

# Glemsford in the 1920s

recalled by Mr. Ted Hartley, December 1978.

---

*This is a fascinating insight into old Glemsford.*

The illustrations are partly Steve Clarke's, but the older material has been gathered (with permission) almost entirely from the [Foxearth Local History Society](#) website, for which the GLHS is immensely grateful.

Starting our journey at Low Road, at the bottom of Church Hill we come to Place Farm. Mr. Spencer Bigg farmed this: it was a small arable farm with a few cows . The skimmed milk cost 2d a pint. My wife used to fetch the milk in cans from Moyses Farm at Boxted, over a mile away. The choirboys were invited to listen to the first wireless in the village, which was set up on the lawn here - the best part of this was the slab cake and lemonade.

[Monks Hall](#) used to be three cottages, occupied by Mr. Chatters, George Piper the manager of the Silk Mill, and the Adams family. There was a deep well in front which supplied water for the houses.



Next we come to the church. With my three brothers I had to attend as a member of the choir and the Sunday School. The Choir outings included trips to the seaside and to the Wembley Exhibition. We travelled by charabanc. These held twenty five people, no roof, just a canvas hood, and we had to get out and push it up hills. One brother of mine who was a bellringer once climbed over the parapet at the top of the church , and holding on to the top walked along the projection which was four feet down !



To the left of the church was Churchgate Farm, farmed by John Goodchild, who was known as "Tapper". He also farmed Duffs Hill and Mill Hill farms, and he owned a portable steam engine, drawn by two horses, which was taken to different farms to drive the pitcher or elevator, drum and chaff cutter.



To the right of the church was [Park Farm House](#), run by the Sterry family. Further on, towards Bells Lane, stood the Prince of Wales public house, and opposite was Jim Brown's shop and bakehouse. The bread oven was made of firebrick. Faggots were put in and set alight, left to burn out, and the ashes were raked out and the dough put in - the end product was a crusty loaf.

Windmill Row was a row of houses just before Tomkin's Horsehair Factory.

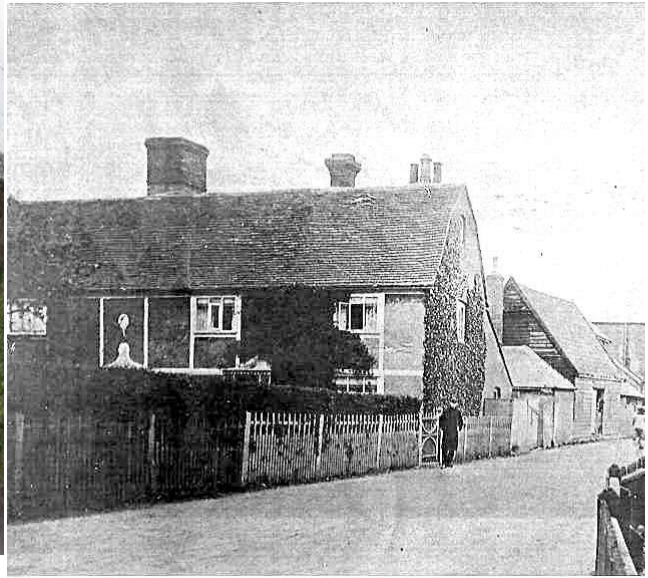




At one time, one hundred people worked there - mostly women.

Going down Mills Lane we come to Arnold & Gould's Horsehair Factory. This also employed a large number of people. The men were called 'hacklers' - they washed and combed (hackled) the hair ready for the women, who were called 'drurers'. Their job was to was to dress and form the hair into neat bundles. During the First World War, part of the factory was used as a prison camp. The area is still referred to as the 'Camp'. The German prisoners used to write messages, put them in matchboxes, and throw them out of the barricaded windows to the young women.

Further down, in Bells Lane, was Bob Beale's Garage. He had charabancs for hire. Most of these and the lorries had solid tyres - with the rough roads you can imagine the ride!



