

History at work

In the spring of last year I mentioned three national, historical anniversaries. This year we have four anniversaries, based on people:

Shakespeare's death in 1616. The birth of James Brindley in 1716 – pioneer of England's canal network, of vital importance to the Industrial Revolution.

And Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, also born 1716, who was to become a landscape gardener of national acclaim. Aged 53 he brought his skills to Suffolk, designing the Italianate Garden at Ickworth House in 1769.

Approximately 200 years earlier a link was made with Glemsford, and Cardinal Wolsey, who appointed the First Master of the Post in 1516. A biography of the Cardinal was written by his very faithful

servant, one George Cavendish, in his retirement at Peverells.

Read more inside this edition of your newsletter, along with some 'current history', an observation of coypus!, meeting reports for those of you unable to attend – particularly January's wintery evening – and forthcoming events.

Pure chance, but a copy of meeting details from April 1998 came to my notice after our February meeting, so I have added it to this newsletter.

Jenny Wears, Editor





Remember those named on one or both of our War Memorials, who died during the spring of 1916

19th April: William Walter John Josslyn. Private in 'B' Company 8th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. Killed in action, aged 20. Born in Lambeth, but resident in Glemsford, he enlisted at Sudbury. His parents Walter and Fanny Josslyn were living at Broadway, Glemsford. He is commemorated in Essex Farm Cemetery, Ieper, West Vlaanderen, Belgium.

26th April: Walter Brewster. A private in 7th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment. Born in Glemsford, he was approximately 24 years old when he died of his wounds. He had enlisted at Stratford, shown on the 1911 census return as boarding and working at Walthamstow. His widowed mother was still living on Bells Lane. He is buried at Longuenesse, St.Omer, Souvenir Cemetery. France.

Details from Glemsford Roll of Honour, with thanks to Steve Clarke and Martin Edwards.

The Glemsford Coypu



I enjoy reading books about Suffolk and underline any reference to Glemsford that I come across. It therefore came as a slight surprise to find our village mentioned in a volume entitled *Mammals of Essex** The mammal concerned was the coypu *Myocastor coypus*, also unexpected, was the sentence, on page 82 'In 1963, additional records of animals killed came from Tillingham, Thorpe-le-Soken, Glemsford and Dedham' **

Farms, rearing Coypus for their fur known as nutria, had all but closed by the outbreak of the second world war. At about this time a few of these South

American rodents, probably escapees from a farm near Dedham, began to colonise the River Stour. It was not until the 1960s that a concerted trapping effort was conducted to eradicate the species from its heartland of East Anglia and this was finally achieved in 1989.

Thanks to the construction of railway bridges across the river, a tiny portion of Glemsford has shifted over onto the Essex bank and this may explain the appearance of our record in the annals of Essex Natural History.

Robin Ford

*Dobson J. & Tansley D. (2014) *Mammals of Essex*. Essex Field Club. Ipswich.

**Corke D.(1965) *Notes on Essex Mammals, 1963-4*. Essex Naturalist 31:273-277.

Peverells and George Cavendish

Peverells was built for one Ranulph Peverell, a Norman and trusted knight of William the Conqueror. He was rewarded for his excellent service with parcels of land throughout the country. He was Tenant-in-Chief in Essex, so with interests here, an agreeable settlement on top of a hill with a river nearby could be a good site for Ranulph to make a home. This interesting-looking house here in Glemsford, a handsome timber-framed building on Tye Green, known as Peverells was built around 1485. Now it is known for its association with George Cavendish, biographer of Cardinal Wolsey.

George was born in 1499 into a distinguished family; their early days being engaged in the London mercer/draper trade. His father, Thomas, held a position in the King's Treasury and owned a considerable amount of property in his native Suffolk.

At an early age, in 1522, George was introduced into Cardinal Wolsey's household as a Gentleman Usher. Here he learnt how to attend to every aspect of his master's life. It was a remarkable life in the court of Henry VIII with its dramatic happenings, such as the divorce between Henry and Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and all attendant intrigues, through which Cavendish served the Cardinal devotedly.

During the Cardinal's rise there was an abundance of wealth, power and honours but all was lost when he fell from favour. Cavendish remained loyal until Wolsey's tragic end at Leicester in 1530. These are Wolsey's own words about Cavendish:

"I se this gentilman howe faytheful how diligent and howe paynful.

