

GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SPRING 2020

Spring IS coming!

The writing of the editorial can be difficult and short on imagination. How to introduce the current issue of the Newsletter so that you, the readers, will want to continue reading? Sometimes the content lends itself to comment, or it is possible to put 'tasters' of articles together, to compliment each other. That can work when I have a stock of pieces to draw on and with a few fillers to act as the 'stitches'.

This edition has another excellent article by Stephanie, one of our committee members, this time on Village Education in the 19th century. To follow, I have added a short piece on the schools in Glemsford. Further reading relates to a Headmaster and the Glemsford POW camp at the Horsehair Factory, and 'Selcol', a now closed factory, at Long Melford. Also included of course are some meeting reports and the all important 'Forthcoming Events'.



Spring is on its way, I think, and although too late for New Year resolutions, how about some fresh ideas for your Newsletter?

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Village Education in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century saw many industrial and social changes which would be beneficial to a vast number of the population, of which education was the greatest opportunity offered to the ordinary person offering a chance to make a difference to their lives.

Before 1870 the educational needs for the majority of the population was catered for by a variety of schools, either public or grammar; Sunday schools; Dame schools (which were run for very small children and often attended by the poor); Church schools many of which were founded during the Middle Ages, and schools set up in the many factories and workhouses throughout the country. All these different types of school gave an education often tailored to the social class to which its pupils belonged.

Although the chance to learn was encouraged by different supporters, England at this time lacked a national system of public/state education. A commission set up in 1858 recommended the setting up of local Education Boards, however the Reform Bill of 1867 paved the way for a free educational system. The Education Act of 1870 ensured all locally set up educational boards compelled school attendance for children up to the age of thirteen.

Each school board was to have between five and fifteen members where each member had to be elected to his or her position on the board. All rate-payers could vote and stand for election; to claim a chair on the school board was regarded by some as quite a social achievement, often doctors and clergymen making up part of a school board. Occasionally a place on the board became a battle between the Church of England and Nonconformity, as well as those who encouraged educational development and those whose aim was partly to save the rate-payers money.

The children who attended schools were taught in a very formal and rigid fashion.

Discipline was harsh and doled out with regularity. The curriculum consisted mainly of what was termed the 3 R's: reading, writing and arithmetic. For each pupil who attained the required standard schools could earn extra grant money, as much as 3 shillings per child. Under this system both pupil and teacher would be pressurized to perform well; naturally some schools did badly and the body of School Inspectors reported many cases of teachers and pupils trying to cheat the system.

The first few years of state education for all did have its critics; some held the view that to educate the working classes was a very dangerous practice – it may cause great discontentment and make the common labourer want for a better standard of living. He may question his betters and resent them. Fortunately this view although not uncommon did not stop the educational movement from improving people's lives and opening up new opportunities.

Village schools all over England were open to those who felt it important for their children to become literate. In many schools practical skills were taught alongside the "3 Rs", needlework, pattern cutting, cookery, laundry and dairy work, which were all useful subjects for girls who would either go into service or help in the home before they set up homes themselves. Boys would be taught gardening, and wood crafts which could set them on the road for a good apprenticeship.

During the first few years of compulsory schooling it was expected that families would contribute a small fee - a penny or two pennies per child per week was the average cost although some very poor families were excused from any charge.

Attendance of pupils was very sketchy with several factors other than illness keeping children from their lessons. In agricultural areas it was quite common for children to be employed in the fields during busy times;

picking up potatoes, and helping with collection of animal fodder. Throughout the year children were absent from the classroom to help their parents to earn a few extra pennies. During the shooting season boys would work as beaters; January saw boys and girls working in fields picking up flint and stones to help repair the roads, while spring was a time to plant crops and lively scarecrows were employed to scare off any birds, so again the schoolroom would be sparsely populated. Of course the busiest time was Harvest time.

In 1880 the Mundella Act made school compulsory and school attendance was recorded. It was now very important that each school had a good attendance record as each school received a Government grant which was calculated on the number of pupils present throughout the school year. Even so classroom numbers shrank at Harvest time when all helping hands were needed on the land; to ease the pressure at this time it was decided that a six week break should be introduced so the Harvest could be gathered which was an excellent compromise for both school and local communities.

Attendance not only hung upon the farming calendar, poor attendance was blamed on many other factors such as a family wedding, funeral, local fairs or markets. Agricultural sales often drew crowds and odd as it seems nowadays children were kept away from the classroom if the weather was bad (heavy rain or snow) – these were valid reasons for pupil absence.

In Clare school, the headmaster Mr Frank B. Goode (1897) was experiencing a difficult and unsettled time, not just with the children, but staffing problems. The months of April and May seemed to throw up problem after problem, with staff suffering bereavement, children down with Whooping Cough, a visit by the school board, poor child attendance, and a report which criticizes the conditions of the cloak room. Even by today's standards this appeared a difficult couple of months for the school.

After experiencing some challenging times, teachers and pupils settled down to the main task of teaching and learning. By 1891 elementary education in Britain became



free so providing the school fee was another financial worry lifted from many poorer families. The Government provided 7 shillings per infant and 12 shillings per junior or senior pupil. This money was not payable on the number roll but on the attendance record, which previously was very important but now vital to a school's budget.