After this came Mr. Middleditch, the shoe repairer. Now, the Broadway, and Alfred Gane's Bakehouse and Post Office. After the bread was removed, housewives used to take pies to bake in the oven, which was still hot. This service cost one penny or three ha'pence.





Then the Foundry, run by [Downs](#), which was used to make machinery for the matting industry. Just across the road was the Matmaking Factory, employing quite a few men.







Making our way to Brook Street, we come to Mallin's shop, grocery and bakers, and in the same row of houses Mr. Elliott, optician and watch repairer. Opposite stood the Hair and Silk Factory.

Along the road, before we get to the [Crown](#) Public House, stood a flint and brick house. One room was used as a sweet shop - now demolished. Jimmy Jarman lived in Brook Street. He was the local postman. He had ladies and gents bicycles for hire at fourpence per hour.



At the bottom of Duff's Hill was Leo Smith's Grocery and Hardware Shop. He was known as "shocking Smith", as he always complained of the shocking trade!

Across the road was the Crown Public House, and down [Chequers Lane](#), we come to the brook, which has steps leading to the water, and a brick wall around the top. The brook has never been known to run dry. When the water tower was painted on the inside every three or four years, the water became undrinkable, so the villagers fetched brook water in cans and buckets.



Next, the Silk Mill, with its large lake supplying the water which drove the huge waterwheel, which in turn drove the silk winding machines. In the 1920s the mill was flooded. Glemsford had been hit by a cloudburst, and water rushed through the houses in Brook Street, down Chequers Lane and into the mill - there was terrific damage.





Now we come to Duffs Hill Farm, owned and farmed by “Tapper” Goodchild, and then on to Fern Hill, and over the iron railings on the right side of the hill to the rough meadowlands sloping down to the deep ditch or water course. This was known to all the boys and girls as the “Squeech”, and further on, a shallow part was called the “Runnies”. Both of these, with their huge beech trees, were the favourite haunts of all the young boys and girls, especially in summer.



Next The Broadway, and approaching Lion Road, we come to Thompson Taylor, as he was known, and Thompson’s Sweetshop. Then on to Lambert’s Sweetshop and milk retail business - a very busy and popular shop.



Now we come to the [Village School](#). Mr. E .F. Wilson was the schoolmaster - very strict, he was! Anyone misbehaving was given the stick. I can only remember having it once - when I pulled the handle off the porch door. We must have looked a motley lot then! - Three quarter length trousers, black stockings, some boys with wooden clogs with steel toe caps. The school was of red and white brick and was built in about 1871 at a cost of £3,000.



Opposite the school was the [Black Lion](#) public house; Mr. Challis was the landlord. Then there was Bill Pearman's blacksmiths shop, the only one in the village then. I

remember him shoeing the horses and the unmistakable smell of burning hoof. We used to bang on the doors and throw stones at the horses tethered outside.