"Synce the begynneng of my trouble he hath served me

"Abandonyng his own cuntrye his wyfe & childerne, his howse & famelye to serve only me."

The King offered Cavendish a post, but he asked only for "six of the best horses and a cart to take his 'stuff' back to Glemsfyorde" where he spent the rest of his life, far from the glamour and perils of the Court. It was then, in his retirement that he wrote 'Thomas Wolsey late Cardinal his lyffe and deathe. Written by George Cavendish, his gentleman usshar'.



He retired to Glemsford in 1530, the year of Wolsey's death; the first complete edition entitled 'The Life of Cardinal Wolsey' only being published in 1825.

With thanks to Sue Langdon, a previous owner, for permission to use her history of Peverells.

Jenny Wears

E.W. Downs – the place of an engineering company in village history

Report of the talk by Donald Rodger-Brown from 9 April, 1998

The Glemsford Local History Society marked the end of the official 1997-1998 season with a talk very close to the heart of the village.

Donald Rodger-Brown prepared and delivered his own fascinating account of the history of E.W. Downs Ltd. Today best known for its products in the area of potato harvesting and grading, the company has been active in Glemsford (just off Fair Green) for more than 150 years.

The company can be traced back to the work of a blacksmith, using his ingenuity and skill to repair and modify various items crucial to the work of local farmers. Typical of that sort of work, Mr Downs was called upon to carry out other tasks too; several church towers around Suffolk contain bells hung by Mr Downs. Glemsford's own church (of St Mary the Virgin) had its own bells completely re-hung in 1863. Other examples are to be found in Long Melford and Chevington.

From the 1840s, the original Edward Walter Downs turned his hand to manufacturing new pieces of agricultural machinery. Suffolk, however, was never a county solely dependent on agriculture, being, as it was, one of the leading cloth manufacturing areas in the country from

the middle ages onwards. Villages like Lavenham and Kersey are world-famous, but Glemsford too had its wealthy clothier community as is witnessed by the number of prosperous hall houses in the village.

However, as the Industrial Revolution took hold, and the focus of the cloth industry shifted to the developing towns and cities of Lancashire and Yorkshire, so the traditional weaving centres of East Anglia declined in importance.

One of the effects in a village like Glemsford was the concomitant development of the mat-making and silk industries, providing a form of employment for the people of the village, often within their own homes.

The matmaking industry used coconut fibre as its raw material, and Downs found new work in the manufacture and repair of the various machines used in the process. (Evidence of the importance of mat-making to the village is further demonstrated by the fact that the original 'seal' for the village school, opened in 1874, was a combination of a matloom and a palm tree, and, of course, Richard Deeks' famous account of the Long Melford riot of 1885 is called *The Matmaker and the Magistrate*).

By referring to company documents and illustrations, Mr Rodger-Brown high-



lighted this early change in Downs' fortunes. At one time, there were nine separate mat-making operations in the village. Samuel Downs (son of the original E. W. Downs) developed the work of the company, often demonstrating his skills by creating bespoke pieces of equipment to suit individual customers particular needs.

Foreign competition hit the company badly, particularly as native producers of coconut fibre began to get involved in the manufacturing side of the industry. At the end of the Great War, Downs had reached a low ebb, which is when the business was acquired by Mr Rodger-Brown's father. The revised business maintained its interest in the matting industry – in fact, expanding into carding and shearing machines, as well as producing 'plantation' machinery such as were needed to remove fibre from husks. A further connection with the past was maintained with the employment of W. H. Playle, a cousin of Samuel Downs, as senior foreman.

Upon the death of Mr Rodger-Brown, senior, in 1955, the company was kept going by his wife – Donald's mother – with the help of just four employees. The company then began a gradual transition

back towards its agricultural origins. In 1967, it produced its first piece of farm machinery since 1860 – a powered hopper for stock feeding, designed by Donald himself, and in 1968, Downs produced the first piece of potato machinery, a line for which the company is now so well known. Despite ups and downs in the agricultural market, and the fortunes of the company, the story continues to develop.

Downs now employs 45 people on its site in the heart of the village. Annual sales now exceed £3 million. It has been rewarded with gold and silver medals from the Royal Agricultural Society of England; purchasers have included the former Soviet Union and the present Czech Republic – in fact 40 per cent of its sales are for export. Its products have ranged from the relatively humble potato harvester to giant elevators for grain storage and a 'banana tractor' I designed to run on an aerial cableway.

