

13.

A FINAL PERAMBULATION

We thought of calling this book "Corn from Olde Fieldes" to cash in on the rural nostalgia market but then discovered to our astonishment that a book with this title already exists. We hope you have enjoyed our conducted tour round Bulmer's hamlets. It has an energetic group who walk its footpaths today. Interesting details survive of the perambulations of the parish bounds from 1711 to 1804. Robert Andrews records paying the men and boys with money or meals. Either the trees on the boundary were marked or stones were placed as markers.

By tradition boys were beaten at strategic intervals to imprint on their "memories" where their parish boundaries were. It took about five hours to get round. Some of the big marker stones are in situ today and were seen by this year's bound beaters.

The two maps that follow show what has happened to the fields over the last two hundred years. Some field names are of course very old and provide interesting clues to the past as we have seen in previous chapters:

Reaney tells us that Helen's Croft (No. 27 on the map) and Blackland Bottom (13) had the same names in 1361.

Often names are descriptive: (29) Goldenfield from the colour of crop or soil, had that name 450 years ago. (38 and 67) Bean Croft and Sare Croft: when Bert Felton saw the old names for these fields on the map of 1808, he said "Yes, the bottom corner is good land and would grow good beans and the top is poor so the crops would easily get seared off". (66) Missermere is probably messymere or muddy land. (136) Good Allen, the E.D.S. tells us Allen was grassland recently broken up.

(160) Lamsey could come from Lamb or Lammas when lands were used for grazing after the hay harvest around August 1st and the fences were removed.

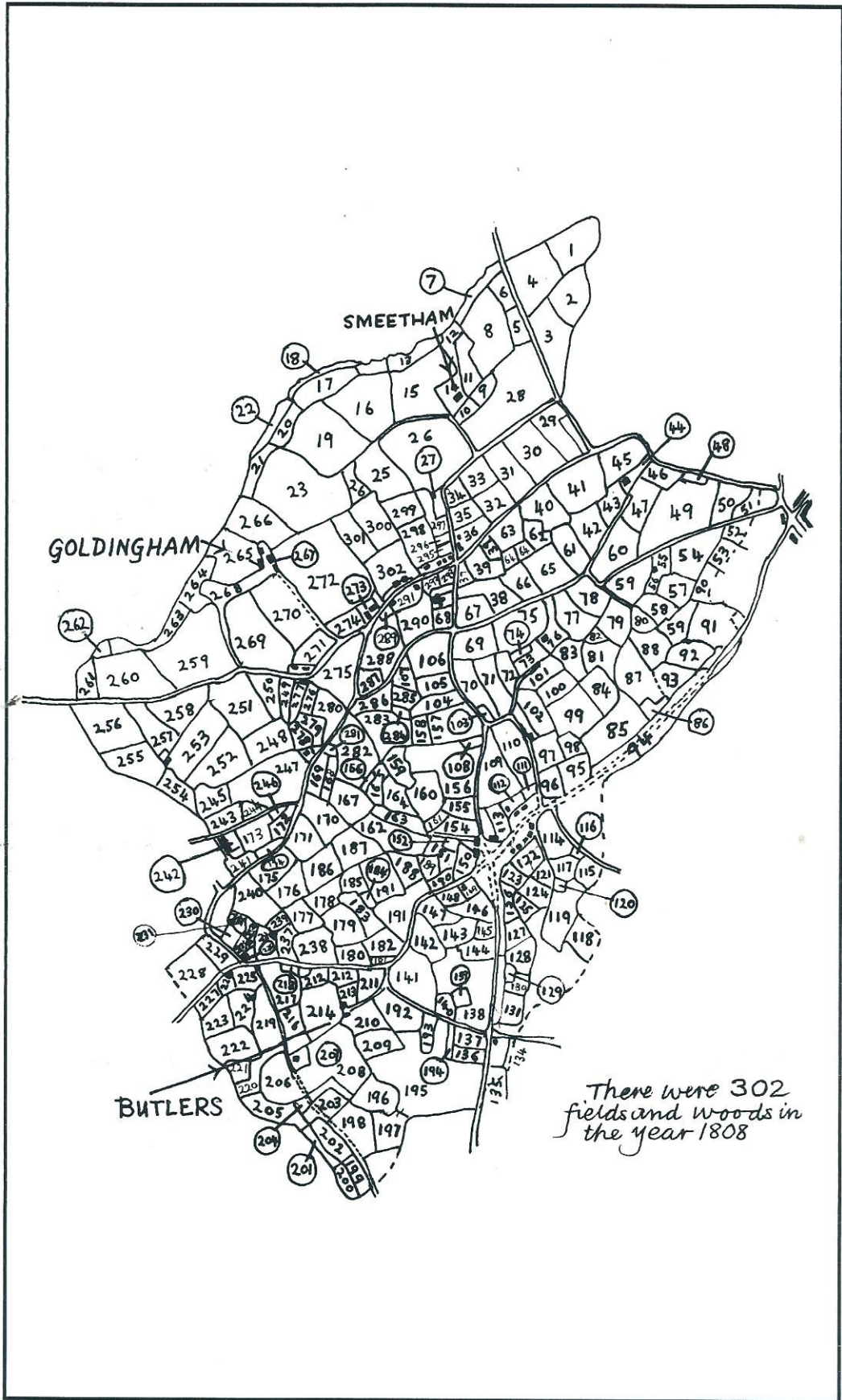
(221) Ninny ought to be what it seems to be. (251) Wool could be what it seems but is sometimes wolf.