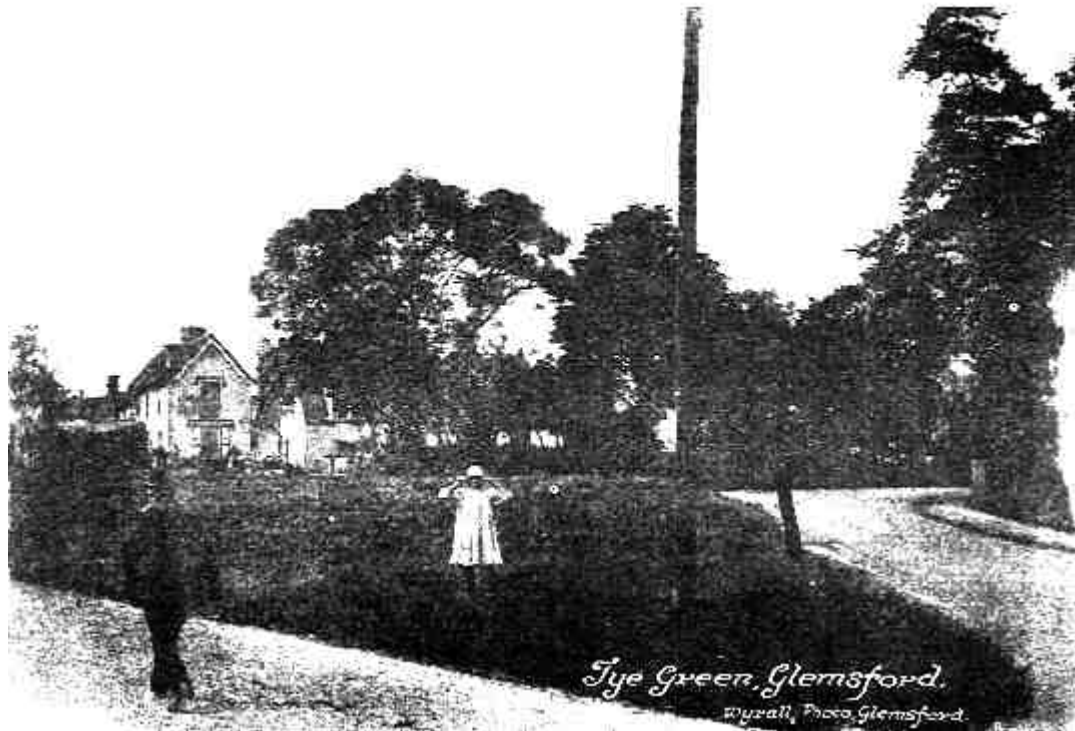
Then there was old Barney Farrance, he was quite a character, he used to sell bloaters, sprats, oranges and bananas; transporting his wares to different villages in a large box on pram wheels. Barney was asked: "How much are your bananas?" - "Penny-ha'penny each, mate", he replied. "Well let's have four for a tanner" - "Can't do that, mate, it cost me that much to buy 'em."

What about the chap in the harvest field, caught a rabbit, broke its neck, as he thought, laid it on a sheaf, turned round a moment later and saw it running away. He remarked, "That's a rum 'un. I killed that bloomin' thing once! Is your sister Mary still alive, Bill?" "Yes, as far as I know, she ain't writ to say any different." "There's a busload going to the football match tonight, and another busload going to bike!" "Poor old girl, she's as yellow as a pagle"

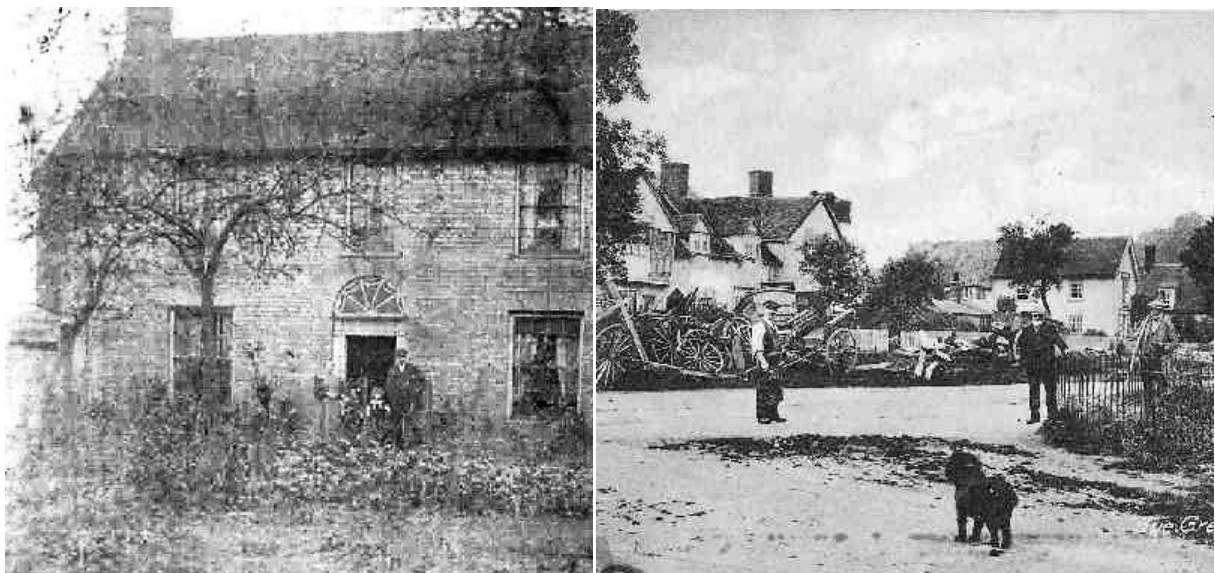
Now on to Tye Green - best part of the village. I would say that, as I was born in the old timbered house, now called "Peveralls". First, the butcher's shop run by Mr Ambrose - he also had a slaughterhouse; we used to watch the animals being killed. When they had been slaughtered, the butcher used to fling the bladders to us. These were then blown up, tied and used as footballs - a bit grim, but better than the rag balls. The loading bay at Glemsford Station was unsuitable for unloading animals, so this took place at Cavendish, and we used to help drive the animals from there to Glemsford. Once, a bullock lay in the middle of the road and refused to get up. A Cavendish boy put some water in the bullock's ear - the poor creature got up and ran all the way to Glemsford!







