

## 12. UPPER & LOWER HOUSES

Upper and Lower Houses get their name from their physical situation rather than their relative social status. Lower Houses, in a little valley leading to Belchamp Brook, are some 75 feet nearer to sea level than those up on the hill. Upper Houses lie just over half a mile from the end of Bulmer Street along a lane which eventually emerges as a green lane on the Hedingham Road at Bulmer Brickfields. It makes a very pleasant walk and going along it, it is not difficult to believe that it is ancient. Part of it could correspond with the Roman road which must have gone close to Halstead, through Maplestead and Bulmer to Rodbridge at Long Melford. Counts along it give some of the hedges a pre-Conquest date. When Auberies estate workmen were cleansing and deepening the ditch which runs from the little bridge below Upper Houses to Lower Houses they uncovered a patch of stone and hoggins and there used to be stepping stones across Belchamp Brook very near this projected road line.

### **Red With Blood?**

The Roman farm site and Gallows Green were near this lane and the Saxon and mediaeval finds mentioned in the Brickfields section lie close to it. To add to the interest of this walk there is a strong local tradition that the track striking off north-eastwards past the church and continuing as Sandy Lane to Ballingdon was a route into Sudbury used by drovers, some say by coaches and with beer gardens to refresh the traveller near Wesborough Hill. The field on the west of the Upper Houses road is called Dean Field on some maps and Dane on others and the track leading to the church goes up "Red hills" which several local people say are supposed to get their name because a battle between Saxons and Danes was fought there.

The little settlement at Upper Houses seems to have started with a timber framed house in the 17th century. This house of two storey construction has a simple roof frame with collar beams. A map of 1755 taken from a survey of 1707 shows the house as "Mr. Manning's house now Bambridges". This house had members of the Rowe family living in it for several generations. David Rowe born in 1842 lost his forearm in a chaff cutter at Goldingham Hall in 1888. To support his family he took on lots of jobs, selling fish, mole catching, some work on the farms and as a postman collecting letters from Bulmer Post Office and delivering to Lower House, Upper Houses, New Barn, the Brick Yard and Butlers. A look at the list of contributors to this book will show that the Rowes have played an important part in it.

### **Sacrifice or Economy of Effort?**

Another timber framed structure, originally stables and then converted into a house, stood to the west but this was demolished some six years ago and in rebuilding the skeleton of a donkey was found buried under the threshold. It is tempting to think of in pagan rites - burying animal remains to bring good fortune - in this outpost of Bulmer.

Or did the donkey die in the stables and, rather than carry a heavy load any distance, did those burying it simply dig a shallow hole near the door?

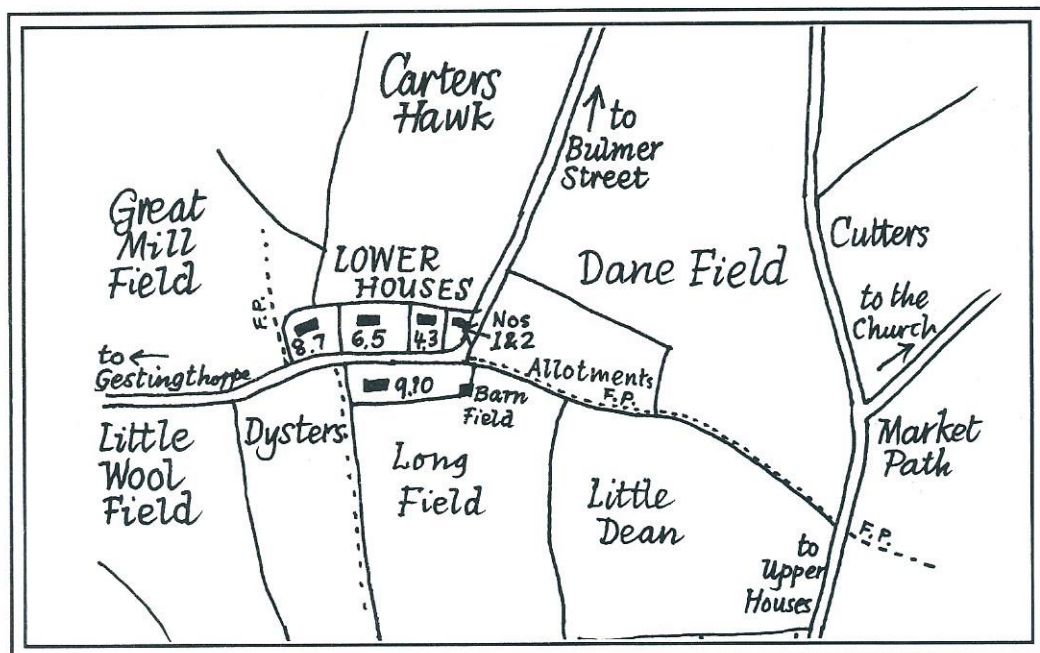
The Hop Ground is still marked on the map of 1808. Hops and other special crops like coriander, weld (for fustian) and teazles (for woollen cloth) were widely grown in this area in the 18th century. A brick built house to the east seems to have commenced life round about 1800 as simple cottages for farm labourers. The Dallimores live here now, great walkers of footpaths. Behind one of the rafters a bill dated 1867 was found for £34, from Ballingdon brewery. The farm wage then was ten shillings. With wife straw plaiting and the children bringing in a little, a whole family might not make sixteen shillings a week. Perhaps they were a very big and very thirsty family living in this cottage or did the neighbours come in, unofficially, to help them out?