Additional grants were available for good academic standards. With the introduction of the attendance register came the right to prosecute parents whose children were absent from school regularly so the school attendance monitor became in some areas a common and unpopular figure.

However difficult it was to introduce compulsory education by the end of the nineteenth century vast improvements were noted. More and more ordinary people could sign their own names in Church documents, a skill often denied to their grandparents. The growth of the village Library and Reading Room were set up to satisfy the public need for reading and learning. From the education given by the village school, many families saw the direct improvement a sound education could offer; more and more people were able to embark on careers their grandparents could only wish for, while job opportunities in other parts of England were open to those with a better education.

Even now despite the many changes brought into force by successive Governments a village education offers the 21st century child the benefits of good academic standards and lasting ties with his or her local community.

Stephanie Prythergch-Hemphill

Glemsford Schools



*The National School
circa 1930*

Glemsford's first school was in the churchyard of St Mary's, the Parish Church. It was given to the village in 1655 by one John Dister, a clothier. The curate was the teacher.

The Glemsford Survey of 17th March 1655 has the following entry: '... for a cottage with a garden by the churchyard at Glemsford sometimes called by the School House'.

In 1840, the National School Scheme was created and the churchyard school was incorporated, before a new National school was built, situated on Hunts Hill in 1856. The Compulsory Education Act, passed in 1870, saw the building of the large school, known then as the Board School, in 1874. At a cost of £3,000 it was divided into infants, boys and girls.

Stephanie mentions pupil attendance and the reasons for absence. Here in Glemsford, some entries from the school Log Book shows a variety of causes:

Week-ending June 25 1875: 'Very few children in school this week on account of Glemsford Fair'. School closed on Wednesday for Fair.

July 25th 1875: 'Attendance very poor owing to wet weather'. (This implies a lack of suitable clothing and footwear I suspect.)

September 3rd 1875: 'Attendance has been very thin this week owing to the gleaning'.

Finally, February 1894: 'A number of children absent and others returned, after an absence of 6-7 weeks due to Scarlet Fever'.

Some Victorian children had quite a hard life, poor clothing, contagious diseases, having to help in the fields, no wonder they missed school to go to the Fair.

Jenny Wears

First World War PoW Camp in Glemsford

Last year a Mr Vincent Riley contacted our secretary, Margaret King, about the 1st World War PoW Camp here in Glemsford. He was researching the lives of some men buried in Commonwealth War Graves in his local churchyard, at Woodhouse Eaves in Leicestershire, particularly a Mr Jesse Gibson.

Mr Gibson had joined the Royal Defence Corps and become a Commandant of the Prisoner of War Camp here in Glemsford. The camp was housed in part of Arnold & Gould's Horsehair factory on Bells Lane. This is mentioned by Ted Hartley in his recollections, *Glemsford in the 1920s* published by Glemsford LHS in 1978.

According to anecdotal evidence, the prisoners would attract the attention of local girls (possibly the factory workers), by throwing matchboxes, containing notes, out of the barred windows. The Horsehair Factory covered a large area beside Bells Lane and has been converted into residential use.

Mr Gibson was married and Headmaster of St Paul's Primary School in Woodhouse Eaves before joining up. He returned to Leicestershire but died aged 56, on 7th March 1919, following an abdominal operation at the 5th Northern General Hospital, a 'field unit'.

Jenny Wears



Jesse Gibson

GLEMSFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY News

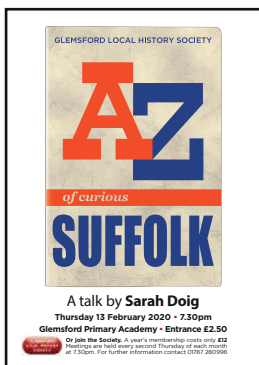


WE COMMENCED THE NEW YEAR with an engaging talk by Geoffrey Kay about the 1951 Festival of Britain. The years immediately following the end of World War 2 were particularly bleak for the British population. Many of the big cities had been reduced to rubble, presenting scenes of desolation and greyness. Rationing prevailed and building materials for regeneration were in very short supply.

However, one man, newspaper editor Gerald Barry, inspired by the fast approaching centenary of the 1851 Great Exhibition, proposed the idea of staging a large exhibition on London's South Bank celebrating all that was best and most advanced in culture, arts, sciences and trade.

At first it was shelved by the powers that be, but the initiative was taken up by General Lord Hastings Ismay and others who offered decisive drive and support to Barry, resulting in an architect-designed model of the site which led eventually to the building going ahead. Complemented by the giant funfair attraction at Battersea, the modernistic designs were stunningly brought to life (in spite of national shortages!).

In the spring of 1951, the public came in their droves to explore and admire, amongst the many pavilions and activities which the exhibition sported, the Skylon, the Shot Tower, the Dome of Discovery and the Royal Festival Hall – the latter still remaining on its original site. The Festival did prove indeed, as continually advertised, a Tonic for the Nation!