Most recently, the story has turned full circle, because Downs were again commissioned to re-hang the bells in Glemsford's own church tower.

Donald Rodger-Brown
9 April 1998

The Stormport Saga of George Lane



The new transformer being connected

One pleasant day last September I received a letter to advise me that the writer, one Alan Reeves, of Stormport Professional Services Ltd. "...had been tasked with carrying out essential works on the mains electrical network in [my] area on behalf of UK Power Networks. Part of this work involves delivery of new high voltage equipment into the electrical substation within George Lane..."

He also advised of restricted vehicular access and apologised in advance for any disruption/disturbance that this may cause, advising that the work was "due to take place between Tuesday 15th September at 10am for approximately half an hour".

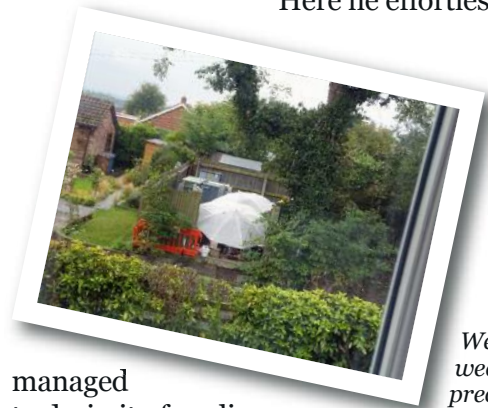
What it was "between" I never discovered although what did emerge I found quite interesting as all the activity which ensued took place right opposite our house. In fact the delay on 15th September was all over long before 10am, being simply some preparation work to the substation site which steps

down the electricity supply to standard mains voltage to serve the few homes in our area and delivery of the new transformer (which I missed!).

On subsequent days four or five workmen, occasionally fuelled by some of our tea carefully connected up the new transformer in situ without any loss of power, simply transferring the cables from the old unit to the new. But on Thursday the 24th the

action truly began, when at 9am a crane arrived to deliver sand and more excitingly, remove the old transformer.

This fascinating exercise was conducted solely by the driver using a remote control not unlike that used for a television. He placed straps around the previously loosened but weighty transformer, and, by pressing some buttons gingerly hoisted it towards the flat bed of his lorry. Here he effortlessly



Wet weather precautions

managed to drain it of cooling oil into large drums before it was finally gently laid to rest on the truck, and then, when it was suitably secured, driven away. He made it look so easy!

While I haven't noticed any difference to the power supply at home it must be capable of supplying a larger area or with a greater capacity than hitherto. Anyway that's about as exciting as life gets in George Lane.

Patrick Hemphill



Job done. Removal of the old transformer

Pull the other one!



It was reported last month in a national newspaper that there is a call by some to reclassify Bell Ringing as a sport! What would campanologists of old think of this, never mind modern teams?

St. Mary's here in Glemsford has six bells, reflected in the name of a long gone public house, The Six Bells. This probably stood in the area of the Stanway Close bungalows and operated in the 1700s.

The church bells weigh from 6½cwt for the treble to 14cwt for the tenor, with the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th, in between, weighing

7¼, 8½, 9¼ and 12cwt respectively. Some effort to ring I suspect – but what of those churches with TEN bells! Perhaps the Ten Bells public house at Rattlesden quenches the thirst of Rattlesden's bell ringers.

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, Downs' had a foundry and maintained the bells of St Mary's. As for the costs involved of repair or possibly new bells, further details from the Churchwarden's Accounts, for example, will appear in the next edition of your newsletter.

Jenny Wears

GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY News



OUR Annual Christmas President's Evening was once again held at Chequers, the 17th century home of George and Ann Grover which as ever, provided the essential Christmas atmosphere for the occasion.

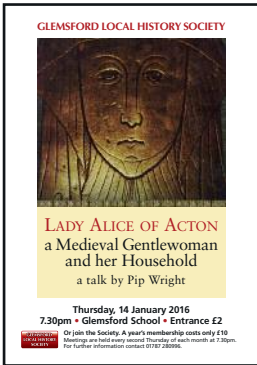
Members contributed a truly sumptuous buffet which was complemented by wine – some being of the mulled seasonal variety – and enjoyed by all.

Proceedings began with a local Glemsford quiz, devised by newly elected Chairman, Rowan Cain, and won by John and Margaret King. A prize raffle followed the buffet and then, for the first time,

the singing of carols interspersed with members' memories of Christmases past, was introduced.