Next door to the butcher's shop was the Hardwick Arms public house, now called the Cherry Tree. Then there was the Plough Inn, right in front of my house - a pub with a well-kept garden, with lovely peaches trained to the wall. There was a meadow close by where the Village Fair was held - "Wright's Fair". The entertainment was provided by "Stinger Wright" - he was very well known throughout West Suffolk. Mr. Gane, the landlord of the Plough, used to smoke herrings in a shed behind the pub, using oak sawdust, shavings and bark from our old shop.



I must not forget Mrs. Peglers's shop, adjoining the Hardwick Arms. She sold sweets and paperback books, such as "Red Letter" and "Bessie and Billy Bunter". We called

her “Bunny Pegler”, as she had two large teeth! Her aniseed balls were forty for one penny, and you could also get twenty soft toffees or ten hard toffees for one penny.

Over the road was our wheelwrights. The Hartley family are known to have been wheelwrights from at least 1750. I left school before I was fourteen years old. My brother, who helped my father, died of blood poisoning when he was seventeen, so I was given permission to leave school to help my father.



I well remember my first job; my father was making a tumbril wheel. The nave was morticed and the spokes ready to drive in. He gave me a bucket and shovel, and told me to fill the bucket with fresh cow dung from the meadow behind our workshop. The ends of the spokes were dipped in the dung and driven into the nave - the dung acted as a sort of glue. This method must have been used by my ancestors, because I have broken old naves and found dung inside.

Now, the workshops. The main one was at front, close to the Green, with a shop above it for storing bolts, nails and paint, etc. All our paint was made in a paint mill - I have spent hours turning the handle, with strict orders not to touch the adjusting screws. In the top shop, my father used to finish small traps and carts - painting, varnishing and lining out. Two long heavy traps (ladders), were placed from the ground to the first floor, and the carts hauled up by rope and pulley. A store shed was behind the workshop. This housed the naves, fellies, spokes (all of these riven), ash and oak planks, patterns and templates of all descriptions. The old lathe was also housed there, with its large wooden flywheel, a wooden treadle, and various assorted tools.

Behind the shed, the blacksmith's shop forge, containing bellows, vice, drills, tongs and lifting and pulling dogs. Outside, the tyreing platform. This was a tyre bending machine with a sunken pit for heating the tyres. Anyone who thinks that a wheelwright's job is easy should try the bending machine!