OUR FEBRUARY SPEAKER, Sarah Doig, gave a very entertaining talk entitled 'The A – Z of Curious Suffolk' itemising a number of humorous, strange and downright eccentric stories which feature in her book of the same name. She gave us tasters of some of the chapters starting with *B for Bang*, thus interpreted as not only the inedible, hard and indigestible Suffolk cheese of years gone by, but also the shooting bangs of the exiled Maharajah and King Edward VII when during one day Elveden Hall estate witnessed the slaughter of 6,000 heads, 4,500 of them being pheasants!

Under *F for Follies* we discovered the 16th century Freston Tower, probably built simply to curry favour with Queen Elizabeth during her Royal Progress. The well-known Tattingstone Wonder, a facade of a church built around a row of cottages, gave estate

owner, Thomas White, the ecclesiastical view he craved and the local folk 'something to wonder about'!

With *M for Misers* we heard about the two most famous misers to die in Suffolk; one William Jennens, (intestate and unmarried, of Acton Hall) whose vast unclaimed fortune was swallowed up by the lawyers and whose story famously inspired Charles Dickens to write *Bleak House*. Secondly, a John Elways, rich, reclusive, and from a very miserly family; here again a possible Dickens inspiration for that most famous of misers, Scrooge.

Sarah ended her talk with the letter *T for Traditions* when she described the complicated 'sport' of dwile flonking (ie. flinging a knitted floor cloth) practised in the 1960s in Beccles where all participants lose points if they remain sober!

Margaret King

Selco of Long Melford

Last year I bought an unusual little musical item at the Melford Hall Boot Sale. As I moved away from the stall, a lady said "they used to make those here in Melford, where the caravan place use to be and they've built houses, in the 70s". The firm was Selco, a plastics factory, and they operated from possibly the 1960s, through to the 70s. My purchase was a musical cigarette dispenser. On pressing a button, a tune is played, six doors open to reveal a pocket on each, and a ballerina turning to the music, in the centre.

I asked several people, including someone at the Melford Heritage Centre, but couldn't discover anymore about Selco, until I spoke to one of our members who I was told, came from Long Melford.

Selco is an off-shoot of a firm called Selmar, (founded in France) who were based in

Braintree, best known for making amplifiers and musical instruments – particularly clarinets. The Melford factory, behind Foundry House, mainly produced plastic toys, instruments and records for children as well as other plastic items, such as my musical cigarette dispenser.

The factory closed in 1982. Keith Slater recently informed me that his mother and aunt had both worked there for a short while, and it is him that I have to thank for the extra details in this article.

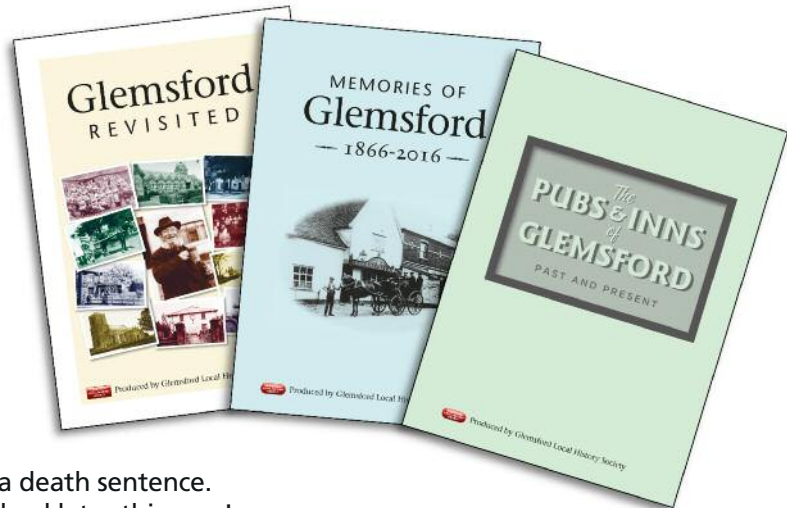
After I finished writing this piece, I caught the end of a TV programme on Skiffle music. A small guitar was shown, a child's plastic toy, for playing skiffle music on, made by Selco, in the mid 1950s.

Jenny Wears



A New Book

I'm sure many of you are aware that a new book about Glemsford is being prepared. This one will focus on the shops, past and present, scattered through the village. The history starts in the mid 1800s but there are two shops that were in business as early as 1828. A couple of burglaries resulted in transportation and a death sentence. You can discover who was involved later this year!



GLHS Book committee

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, **Pip Wright:** Whistlecraft – a true story of
March 12th a Suffolk poaching family

Thursday, **Ivan Cutting:** Creating Theatre from Local
April 23rd History Sources
NB. The 4th
Thursday

Saturday, **London outing** cancelled following committee's
April 25th decision. Deposits will be refunded

Thursday, **Philip Lyons:** The Wild West goes East –
May 14th Buffalo Bill's Tour of East Anglia 1903

Thursday, **A Summer Outing** A Guided Tour of Long
June 11th Melford Church (to be confirmed)

Thursday, **Summer Social Function**
July 9th Possibly preceded by a walk and talk around
St Mary's churchyard

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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.