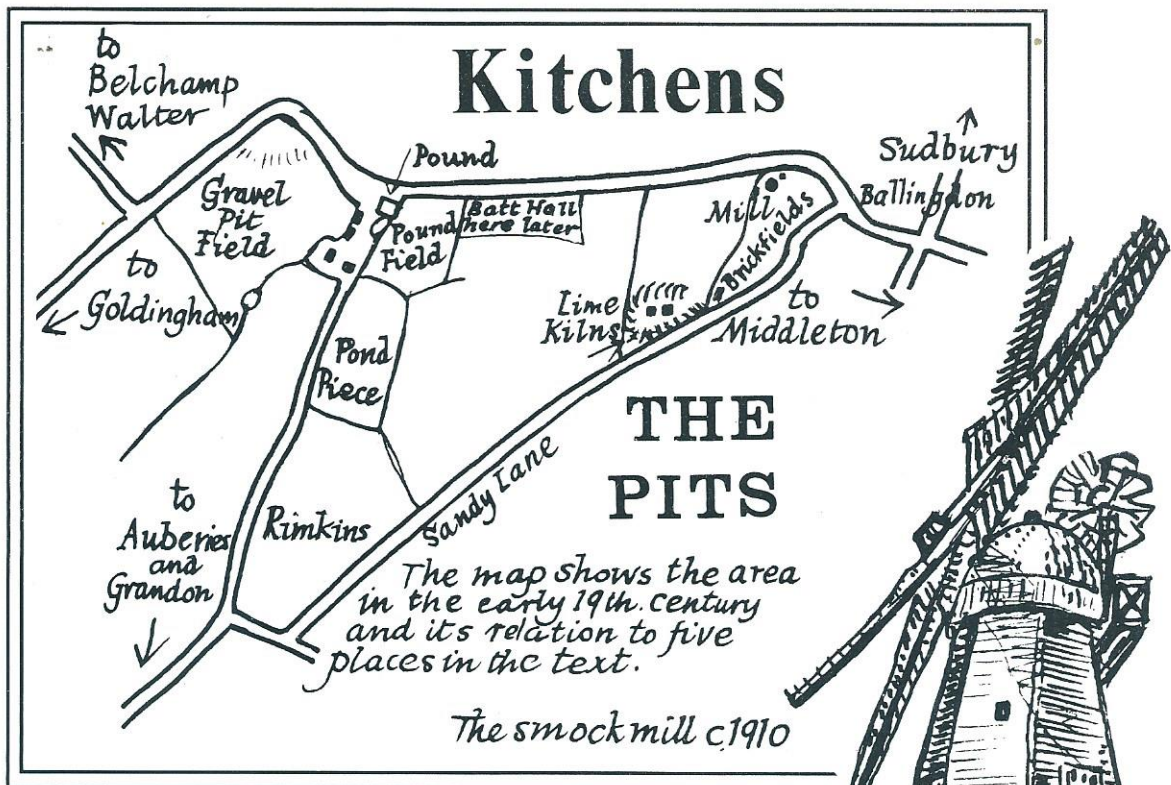


8. BATT HALL, THE PITS, KITCHENS AND FINCH HILL

Batt Hall

This rather curiously named terrace of twenty-one houses was built in 1863 just over the border from Ballingdon. On the plaque are the initials of the developer I.O. (?Oliver), and its original name Prospect Place. The prospect from the third floors certainly is a fine one. The later name (now officially adopted) seems to be a descriptive nickname from joking suggestions that brickbats, half bricks or seconds, from the nearby brick works were used in some part of these houses.

The big second storey windows were designed to give weavers plenty of light for their looms. The 1871 census was taken soon after Prospect Place was built. It shows that nine silk-weaving families were, in fact, living in the houses making a total of twenty silk weavers in Nos. 2,3,5,6,7,8, 14 & 15. Their birthplaces and those of the children show, what we would expect, that they had lived in a number of weaving centres: London, Haverhill, Braintree, Bocking and Sudbury. The occupations of the wives and older children are often given as weaver in addition to the husband. The manufacturers could pay lower prices (2/3) outside London and they tended to go to places where woollen weavers had at one time been established. Two of the other houses (Nos. 18 and 20) held





Batt Hall Bulmer August 1979

coconut matting weavers. Add to this twelve wives straw plaiting in other houses and what a hive of industry Batt Hall became one hundred years ago.

