

HISTORY OF BURES ST. MARY and BURES HAMLET 1830-1914

By following this trail and looking at the remains of the last century's working existence in the village it is possible to make a rough picture of life in Bures. But remains are not enough so imagination will be needed to fill out the documentary evidence on which these notes are mainly based. The end of this period derives from the memories and knowledge of people still living.

Starting out journey on Lamarsh Hill, to the left the grandiloquently named Nightingale Hall. [1]. With its little Gothic window apparently an improved 19th century workman's cottage. In fact a 17th century [or earlier] frame moved up from the brick-yard area before the railway opened in 1849. It stands on the original pre-railway road that led from Water Lane to Lamarsh Hill at this point.

Down the hill to Bures Hamlet, in the 19th century the downtown working-class area of Bures St. Mary containing in 1851, all but one of the parish's paupers. On your left a sharp drop into the old brickfield now filled with the modern houses of Maltings Close. Here you have a clear view of the Maltings [2]

The Bures Maltings History

The Maltings were the most important non-agricultural source of work. This one was built in 1851, two years after the railway opened, and there were four others existing in that year. The Garrad family owned it. The block at the left end has doors where the barley grain went in, carried up 10-12 steps on cat-ladders in 16 stone sacks and also the cistern for soaking. To the right the extent of low ceilinged floors where the grain was turned over with metal ploughs as it sprouted. The small louvered windows controlled the critical temperature needed for the malting process. Next the beehive shaped kiln for drying the barley and then the chute to the right where the barley came out. Bures maltsters finished work about March/April when the barley was finished and switched to the land, local builders or the mill for the summer months returning in September at harvest time.

Continue around the corner [3] passing two derelict cottages of the same date where the foreman of the maltings lived. Left into Maltings Close and the former brickyard also owned by the Garrads and down to the end.

Ahead of you are Brick Kiln cottages [4] where the labourers lived. The yard was operating in 1837 and certainly earlier and closed before the First World War.

The moonscape configuration indicates where the brick earth was dug out. Notice where the right-hand cottage has been shortened to allow for the building of the embankment.

* These have been demolished since these notes were compiled.

Walk to the end of the close toward the left of the cottages. Here built into a garage are the remains of one of the three kilns, which stood on this site [5]. Two more have substantial remains behind the garage in the [private] garden. The pug-mill where the clay was mixed by a horse walking around it turning the blades, still stands a few yards inside. [Local children called it the pug-wash.] The soft, red bricks were shaped in wooden moulds and dried under little timber shelters two to three feet high roofed with pantiles. Once air-dried they went into the kilns for three to four days firing, were stacked for cooling and then wheeled on flat wheelbarrows to the railway on a wooden runway eight to nine foot high

Now back to the bridge. High up on your left the old loading platform [6] from the malting to the railway. To the right the Colne Road ran through the old goods yard. Under the bridge and to the right the railway house [7] occupied in 1851 by a Mr Page, ticket collector.

Turn left into Water Lane and looking ahead it is easy to see the line of the pre-railway road following the line of the cottages and eventually coming out where [8] Nightingale Hall now stands.

Basically Water Lane was what it looks like the home of farm labourers who lived on the lowest average agricultural wage in England, with a few paupers supported outside the Sudbury Union Workhouse [now winsomely called Walnut Tree Hospital]. Behind the wall on your right was the White House, which served as a home for the poor of the Hamlet only [9]. Out to the main road again. On your left the Secretaries [10] where the Garrads lived at this time. Farmers, maltsters, brickmakers and owners of sailing vessels. The Garrads were related by marriage to John Constable's family and both his brother Abraham and sister Mary used to visit here for dances and parties

One letter from John Constable's mother to her son described Mary's exhausted state after returning from 'dancing the light fantastic' at the 'heavy-footed Garrads' This form of visiting was a regular pattern of Constable family life so probably the young Constable visited Bures where his father was born.

On to the crossroads by the Swan [11] To your left the cafe*was once a bakery, one of several in the 19th century village. Opposite in the corner of the field you can see the apple trees of the gardens, which were behind, the now demolished smithy and butcher's shop [12]. To the right the Eight Bells. Here the post office van changed horses before going on to Clare. Broughams and wagonettes were let out from here too and acted as a taxi-service from the station. Beyond the Eight Bells was a large builder's yard now occupied by Hamlet Court. Part of the old work sheds still front Colchester Road at No14 and now make a pottery workshop.[14]

Opposite ramshackle decayed cottages stood where the 1920's terrace now stands [15], and further on next to No.26 a further five thatched rural rat-traps ran in a line back from the road on the site of No.28 [16]. These, with the present Nos. 14-24 contained some of the paupers of 1851.

Walk onto the bridge [17] [wooden until the 1890s] and look up the river toward Sudbury On the left the end of the barge-towing path [18] Here the horse crossed the bridge and jumped back on the barge from the wharf which was just below wharf cottage [19] [antique shop] It did this six times before the Bures Mill lock to cope with land where there was no right of way. To the right was the Tannery [20], now Bridge House

*Now transformed into an antiques centre.

The Bures Tanning Industry.

The yard closed in 1909 and the machinery to Ipswich. Parts of the frame of the old buildings are incorporated into the present Bridge House.

Hides came in by road, rail or river. The oak bark used in the tanning was brought in by road and weighed on a weighbridge inside Chambers's present garage. A small store of bark was kept inside Chambers but the bulk was stacked at the end of the Croft [21]

The yard had a steam engine for working the bark-crusher and the stack was next to the footpath close to the house called St Mary's, [22].

