

Welcome to the Bulmer Historical Walk. We invite you to 'step back in time', and trust that the guide will enhance your perambulation. (The 'shorter' route is just over four miles, the 'longer' about five)

*From Village Hall proceed towards Church. 'Stop One' occurs on meadow near entrance to Churchyard.*

### **STOP ONE: CHURCH MEADOW**

Imagine numerous children playing here, for the Village School was situated nearby from 1840-1965. Note also the massive oak tree. The school's first football was purchased by the children gathering acorns - for pig feed - from beneath this and many other local oak trees.

Imagine also during the second World War a night-time exercise of 'Dad's Army', to "capture a lantern in the middle of this 'ere green and the immortal line:

"Psst ..... Jack .....come and capture us quick - the Blackbirds is going to close in twenty minutes!"

Picture also the Church in early medieval times with a 'thatched roof, rushes strewn on the floor and murals on the internal walls. Yet there is also a mystery - look at the chancel (the eastern end.) Why is it so large? (The chancel is usually much smaller than the nave. For more, see Richard Slaughter's guide inside the church.)

Within the graveyard lie many local heroes - threshing contractors, shepherds and horsemen whose memories we recorded. Yet there are also surprises. On the left, one gravestone mentions the second Afghan War of 1878-80. (Local enthusiasts have recorded all the gravestones and conducted considerable research into those whose names are listed on the War Memorial, which can be found on this website).

*Proceed through the Churchyard along the path through avenue to roadside opposite the late 'Cock and Blackbirds' Public House.*

**STOP TWO: BY PUBLIC NOTICE BOARD (OPPOSITE THE ERSTWHILE 'COCK AND BLACKBIRDS'** (Sadly this closed in 1999 and is now a Grade 2 listed property called "The Blackbirds).

The pubs sign is especially important. The traction engine records the THREE families who once ran threshing machines from Bulmer Street. Imagine then, the traction engines being refurbished to their pride and glory each summer in nearby yards and meadows.

But on one occasion, in ration stricken World War Two, "We couldn't get any proper coal for the traction engines, so we burned wood and some funny coke stuff together - huh! 11 smoked Bulmer Street right out!"

Look further, above the sign. And see a metal 'cock' with a hole in the 'tail'. The latter memento was shot out with a revolver before leaving for the Burma Campaign of World War Two. (*K.C. p. 162* .

The pub witnessed many other happy evenings. After one harvest horkey a 'highly jolly' labourer staggered up the path to the Church and collapsed amongst the gravestones. The village's policeman followed. "Tell some of the other buggers to move!" said the labourer, pointing to the gravestones - when requested to 'move on!' The gate from the Church graveyard is of interest. In the 1930's mischievous schoolboys would place a small stone in the latch to hinder the schoolmistress opening it. Next day the estate carpenter would be dispatched to offer a 'repair' ..... The schoolboys would quickly remove the stone and hide up to watch.

"Oh, you have improved it" the schoolteacher inevitably exclaimed to the bemused estate carpenter sent to repair it! "Not surprisingly, recalls one erstwhile truant, "the old carpenter didn't half look puzzled!!!"

The adjoining meadow was sometimes used as a football or cricket pitch with rocketing balls occasionally landing in Brickwall Farm. (The wall is actually mostly flint and is just opposite the meadow.) In those days there were still cows, pigs and chickens in the farmyard. ("Wonder the bloomin' milk kept at all!" was one comment)

In 1800 the traveling agriculturalist Arthur Young observed: "At Brickwall Farm, Bulmer, finer land is rarely to be seen (*L.F. p.41*)

Now look to your left. A wheelwright operated here in bygone years. Almost opposite is a large shed, with a rounded corrugated roof. It once housed a 'Model T' Ford bus, whilst a traction engine operated from the same site. Further along is the magnificent former Chapel. Note especially the patterned roof slates, ridge tiles and ornamental brickwork. But there is also a human aspect.