The other residents were mostly Bulmer, Ballingdon or Sudbury born. There were twelve agricultural workers, four brickmakers, two millers and a maltster. A sawyer occupied the detached building next to Prospect Place. Apart from the plaiters one woman was a nurse and one was a grocer. The groceress lived with her silk weaver husband at No. 4 and this house was still a shop (an off-licence) until recently. At one time it was also a bakery. Mrs. Pearson, who kept, it was born at Batt Hall but went to school in Sudbury in the 1920s because "it wasn't safe for one girl on her own to walk to Bulmer school". Later when there were more children to walk with her they all went to Bulmer. Now a taxi paid for by the County Council brings children into the school.

Despite their proximity to Ballingdon many of today's Batt Hall residents take part in church, school or village hall activities and support Bulmer organisations. Two of the village's most energetic footpath walkers strode forth from Batt Hall and one of them, John Drury, drew it for this book.

The Pits

The corner of Bulmer that adjoins Ballingdon (itself formerly an Essex parish) has an interesting industrial history. In the 1871 Census it was called "The Pits". Chalk is near the surface here on the Stour Valley slope and it was used for improving the heavy clay soils of the area. Arthur Young reported on the cost of improving each acre of Bulmer's heavier land towards the end of the 18th Century. Hollow draining cost £2.10s.0d. Eight waggon loads of chalk were then put on at a cost of £3.4s.0d. To this add filling, carriage, spreading and allowance for beer at 8s. per load, totalling £3.4s.0d. The cost, therefore, was £9.6s.0d. per acre.

The chalk was also used for lime burning for a very long period. There is a will of 1840 for Richard Down, limeburner. Two lime kilns are marked on the map of 1808. We know that Robert Andrews of the Auberries owned kilns in the 18th Century. The perambulation record of 1711 mentions the chalk pit and the kiln. In 1640 a Bulmer lime-burner is mentioned at Quarter Sessions and in 1425 the Vicar was awarded the tithes from Bulmer lime kiln. In 1832 John Shorten's occupation is also connected with chalk. He was a whitening maker.

No lime kilns are marked in 1876 but a brick kiln is nearby because good brickearth was also available and being worked then. The brickfields just over the border in Ballingdon provided work for Bulmer men. A new estate of houses, part of it in Bulmer and called Bush Grove occupies this field now.

Then overlooking all this was Bulmer's beautiful smock windmill. It had a pitchpine and oak wooden tower painted white (the smock) on an octagonal red brick base. Only the three storeyed base remains with the marks still visible where other buildings were attached. James Orbell was here in 1840 but the Clover family had taken over by 1846. In 1914 Henry and Sydney Clover were the windmillers. The sails had gone by 1916. Lightning struck the mill twice. Parishioners remember the last miller Clover and say that when he stopped using an oil engine he continued to sell and deliver other millers' product by cart.

There was also a Bulmer millwright. Thomas Bare or Bear (spelt variously in the same document) agreed in 1830 to build a new tower windmill at Lavenham for £430. It was to have four new patent sails and replace an old post mill. Samuel Bear, a millwright's labourer, lived in this part of Bulmer in 1840 and 1871; but it looks as if the millwrighting business went into Ballingdon because an agreement by William Bear (of Ballingdon) to build Buxhall mill in 1860 is printed in Rex Waile's book.

The cottages in the pits had fourteen people living in them in 1871 including three agricultural labourers, a carter and a brickmaker. The area is currently threatened by a Sudbury by-pass.

Gravel, clay and chalk pits were plentiful in this corner of Essex where it slopes down, quite dramatically at times, towards the Stour and where the geological pattern is most clearly visible.