Wooden vats were set in the ground and the hides were put in with the oak-tan, lime and water. The treated hides were dried in the timber building still standing in the garden of Bridge House and visible from the bridge [23]. The lime and hair residue as used by a local builder as `tan-mortar`.

The tan yard entrance was opposite Chambersís [24].

Grouped around this industry were related crafts but one cannot state they categorically derived from it. In 1851 Bures had seven shoemakers, three bookmakers, a bootbinder, a collar and harness-maker, a bookbinder, three saddlers, and two glovers. A local skill was in making leather balls for games.

Now look downstream. The river formed an insuperable divide for the people of the two parishes. If you were born in Bures St Mary and stayed in the village you did not cross the river to live in Bures Hamlet and vice versa.

In fact there were more 'foreigners' from Mount Bures living in the Hamlet than there were people from St. Mary,

To your left was the Stour Navigation Company's wharf [25]. Cargoes were unloaded by men climbing up and down ladders carrying skips. The bargees slept on board, if necessary, in a small compartment. On the right of the bridge was a cutting for barges loading bricks from Garrad's brick-kilns [26]. Wagons came in from outlying and hamlets, carrying produce that would be shipped down to Manningtree and then round the coast to London

Horses towed 'gangs' of two barges. The Company employed a Mr Brady and his son to repair locks, tow path gates and stiles as full time maintenance men in the period before before 1914. To deal with railway competition after 1849 the Company experimented with a steam barge and on 26 October 1864 the Bures children had a school holiday to see the steam barge go through. Bures, with Dedham and Nayland, were the most important mid-points on the river, especially as the village possessed a watermill as well as two windmills and moreover, was the converging point for six roads.

To the right, on the site now occupied by the remarkably ugly Eight Bells Garage workshop stood the village oneman gas-works fuelled by the barges [27]

Everytime the river flooded the gas went out. On the same site stood the Merryweather horse-drawn fire-engine The volunteers had uniforms but no horses. These you provided yourself or were borrowed from the local builder's yard. One resident has a vivid memory of a young man from Wormingford furiously cycling into Bures to fetch the engine only to be told he had to fetch his own horses. This he did galloping back wildly on one and leading the other.

Looking further round the bend on the right is the Boathouse [28] which hired out rowing boats and sold a famous, home-made Ginger-beer in bottles which are now trawled from the river bottom by vaguely sinister sub-aqua club divers.

Now round Wharf Cottage [antique shop] and down the lane, On your right stood, in 1837, a granary by the wharf and a blacksmith's shop.[29] Further along was a kiln and malting which like the malting just the other side of the bridge [30] indicated the pre-rail era when they were supplied by river, and then a row of six cottages fronting the lane [31]

Through the gate into the field and round the back of the vicarage garden [32]. In the 18th century this field was known as the Camping, the name of a sort of homicidal football played here and common to many Suffolk villages.

Round and across to Nayland Rd, To your right the former British School built in 1854 [33] with the teacher's house to the right. All for £360.

We come later to the National School. In 1855 Samuel Grimwood ran an academy for the

better off children.

Left towards the Church sq. Stop opposite Bures House and notice the red-brick buildings to its right abutting the road [34]. These are the remains of a very big maltings; Four kilns stood here on the site of the present factory and their premises ran from here down to the corner and behind [35]. If you look through Swifts Factory gate [now residential properties] you can see the remains of a white painted kiln.

On Into Church Sq, Harrods on your left was a grocers and drapers owned by Mr Fitch in 1837 [36] Going towards the High Street, at the end of the churchyard wall, was a cottage and garden [37]. Samuel Death's smithy and Henry Salmon's bakehouse were next to the Queen's Head in the 1830`s [38].

Cross the road. Chambers on your right developed from a saddlers in the 1870s to a livery stable. They also ran a weekly horse bus to Sudbury and Colchester. An alternative was the much slower carrier's cart. Left past the tannery chimney to the open space of a small workshop [39]. This originally contained malting-chambers and maltshops in the 1890s. On your right was a bakehouse tucked away behind the houses between Drakes and Churches [40]

Stop facing the Baptist Church [41]. To your left of its site facing the road was a blacksmith's shop with a wheelwrights next door To the right was a malting now used by Churches [42]. All this existed in the 1830`s. To your left of the Church is a one-storey building built in 1840 that began as a Sunday School and became the National School [i.e. for nonconformists][43] Round the back is the extension put up in 1844 as demand swelled. The Church also ran its own benefit society in the 1860`s, a self-made welfare tradition that had its roots in the Middle Ages in the village. Another tradition, which antedates the Reformation, was that of religious dissension. In 1890 a group broke away from the rigorous discipline of the Particular Baptists who controlled the Church and built their own Free Church in the Croft. Locally known as 'Spite Hall' it became the Women's Institute base and is now a house with Presbyterian foundations [44]

The grandson of one of the founders of the Free Church, Dupont, became the first president of post-UDI Rhodesia.

Continue up the High Street, passing another old malting owned by the Boggis family in the 1830`s, and now used by Churches [45]. Two kilns still survive which are clearly visible from Friends Field estate.

Finally up to the Cuckoo Hill junction To your left next door to the Manse stands Junipers [46], formerly the Parish's house for the destitute. Ronald Pratt, the Relieving Officer for the district, lived in the village. Up Cuckoo Hill passing a beerhouse of 1837 on your left [47] to the almshouses put up in the 1860`s [48].

This has briefly surveyed the village in the hundred years to the First World War. It is not remotely complete as a description, but may help to recreate the old community by replacing what was destroyed and interpreting what remains. Overwhelmingly the work of the village was agriculture like most villages? but its industries and position provided a hinterland that gave it an importance beyond that of a village but below that of a town.

Compiled by John Parkhouse.

Date unknown, 1970 or later