There remain two modern bungalows together with other buildings used for lorry repairs and servicing to complete the community of Upper Houses. It was known in the last century as Upper Halfway Houses, presumably because it is roughly halfway between the church and the Brickfields. There is a (once important) footpath from Upper Houses to Gestingthorpe. The population was 46 in the 1841 census dropping to 33 in 1871 and 14 in 1979. In 1871 all the males were listed as agricultural labourers.

Phil Rowe made bricks on his own account at Upper Houses between the wars having worked at Bulmer and Cambridge making bricks and tiles. First he dug clay all the first winter. The next year he started his clamp type kiln. The thirties depression made the bricks very difficult to sell. In fact he described his experiment in self-employment with these words: "I was the worst bloke I ever worked for". You can see his bricks in the chimney of Inglefield in the Street.

#### Lower Houses

Lower Houses is on the Gestingthorpe road out of Bulmer. It comprises four houses all of timber framed construction but greatly modified and altered and three of them thatched. The oldest building appears to be that on the south side (now two cottages). It is listed and is an early hall house with a central hall section originally open to the rafters and small side sections of two rooms on either side of the hall. One of these rooms has the original early plastering. This house was known in the 18th century as Dysters. A Benjamin Dyster was buried in Bulmer in 1614.



Map based on one of 1840. The numbering of the houses is explained in the text.

Two of the three cottages on the north side of the road seem to have been built in the 18th century and the third may be a little earlier.

Lower Houses forms a very picturesque group at the angle of the road. The small field on the east of the road is owned by the Parish Council and was formerly allotments.

The population shows a decline from 68 in 1841 to 33 in 1871 and then to nine in 1979. In 1841 there were five double cottages (numbered on the map from 1 to 10). By 1871 one of the pairs (Nos. 3 and 4) was unoccupied and later demolished. It might be interesting with the aid of the 1871 census to take a closer look at one of the families. Samuel Butcher lived at No. 1. He was 47 years old. He and his 17-year-old son were agricultural labourers. His wife and their daughters of 14, 11, 9 and 7 years were all straw plaiters. The younger son was four years old. They also had a female lodger who straw plaited. Nine of them lived in half a cottage.

Most of the Lower Houses women plaited. (In the 18th century they would have been spinners). Phil Rowe, who lived in the cottage which in 1841 was Nos. 7 and 8, also used straw. He made fine Corn Dollies and Oxfam benefitted from their sale. Peter Rowe restored and added to this cottage and in the pargetting he included representations of the tools of Phil's trades, beekeeping, thatching and brick making.

This corner seems to attract journalists. Dudley Carew, the cricket correspondent for The Times, lived in Nos. 1 and 2 during the '50's. Also, until his recent death, Maurice Richardson, author and journalist, lived at Lower Houses. He rode a bicycle with style but on his way from Sudbury Station he often alighted from the taxi clutching a very bulky string bag full of detective thrillers which he would racy review for The Observer newspaper. Once young writers of a little newspaper at Bulmer School invited him to talk to them. He did this with great modesty, as one writer to others, and held them fascinated with such stories as his meeting with the oldest criminal in England.