neighbours to join us.