Put in a 3 1/2 X 5/8 inch iron bar and start turning the handles. Or try a day welding at the forge, and then to the smoke and steam of shrinking the tyre onto the wheels - "shoeing", as it was called. The sawpit was about ten or twelve feet long, four feet wide, and six feet deep. I remember the water being pumped from the pit and the two sawyers arriving. These two came from Brockley, and used to travel to different villages to work. The log was placed over the pit and held firm by the dogs, one man on top, the other below using a pit saw. Another job I had was ripping the wagon shaft from a 3 1/2 inch thick plank. It was as hard as blazes - the saw ran under and out - my father had to come and correct this - I was only fourteen years old.

Old photographs of the Green in front of the shop show it absolutely full of logs, tumbrels and wagons. As boys, we made two see-saws, or "teematawter", as they were called. One for the younger boys - an old binder pole over a log, and for the older boys, a long hefty sapling over a large oak log, with three or four boys at each end. The idea was to bump the other side off - we used to play this most summer evenings.



Every Armistice day, my father used to give the signal for the two minute silence by firing our cannon, which was bolted onto a large block, and placed between two heavy timbers. Talk about bang! It was heard all over the village.

Once a year, before harvest, a "timber jim" - a two wheeled vehicle with pole and chains - was loaded with large timbers. Two road wagons, large and heavy with double shafts, drawn by two horses plus two trace horses, were loaded with smaller logs and taken to Wheelers of Sudbury to be sawn into planks suitable for the trade. I travelled on one once; we loaded up the day before, and set out for Sudbury at 6am. with quite a few people to see us off. We stopped on top of Skates Hill to have the brake shoes, or "slades" put on the rear wheels. The trace horses were unhooked and tethered to the back. Down the hill we went, and got home at 8pm - quite an occasion for a ten year old.

Next door to where we lived was a lady called Mrs. Chatters. She used to have a loom in one of her rooms, weaving horsehair cloth. I used to take the finished cloth back to the factory in Brook Street, and then bring another lot of work back to be woven. I got tuppence for that. There were many looms in the houses in the village. I have never actually seen this, but its true that women with babies attached their cradles to part of the loom, and thereby rocked the baby to sleep!

Quite close to us was old Jed (Charles) Pettit, the undertaker and builder. He too had a number of logs on the Green, used for coffin boards and posts. I was asked once to drive the horse and hearse back from the church, with very strict orders to walk the horse slowly - how I would have liked to gallop the old nag through the village!

Adjoining Pettit's workshop lived an old gentleman who used to collect a lot of herbs and hang them out to dry on the fence and the Green. The large green was also used by us boys to play cricket, football etc., also for religious meetings and political gatherings.

Around the corner to Cavendish Lane, and Debenham's Builders yard. I worked for him after my father died, as did Richard Deeks, much later. Some of our wood carving is in the main roof of Cavendish Church.

Clockhouse Farm is at the top of Cavendish Lane, and was farmed by Collis Goodchild (Old Collie), a bite-your-head-off type! I remember the stackyard full of corn stacks, and the ratcatcher coming with his ferrets, one or two of which were thrown on the top of the stack to chase out the rats. Those which came out of the top and sides were shot, and the dog snapped up those which fell to the ground. During threshing time, we used to go to the farm with sticks, to help kill mice and rats.

Old Collie had a rather fierce red poll bull. On Sundays we used to tease the bull, it pawed the ground and made horrible noises before starting to chase us, we always managed to vault over the gate in time but on one occasion it went straight through the gate and we had to climb trees to avoid it.

There were five ponds in the meadows behind our house and we used to get a long stick, tie a spoon to the end and lift out moorhen eggs; we also climbed trees and robbed owls' nests, we had to bend the spoon for that. My father explained how the ponds came to be there - clay was dug out to make clay lumps or bricks and to help make wattle panels.

New Street Farm was up a road branching off Cavendish Lane and was farmed by Collie Goodwood. In a meadow beside the farm was a sunken pit used as a sheep dip, a pond close by supplied the water. Collie and Tapper both kept sheep and employed a shepherd who during lambing time spent a lot of time in the Shepherds Hut. This was about 6 feet wide and 10 feet long of matchboard outside and lined inside, the cavity packed with fibre from the matting factory. The roof was also lined and there was a small tortoise stove. We made and repaired several of these huts.