For the heating originally came from a stove UNDERNEATH the pulpit. One sweat-drenched preacher reputedly exclaimed, "Preaching at Bulmer is like going to Hell!" (*Bulmer Then and Now*).

*(Cross the road and turn left. After 50 yards turn right onto track beside the large shed. After a further 50 yards turn left along footpath beside gardens on your left*

*behind Bulmer Street. After 200-300 yards look for 'Waymark' signs by ditch. Cross the ditch then turn right along the edge of the field - keeping hedge to your right.*

### **STOP THREE: CHURCH FIELD**

In open countryside picture others who have trodden this path before us. Generations of teenage lads striding from Belchamp Walter to Sudbury on Saturday evenings, courting couples, children, aging patriarchs and earnest lay-preachers preparing to give the sermon at Bulmer Chapel.

In 1893 a farm workers' strike occurred at Belchamp Walter. News of the fraught negotiations were carried along this path, for Bulmer at the time had over a hundred farm workers. Attempts were made to form a National Agricultural Labourers Union. The great workers' champion, Joseph Arch of Warwickshire, spoke in the area. (*L.F. pp 50-53*)

Yet, horse era agriculture had numerous stratifications. Every field witnessed intense competition.

"You were always out to beat the man you were with - to plough or drill straighter - to make a better job," remarked Horace Elsey.

Tom Rowe (b. 1903) recalls, "My dog went and lay in a furrow once on Church Field, and the ol' horseman was FURIOUS! ... An inch was an inch that time of day!"

Picture, also, another local lad, 'Pod' Marten, nervously attempting his first day's ploughing on this very field: "it was with three horses on a two furrow plough ..,.... one of the mares was in foal, and I was told to let her have a 'good blow' at the end of each bout".

In the distance are the 'famous' telephone poles to Goldingham Hall. On one Home Guard training evening a reprimanded private had to "march up and down the drive and salute these 'ere telegraph poles."

(He was soon joined by his best mate who couldn't help laughing).

As you follow the path you may well glimpse the front of Belchamp Hall. In morning sunlight the architecture is especially pleasing. The bricks are reputed to have been imported from the Netherlands.

Belchamp Walter and Bulmer have long shared the same rector. In the 1920's he lived near Bulmer crossroads. "He had a boy who worked in the garden," recalls Bob Raymond, "but he often had to nip along the footpath with a message for Belchamp Walter's sexton or schoolmistress." Eva SurrIDGE remembers, "Rev. Pannell often walked along that footpath himself when he was taking a service at Belchamp Walter.

*Follow the path for  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to the valley at the bottom of the field and turn left. After about 200 yards the path branches. To the right is Belchamp Church. To continue the circular walk, turn left. At the junction, however, is:*

#### **STOP FOUR: SMALLBRIDGE FIELD**

Belchamp Walter Church is set in serene surroundings. The Hall opposite was sometimes seen in a recent television series about a 'roguish antique dealer' (Lovejoy). In previous years the Sudbury postman would stride through Bulmer to Goldingham Hall and along this path to Belchamp Walter village, before returning in the afternoon. (*H of H*)

A water mill existed in the valley for several centuries. Bulmer children sometimes went swimming in the mill ponds.

When courting, their elder brothers and sisters ambled along this route and carved their initials onto trees not far from the Church.

Belchamp Hall has interesting links with India, several generations of the Raymond family being involved with the sub-continent. One ancestor by marriage was the country's first Surveyor General. His son is buried in Bulmer Church.

In 1914 a romance blossomed between a son of Belchamp Hall and a daughter from Goldingham Hall, but Philip Raymond was a coffee planter 'on leave'. Despite the proximity of two such lovely churches the couple were consequently married in Bombay Cathedral! (*K.C.*)

*We now follow the path across the field to Goldingham Hall.*

*Please note: the soil here is **very** unco-operative and it is not always easy to mark out a good track after ploughing. After drilling it takes two to three weeks for the crop to emerge before a path can be sprayed out.*

*Proceed across the field to the pond; follow the track through the farm buildings, bearing right and turn onto concrete road. Next 'Information Point' is near the old Chalk Pit.*

#### **STOP FIVE: GOLDINGHAM CHALK PIT**

We have now passed Goldingham Hall, one of Bulmer's FOUR manors recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. (But why did Bulmer have so many Domesday manors? (*H of H*).