Kitchens

There is a lost Domesday manor somewhere in Bulmer called Bineslea. 13th Century charters refer to it. For instance William Goub of Binesle gave one and a half acres of land near the wood of Ralph de Grendon and there is mention of a piece of land in the 'villa' of Bolemere lying in the 'hammelletto' of Bynesle. The Victoria County History says that this manor was close to Belchamp Walter and Ballingdon. It occurs in the Great Hospitallers Cartulary as "a place in the neighbourhood of Middleton and of Goldingham." Remember that Grendon was near Auberries and then find the five places on the map and you have found yourself a lost manor because Kitchens has to be Binesley. "The Kitchen" was often referred to as an old manor and Reaney tells us that it was purchased in 1380 as an endowment for the College of St. Gregory at Sudbury. The suggestion is that the priests used the farm to grow food for their kitchen or the profits to maintain it and it took this name thereafter.

In 1545 it is spelt Kechyn and has gone back to lay ownership. By 1700 the Brage family owned it and the property deed calls it the Manor of Kitchen formerly held by William Morse and then let to Roger his son. A house and lime kiln with lands were held by John Stebbing. Robert Andrews bought it in 1792 and his deed runs, "all that Manor and Farm called the Kitchen of 228 acres occupied by Elis. Nice widow with the lime kiln, cottage and garden thereunto". From thereon it become part of the Auberries estate but was still let as a farm. The map of 1808 marks the pound where strayed animals were kept.

The next item from a newspaper illustrates the depression in farming in the late 19th Century. In 1881 E.L. Baker farmed Kitchens paying a rent of forty four shillings an acre, eleven shillings tithe (£1,200 per year). He asked his landlord for a reduction in rent. This was refused so Baker left the farm saying that he was unable to make it pay. Eight acres of land was sold to Sudbury in 1901 as it was required for sewage works and some the following year to Brundon Hall "to make a new and direct road" to that property. New cottages went up in 1912.

Col. Burke has the last word from his notebook in 1913: "Kitchen. The house had been built at various dates of timber and plaster. Some of it was very old indeed and with a great brick chamber to the kitchen chimney for smoking meat for winter use. The house was not fit for modern use and had for many years been occupied by a labourer only. All was pulled down except for the modern brick part and a new house was built. The architect was A. Howard and the builder C. Deaves of Bures (£930)".

How appropriate that Kitchens should have had an interesting kitchen chimney. Perhaps meat for the Sudbury priests was smoked in that great chamber.

Finch Hill

This group of houses adjoining Brundon is a largely 19th Century development. It also arose, like several other Bulmer hamlets, to cater for the great increase in population in the early part of that century. Bulmer as a whole had 50 houses in 1766, 64 in 1801, 158 in 1841 and 186 in 1871. The map for 1777 shows nothing at Finch Hill and that of 1808 shows only one house. By 1840 there were eight households. The tithe map also shows on both sides of the hill as far as Smeetham Hall Lane narrow strips used as "Potato Gardens". Presumably they were allotments for the householders to grow vegetables. In 1845 the Vestry Accounts mention eleven cottages at Finch Hill. The 1871 Census numbers the houses from one to fifteen. Numbers ten and eleven were unoccupied. The population by this time was beginning to drop. The other thirteen held fifty two people: ten agricultural labourers, nine wives who were full-time straw plaiters, two gardeners, a master carpenter, a shepherd, a sawyer, a seamstress, a cook and twenty two children. Before the well was dug the people of Finch Hill walked to Bardfield River (Belchamp Brook) to get their water. Yet should it be Finch Hill? Bob Raymond's father used to say that its proper name was 'Pinch' and it is so named on one 19th Century document. He said that people in his day, when times were hard, used to refer to the dwellers on the hill as "that lot who live on Pinchgut or Starvegut Hill".

Out Foreign

Bob Raymond was born at Finch Hill and went to Bulmer School which started him on a lifetime's interest in music-making by teaching him to read music. He remembers too the excitement of being taken on trips to Castle Hedingham by donkey cart to see friends or relations. It was an all-day round trip of about twelve miles. The very first time he went on this journey abroad, he was about seven years old and he kept wondering whether he would see palm trees round the next corner. The school's geography teaching was no more to be blamed (perhaps praised) than could today's be for the following conversation heard in 1979. The school had one little coloured boy who had lived for most of his years in a neighbouring village. A five year old was heard asking him: "Where do you come from?". The answer came correctly, "Great Henny". The five year old, no wiser, came up with with, "Is it very hot there?"