Small wagons were used by the flax factory, some were bought by local farmers:- although not suitable for farm work, the buck was taken off and the shafts, wheels

and undercarriage used for the huts; it was then horse-drawn to the field. Another thing was the iron hurdle - twelve to fourteen feet long and three foot six high with two small cartwheels back and front. Seven or eight of these would be linked together and drawn by horses from field to field. When they came through the village they could be heard a mile away because of the screeching wheels and the rough roads.

This noise was the cue for us boys to run down the road, hop on and have a ride! The shepherd would try to frighten us off but he couldn't control both ends.

If a person was very ill in bed, chaff or caven was strewn in the road in front of the house to deaden the sound of farm vehicles. This happened when my brother died.

Plum Street was a narrow road from New Street to Mill Hill Farm. Leading from here was a footpath and cart track to what we called Hilly Mountains or the Hillies, a rough meadow with a sandpit at the top, sloping down to a deep ditch or water course twenty feet deep in places and more than that across. This was completely overgrown with bushes and was a favourite place for the boys.

Shepherds Lane led from the farm to the school. In a meadow down here there were twelve large poplar trees which were known as the Twelve Disciples, and before we got to the school there were three large elms which were known as the Three Sisters. All these trees have now gone.

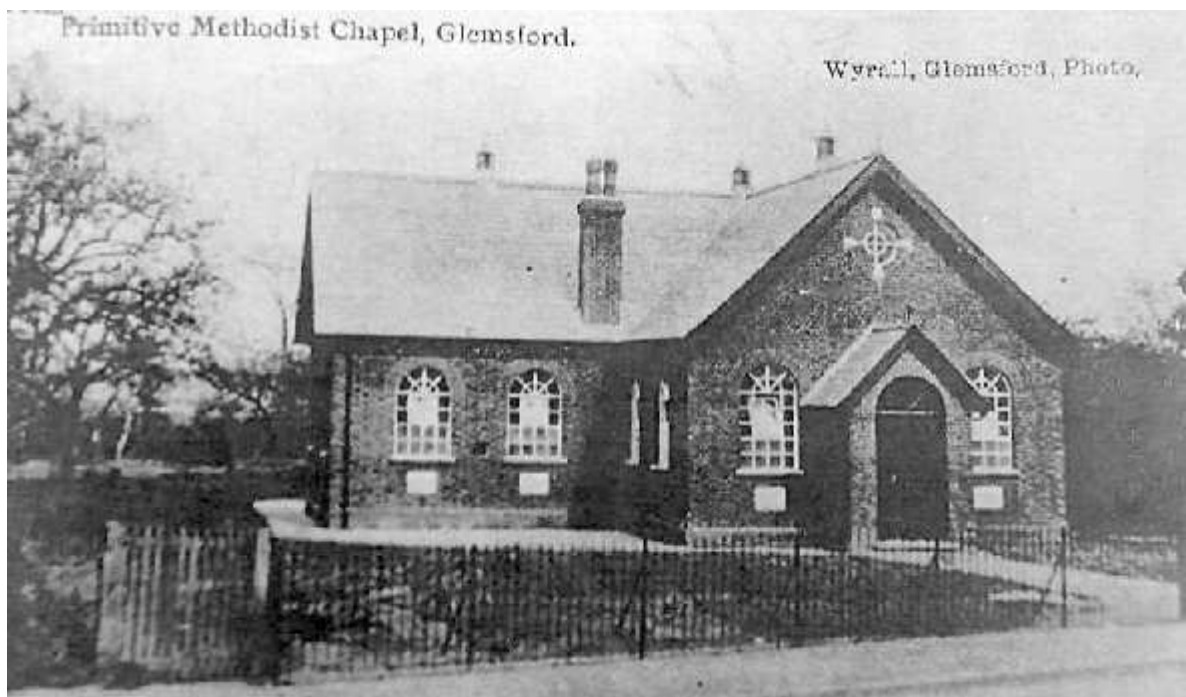
The children from the school down to Brook Street and up to the Church were called the "Brookies" and those from Tye Green to the Station the "Downies" - there was great rivalry between them.