(268) Slade: this locally was a narrowish strip of land often connecting other fields with tracks or roads; there is another slade at the Tye belonging to the Parish Council and elsewhere the word means a wide green road or a strip in a marshy valley.

(271) Carter Hawk is an intriguing name and one dialect dictionary suggests that it was connected with the hawkey load or the last load of the crop at harvest time, so was the Goldingham last load for the horkey carted from this field?

(287) Cutters - a cut field was one drained by deep furrows.

Over the last twenty years or so, several of the field names have changed. This seems mostly to occur when a new owner takes over a farm, especially when there are no workers taken on with the farm to carry the names forward. It is interesting to look at some of the new names and their derivation. Some are obvious and speak for themselves - Goldingham Pond Field, Orchard Field, Low Meadow. Others record the previous name of the farm or its owner. When H. P. Cooper took over the land of Hill Top Farm, the large field came to be called Days after Arthur Day, the last owner. Brickwall field



Fields and Woods - 1808

recalls Brickwall Farm to which it had belonged. Theatre Field was likened to an amphitheatre. Lucerne was the crop grown. Other names have changed more subtly. Brick Kiln Wood became Brinkles Wood; Dove House Field became Duffles; May Hill Field, Maize Hill Field; Little Coney Field, Little Cornerford and Dysters is now Dices; Cranes into Screens sounds like a less subtle mis-hearing.

The field names on the modern map have, wherever possible, been obtained from the farmers or one of their employees. Comparing the two maps, the difference of field size between 1808 and the present day is very obvious. It is interesting to note though that the fields of Smeetham Hall remain largely unaltered, and that where Domesday manors like Goldingham, Smeetham and Butlers remained reasonably intact throughout the centuries, their fields are large and have changed least. The complete list of field names can be had from Peter Rowe, appropriately at "Cornfields" in the Street.

Proper People and Foreigners

Today's walkers regret the passing of so many old roads and foot-paths and also pass the sites of many vanished cottages and small farms as they go. In the early years of the century, small cottages sometimes changed hands for £10. Astonishingly farm workers were paying £4 per annum in rent but of course to save this amount to buy your own cottage was far from easy. It is not surprising that older country people find today's cottage prices remarkable. It is, however, the superfluous farmhouses and the old cottages that have helped to keep up the population today. People like to live in something old especially if it has beams and the new houses are occupied because of the attractions of village life.

Many residents have to work elsewhere but two thirds work in or within six miles of Bulmer in small towns like Sudbury, Halstead or Heddingham. The old and the new residents have got on well together in the village partly because they are evenly balanced in numbers and partly because the Parish Council, chaired by John Dixey for the last twenty years, has been keen that they should. In 1988 42% of the village had lived in it for less than 11 years and 43% had been there for more than twenty. Again the contributors to this study were a good mixture of the old and the new. It was edited by someone precariously placed in the middle fifteen per cent - neither foreigner nor "proper Bulmer person".

Home Made

In 1841 the people of Bulmer were reported to be getting enough to eat on the farmworker's wage by living "mainly on flour and potatoes with a little pork". Memories of the diet around the turn of the century are also of plain but unadulterated fare; own-baked bread and own-grown vegetables from all those Bulmer allotments eked out with the products of the family pig or a herring.

Before his school days and the 20th century started, Sid Rowe used to walk the five or so miles from Upper Houses to Mauldon's brewery and back to get the yeast for his mother's baking. If anyone who has read this portrait of a village feels disposed to describe it as home-made, that will please us. Has it all been a shade too sunny? Are you complaining that there has been no mention of catching rabbits or of gossip in a book that purports to be about village life?

Catching a Surprise

An anonymous contributor said:

"Well, this happened over 60 years ago, when I was a boy. We went one night onto a field. Dad had set a net across the gateway. Uncle and I dragged a long rope across the stubble towards the gateway. This was to put up any rabbits or hares, which hopefully Dad would get in the net. The rope was weighted in the middle to make sure it kept to the ground. When we got nearer to the net I could hear Dad was having a bit of a struggle with something biggish. He was a-puffing and blowing, and I thought, "Reckon he's got an old hare'. When we got up to him he hadn't got a hare or nothin'. All there was was a tidy ol' stink! He'd dived on it when it hit the net. I reckon he soon let it go again though!

“Of course, some of the old boys used to use long nets. I remember Dad making one for someone once. These would be used in front of the rabbits’ holes, close to a hedge, while the rabbits were out feeding on the field. A dog would then be let loose to startle the rabbits and they got tangled in the net as they made for their burrows. They were also used to drag the field for game. The gamekeepers of The Auberies used to “bush” the fields to stop this. “Bushes” were usually blackthorn branches stuck into the ground at intervals. A long net used to be kept behind the bar in one of the Ballingdon pubs, I don’t remember which one. The landlord used to hire it out to anyone who wanted it. There was an old boy called John, who they called a lazy old beggar, but I know one night he lugged a sack right full of rabbits away from Heaven Wood to his home, two miles away!”

Gossip

Not all of the gossip took place in previous centuries but it might be safer to illustrate its quality with a 19th century example. David Badham, a Bulmer farmer, must have been hurt by it because he wrote a letter to the Church elders complaining about “the malignant insinuations” that had been circulating “relating to the lost key of the iron chest” in the church. Open ended finishes are fashionable so please feel free to unlock this puzzle in your own way. The names of the contributors to this book now follow and they hope that they have unlocked a few doors on Bulmer’s story for you.