Goldingham, incidentally, was given to a Norman family in 1066 and they retained ownership for over five hundred years!

In the 1930's it was one of hundreds of farms in East Anglia to be taken over by Scottish immigrants between 1890 - 1940. Older residents recall their livestock being driven up, along the roads, from Sudbury Railway Station.

The 'fictitious' short story 'Harvest Home' is set in the field to the left.

Chalk has long been quarried along this valley, and also around Sudbury. The hilly field opposite was known as "Kiln Field".

In 1425 the rector collected tithes from a Bulmer lime kiln. The chalk itself was deposited when the area was covered by sea, some hundred million years ago.

*Somewhere* in the vicinity of the surrounding fields and Belchamp Walter, a rare MILITARY ORCHID was noted around 1700. (*both from O.M.E.*)

Today, part of the valley grows willow trees for cricket bats.

In the great hurricane of 1987 nearly half were destroyed. In better times, however, half of the best 'Bat Willow' from the area is exported to India.

Around the willows meanders the Belchamp Brook. Today, this is a gentle, languid stream. Following the last Ice Age however, approximately twelve thousand years ago, it was a "fierce fast-moving, swirling torrent - a torrent in full spate".

A lake existed in part of the willow tree area. Pollen analysis suggests that this silted up due to soil erosion following the clearing of woodland from the surrounding hills by Bronze Age man (1700-500 B.C.). Much of the 'good soil' from the tops of the hills was washed down into the valley (*from Cambridge University Plant Science Dept.*)

*Proceed round the pit and along the slade. On reaching the metalled road turn right. After about 100 yards, turn left. Follow the cart-track to the Old Barn. N.B. The cart-track is a 'courtesy link' to enable a circular route and constitutes no right of way. It may be formalised at a later date.*

## **STOP SIX: OLD BARN**

(Referred to as 'New Barn' on O.S. sheets).

You are now in the heart of 'The Long Furrow'. Chapter one begins at this point. In the final chapter, we walk home at midnight, along this route after finishing harvest.

Until the Napoleonic Wars, some thirty acres of woodland existed here, stretching down to the road and over half the adjoining field. Hornbeam still grows in the 'ancient hedgerow' beside the cart track. The barn was built in the early nineteenth century, as were two cottages, last occupied in the 1930's.

In the First World War an aeroplane landed here in dense fog. Next day children from Belchamp Walter and Bulmer scampered along these footpaths and cart tracks to look at it. "A soldier was sent to guard it", recalls Fred Chatters, "but we'd never seen an aeroplane before - that was real excitement!"

Eventually it was towed down to the road by a traction engine.

Sheep were sheared near the barn. 'Pod' Marten recalls that "unfortunate passers-by sometimes got sheared as well!" Glow-worms are remembered beside the Bulmer to Gestingthorpe road, whilst Nightingales still sometimes sing in the valley.

In the imaginary "*Tales of Woodland and Harvest*", the old crawler 'Big Al' emerges from this barn, whilst the lovely Elm tree in 'Hazel' stood on the skyline beside the concrete road to Hill Farm.

*Proceed now along the concrete road. After a quarter of a mile the road turns sharp right. After a further 150 yards the road branches. Continue straight for a further 20 yards. Then take a left turn onto a grass track.*

## **STOP SEVEN: GALLOW GREEN**

You have now crossed into Gestingthorpe Parish. Gallows were often found near parish boundaries. So, too, were isolation or smallpox houses. One stood in the field to the east. The village of Roman Gestingthorpe lies to the South West (*see L.F. Chapter Two*). Gallow Green may also have been a Saxon Meeting Point for the Half Hundred of Thunderlow (from '*Gazetteer of Hundred Meeting Places in Cambridge Region*' by Audrey Meaney although other sources suggest it may have been near Bulmer Church).