Towards Hunts Hill, nearly opposite our sawpit was Billy Raymond's orchard - now there are two large houses there. Across the road was Fenn's Bakehouse, and further on, Tower Meadow and the Water Tower; part of which was the Surveyor's office. Mr. Taylor, the surveyor collected the rates for the then Urban District council. The outside of the tower was painted with aluminium paint and could be seen for miles. The tank is demolished now as the metal tank had rusted.





On the left of the road towards Hunts Hill was the Methodist Chapel which I remember being built. Further on was Felix Underwood's shoe shop; he had a horse and cart to carry his wares around the villages- the old horse stopped at every pub! Later he had a Model T Ford.



Next along the road was the Old School, used as a Sunday School in my youth. Dances and other entertainments were held there, sixpenny hops were popular - I met my wife at one - quite a good bargain for a tanner! Other week-nights were

taken over by the Men's Institute where we played billiards, darts and cards. The most popular game was bridge which we learned by watching the experts - the schoolmaster, the rector and the other nobs. You could join at 14 - but misbehave and you were banned.

Across the road was the Dentist. I had a tooth out when I was twelve - how I screamed! Once he got the pincers on your tooth he never let go - it was your head or your tooth.

Nearby was a small building where the village Fire Engine was kept, it had to be pulled by the firemen who were council workers. Box Iron Row were houses built for the weavers; old Charlie Elsdon lived there - always called "Show". He was a poacher and kept his ferrets in the pantry. Nearby was Neely Brown's Fish shop - he also collected rabbit skins and lived in a thatched house.



In another pair of thatched houses near the fire engine shed lived old Ezra Slater who gathered watercress from the river Stour and sold it in the village - he also bought rabbit skins. Mr Bigmore's horsehair factory was close by - all the above have now been demolished. Mr Millam had a fish shop next to the hair factory he travelled by horse and cart selling fish and collecting rabbit skins. Seven or eight folk collected skins which fetched threepence or fourpence each. The Baptist Chapel, now demolished, adjoined the fish shop; the graveyard is still there.



At the top of Hunts Hill on the right was Long's Grocery shop and on the left Long's Garage - they owned a charabanc, at first with solid tyres, later they had cars for hire and lorries and buses. Next was Mrs Maxim's sweet shop and tobacconist, her husband was the local carrier. He often took templates and patterns of shafts, plough beams etc. to Wheelers of Sudbury to be cut, they were brought back the same day, the charge being a shilling. His cart had brass caps on the wheels inscribed "Hartley, Wheelwright, Glemsford". On the same site was a butchers, Bullingham & Maxim ( son and son-in-law).



Opposite was a small matting factory run by the Smith brothers - now demolished. In



the middle of the hill stood a row of cottages (now also demolished). The British Legion Hut was built on that site - it's gone now. On the right of the road was Mr Cranfield's sweetshop and barbers. Next door, in house standing back from the road lived Mr Taylor - known as "Motorman Taylor" - the first man in the village to own a car - it was a Daimler.

At the top of Workhouse Lane ( now Flax Lane) was a deaf and dumb shoe repairer - you had to write on a slate what repairs you wanted. Directly behind this site were several dilapidated thatched houses, the site known as Mitre Square, all gone now. Down the lane on the right was a large orchard (Lee's Garage and houses are there now).







Next was the Flax Factory, built on the site of the old Workhouse. I remember it in operation, you could smell the stench a mile away - this was the “retting” or rotting of the flax.

At the bottom of Angel Lane was Mr Lee’s draper and grocery shop, and opposite was the Angel pub and Angel House, one of the oldest in the village. At the top of Angel Lane was Enoch Watkinson’s small matting factory. Further on was Grove Farm, then owned by Mr Fuller. A cart track and footpath led to a field called Hanging Hill, at the bottom of the field was Bill Gobbler’s smallholding - he kept pigs, turkeys and chickens. He once boasted he had shot a white rook and later found it was one of his own chickens!