All appeared to be participating and enjoying the well-known verses and our thanks must go to Peter Willmoth for leading us into song, and to David Newell who, at the 11th hour, produced some music and expertly accompanied us on the keyboard!

All in all it proved a most successful evening and one where again we must thank our hosts, George and Ann for their unfailing generosity and hospitality.



A HAPPY NEW YEAR and well done to everyone who braved the appalling January weather to attend our first meeting of 2016!

Speaker Pip Wright gave us a clear, concise, yet fascinating insight into the early 15th century world of Alice de Bryene of Acton. Born around 1360 and probably bearing no resemblance to her famous brass in All Saints' Church, there is very little information about Alice as a person.

We do know that she came from a background of considerable wealth built from her great grandfather's years of military service and that she married well, bore two daughters, lived in Acton Hall (a medieval, moated hall house), was widowed in 1386, and later inherited 6,000 acres of Suffolk and Gloucestershire, land thus ensuring her lifetime wealth with no need to seek another husband.

But our knowledge of Alice's household comes from 1412 when books were kept (in an eclectic mix of local English, bad Latin and medieval French!) which recorded every detail of the economical running of her household and estates. Fortunately, these survive, in Chicago and the British Library, and have been brilliantly transcribed.

Thus we learn that Acton Hall was open house not just to family and workers but also to visiting traders, monks, dignitaries

and pilgrims; meals consisted of vast quantities of fish (on three fasting days per week), meat – lamb, beef, pork, bacon – and even greater amounts of bread baked every five days.

Much food came from local animals, the fish pond and the moat, but much was brought in; large sea fish, shellfish and oysters (then the 'poor man's food') – records show that the delivery man and his horse were duly fed after their journey!

It is quickly obvious that a great deal of this food had to be preserved, i.e salted, dried and smoked in autumn to last throughout the winter, and it doubtlessly deteriorated with time. A Lenten fast was possibly welcomed!

Water was unsafe for human consumption so wine and 112 gallons of ale brewed with malt, an additional sweetener, four times each month were drunk. Latterly we can only speculate on the health issues which this virtually vegetable-free diet produced, laden with fat, salt, gritty residues from milling and eaten around the Hall's central open and very smoky fire.

However Lady Alice survived, dying in 1435 at the ripe old age of 75. She lived in lawless times, through the reigns of five kings, a 1361 plague, the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and the 1415 Battle of Agincourt. She was obviously a very remarkable lady, definitely feisty, but also well-respected, sociable and kind.

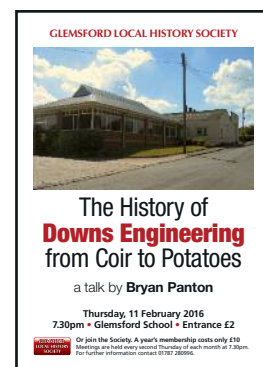
OUR FEBRUARY speaker, Bryan Panton, drew a large audience of former friends and work colleagues when he spoke to us on the subject of Downs Engineering – Coir to Potatoes. A mechanical engineer, Bryan worked for Downs for seven years in the 1970s during which time he moved into management.

E W Downs founded the Fair Green company in the 19th century, setting up a foundry while also dealing with the maintenance and hanging of local church bells.

However for 100 years, 1850-1950, the firm concentrated principally on the coconut matting industry and the

manufacture of machinery required to make fibre products such as floor and door mats. Indeed the cross-section shape made by the fibrous coir in the coconut, was adopted for the Down's logo.

By the 1970s Donald Rodger-Brown had inherited the running of the business from his father and the main focus was now on the designing and manufacturing of farm machinery from celery harvesters to harvesters and conveyor systems for potatoes. The factory was changing and expanding until the relatively recent closure which was much lamented by many. The large site is currently being developed for housing.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, **Ron Murrell:** Brandy for the Parson, Baccy for the Clerk – the true face of smuggling in the past
April 14th

Saturday, **Coach outing to Kings Lynn**
April 23rd Details to be announced

Thursday, **Clive Paine:** A guided tour of St Mary's Church,
May 12th Glemsford. 7.30pm at the church

Thursday, **A Summer Outing**
June 9th To be arranged

*Some images of Kings Lynn
from Robin, in advance of
our April coach outing.*



GLEMSFORD
LOCAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

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Annual Subscription: £10.00 **Visitors:** £2.00 per time

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

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