The field in the foreground is known as 'Brick Kell (kiln) Field'; in the wooded glade to the South East is the famous 'Bulmer Brick and Tile Company'. Today it is a living reminder of the skill and hard work of the many brickyards which once existed in the Hedingham-Sudbury area. Sharks teeth found in the clay date from 20,000,000 years ago.

In the distance is Wickham St. Paul Church - note the brick tower. Roman sites are often found near Wickham place names. Near the southern hedge an elderly Wickham farm worker was ploughing one dull November day. His name was Cecil Smith. In the 1920's he served in India with the Suffolk Regiment. His two neighbours served in the Burma Campaign. Cecil's words introduce '*The Khyber Connection*'.

*Proceed along the grass track and then across field. On joining the green lane, a night turn leads to Bulmer Brickyard, Butlers Hall and the path to Twinstead.*

*For the circular route, however, turn left. Proceed along lane for approximately half a mile until you approach Upper Houses. A gap in the hedge reveals a path to the right.*

### **STOP EIGHT: GREEN LANE**

We have passed the 'Deal Nursery' of which Tom Rowe recalls, "When we went sheep shearing in the 1920's the fir trees were a real landmark - we could see them as far away as Hundon!"

Legend has it that this route, which leads to Sudbury, was sometimes used to avoid paying toll gate charges. Somewhere in Bulmer, and quite possibly in the vicinity of this track, may have been the 'missing length' of Roman road which connected Braintree with Long Melford.

On Jenkins Farm to the east, the scythe was first used for cutting wheat in Bulmer about 1850. On Broom Ley to the west, the first 'self binder' was tried about 1882. Imagine then, gangs of, sturdy men, scything, 'shocking up' and later loading the harvest waggons with sheaves. Picture also groups of women and children waiting outside these fields for the final sheaf to be carted, so they could start gleaning, or scurrying along these footpaths to bring the 'harvest lunches' to their husbands or fathers.

Generations of workmen also plodded this route to work at the brickyard. One of them - Philip Rowe - actually staged his own brick kiln beside the metalled lane opposite 'Upper Houses'. But it was during the Great Depression of the 1930's. "I reckon I was the worst bloke I ever worked for!" he said later.

In the late 1920's and 30's, ploughman Ernie Lot would stop beside this hedge to let his horses rest.

"You ploughed an acre a day - and walked at least twelve to thirteen miles a day doing it", he remembered. But he also reminisced of the brief years he spent away from Bulmer on the North West Frontier, and in the trenches of World War One.

Eighteen men from this parish paid the supreme sacrifice in that conflict. Over ninety actually served. Every single one of them knew these footpaths and routes. In World War Two, a searchlight was based near here.

One of the small fields adjoining the metalled lane was known as 'Hop Ground'. Locally, hops were quite an important crop until the early nineteenth century.

*To reach the Village Hall, continue along path until it becomes metalled. Proceed for approximately quarter of a mile then ascend track on right hand side of lane. This route affords fine views of the surrounding countryside.*

In bygone days, however, the steep hillocks presented agricultural problems.

"If you were loading a harvest wagon with sheaves on Cutters Field recalls Tom Rowe, "you had to take account of the slopes - and how you placed the sheaves in the wagon. If not the whole lot might come tumbling off - especially when you turned round. Goodness knows what people would have said then!!"

"Another time, though, I saw ol' Walter Eaves - who was horseman at Griggs Farm - up a tree in the hedge there ..... And do you know, because he couldn't see over the hill, he's climbed that tree to check his furrows - to make sure they were straight. People were perfectionists that time of day!"