Now Egremont Street - first on the left Art Chinnery’s shoe shop - he’s still there aged 84 - he started the business in 1922. Over the road the Ebenezer Chapel and next door to that Silas Gane’s bakehouse. Pump Lane is close by with thatched houses and a pump. The Cock public house, Copsey’s butchers shop and Cutting’s wholesale grocers are all together. Then Bretts the Coal Merchant - he lived in another thatched house.

Down the road on the left, another horsehair factory and directly behind a small chapel call the Ranters. Then Joe Gridley and his fried fish shop- he sold whelks and cockles and also collected rabbit skins. He had a stall at the village fair.





Opposite, the Greyhound house which used to be a pub. Next door a small chapel- an iron building we called the Tin Tab (Tabernacle). Then a coal shed belonging to Mr Taylor, the landlord of the Angel, and quite near a bakehouse run by Mr Cable, and a newsagent and sweetshop owned by Mr Sawyer. Alongside the shop another large matting factory.

Then the cul-de-sac called New Cut, off Egremont St. At the top an off licence (The Weavers Arms). The landlord was Walter Goodey- he was a plumber, painter and glazier. Skates Hill Farm next, owned by Collie Goodchild and the Lodge Farm also owned by him.

At the bottom of Skates Hill, on the left, Potash House owned by Mrs Twinn - she kept a lot of chickens which used to run in the road. As boys we used to catch a few, put them to sleep and place them across the road - place the chicken's head under it's wing, with both hands around it's body and wings, one or two complete circles and lightly place it on the ground - it stops there two minutes or more and gets up as if nothing had happened. I did that to my mother-in-law's chickens once, she thought they were all dead!

At the end of the village was an old lady called Rosie Byford, she kept two or three cows and supplied milk to the locals.

Then the Three Turns pub at the bottom of the hill, to the rear of this another matting factory, I can't remember it in operation.



The Lower Road was known as the Chicken Run and was where people from Glemsford, Cavendish, Foxearth and even Long Melford used to walk, meeting and

talking. The young ladies showed off their Easter rig-outs - many a romance blossomed from the Chicken Run!

Then Glemsford Station - Mr Herrow was the Station Master, very smart in his uniform.



Across the river Stour on a rough patch of ground was a gypsy encampment - a gypsy was murdered here; shot at point blank range by a well-known gypo Bill Munday, he got off through self defence. Gypsies were called Gypos or diddycoys.

An old well-liked character who lived rough summer and winter in the hedgerows and thickets was Jerry the scissor grinder, nobody knew his real name, he roamed the villages sharpening knives and scissors on his contraption.

I wonder if boys today would do this - we used to eat the young tender shoots of the briar ( wild rose), just the first 6 inches, also the young shoots of the hawthorn - we called this "bread and cheese - also the red fleshy berry of the fir (not the seed) , hips and haws and even the flowers of the primrose.

Finally, a few words about the Old Rectory. It was a spacious house set among chestnut and beech trees with large cellars, hothouse, green house, conservatory, beautiful gardens and well-kept lawns. I first remember Canon Hall living there, after him the Rev Banks- Williams - he left me his watch in his will. We were allowed to pick mulberry leaves from a tree on the lawn to feed our silk worms. The village flower show was held on the rectory meadow. This attracted visitors and the gardens were open to visitors. Dancing to the Long Melford Brass Band took place on the rectory lawns. The Girl Guides had a very successful group, the Rector's daughter, Irene Banks-Williams formed a group in the early 1920s. My wife was a guide and she's told me her group was always the first to get a fire going at camp. They peeled a silver skin of a Silver Birch, placed it under dry twigs and just see how quickly it burns!





---

Transcript of a tape recording made by Ted Hartley of Glemsford December 1978.  
Original transcript by D E Weston of Clare Middle School Re- transcribed by Dee  
Hamilton 1997