"Further up the hill," recalls Evelyn Reeve, "a stony area was once exposed. My mother, who was born at Upper Houses in 1890, said there was an ancient tradition that soldiers were buried there. Some older people said they were Danes. The field was called Dane Field."

#### **LONGER ROUTE via JENKINS FARM/BULMER TYE**

*Turn right and follow track to Jenkins Farm. Turn left at Jenkins Farm along metalled lane. This becomes a footpath after some 200 yards before rejoining road near Bulmer School. At the school bear left and follow lane beside the school, after 50 yards turn right onto a permitted path back to Village Hall.*

#### **STOP NINE: ON CART TRACK BEFORE REACHING JENKINS FARM**

To the right is Parsonage Wood - famous for its Lilies of the Valley. Nearby is Stonhams Field. Horace Elsey recalls that farm horses were agitated by the passing hunt.

"But one time on Stonhams Field, my mate couldn't hold it, and this horse completely 'took off' with a cottis hoe dragging behind, and went careering off right back to the farmyard!!!"

Horace continues: "At Jenkins Farm, it was my job to pump up the water for the livestock - I had to turn the handle THREE HUNDRED times every evening!" (*Both from LF*)

Plough Green itself may have been named after the 'Plough Inn' which stood next to Jenkins.



In the 1770's Bulmer 'Tye' (or 'Green') still covered some 23 acres. All day games of cricket were played here, whilst stage coaches, farm wagons and great droves of turkeys and geese were driven through on the way to London. The Tollgate, or Turnpike, was near today's 'Fox' inn. (*Bulmer, Then and Now*).

In earlier centuries pilgrims travelled this route to Bury St. Edmunds whilst a Shakespearean actor, Will Kemp, morris danced his way from London to Norwich via Bulmer Tye.

A 'Blacksmith's Lane' records a crucial village industry - "when the parish had at least a hundred heavy horses" whilst the lines of young trees in fields beside the path tell of a more recent success story - production of fruit stock from the parish's soil.

*As mentioned before: turn left at Jenkins Farm onto metalled lane-cum-footpath. At the school bear left and follow lane beside the school, after 50 yards turn right onto a 'permitted' path back to Village Hall.*

### **FINAL STOP: VILLAGE HALL**

Walkers of the 'shorter route' will have passed Cutters Field.

Legend has it that in one disastrous harvest the sheaves were not carted from this field until Boxing Day.

The lane opposite the Village Hall leads down to Sudbury.

Thomas Gainsborough's famous painting 'Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews' was undertaken in the private grounds of the 'Auberries' to the right.

Jack Cornell recalls the Home Guard attempting 'a quiet march' from the Village Hall down Ballingdon Hill and back up Sandy Lane. "We had to set off at internals ..... and we *were* quiet to begin with. Trouble was there's a pub at the bottom - The King's Head. Come the finish we all had a pint and came scampering up like a herd of bullocks!". (*L.F.*)

Stories are also told of 'Dad's Army' being trained in dummy hand grenade use by lobbing bricks over the Village Hall .....need one write more! Not one roof slate got broken - but several!!

Yet Bulmer is not a village that is locked in the past. Each week the Village Hall is host to a range of activities including carpet bowls, country dancing and keep fit, whilst enthusiasts ensure that St. Andrew's Church is still open for worship and provides a warm welcome throughout the year.

## **BOOKS by ASHLEY COOPER**

Quoted in this guide : Available from local bookshops

### **THE LONG FURROW £6.95**

2,000 years of farming history along the Suffolk-Essex border, including Roman Gestingthorpe, harvest-time memories, blacksmiths, threshing machines, old horsemen, shepherds, drovers, wildlife and countryside - including the recollections of 70 local people.

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**ISBN: 0-9524778-2-3**

### **BULMER THEN AND NOW**

The definitive guide to Bulmer's history, complete with many maps and drawings, edited by the late Basil Slaughter.

Available from this site or at Sudbury bookshops **£3.50**