

BROOK LANE COTTAGES

Until the early 1970s, the eight cottages ‘down The Brook’ had been home to a community which, although physically detached and quite separate from the main area of the village, were very much part of it. Six properties were demolished for redevelopment at that time while the two that were left standing remain to the present day (2018). The little hamlet had in earlier times accommodated as many as ten separate families when pressure on housing in the early 19th century was intense but, unlike the properties that once stood at the top of Brook Lane in the corner of Archway Field, there was no terraced accommodation but an even mix of detached and semi-detached homes with considerably more open space around them. And unlike the cottages in Archway Field, every one of those at The Brook survived the big clearance by the Bristol Estate in the 1870s and ‘80s hanging on for another hundred years before they in turn were razed to the ground. But, instead of being



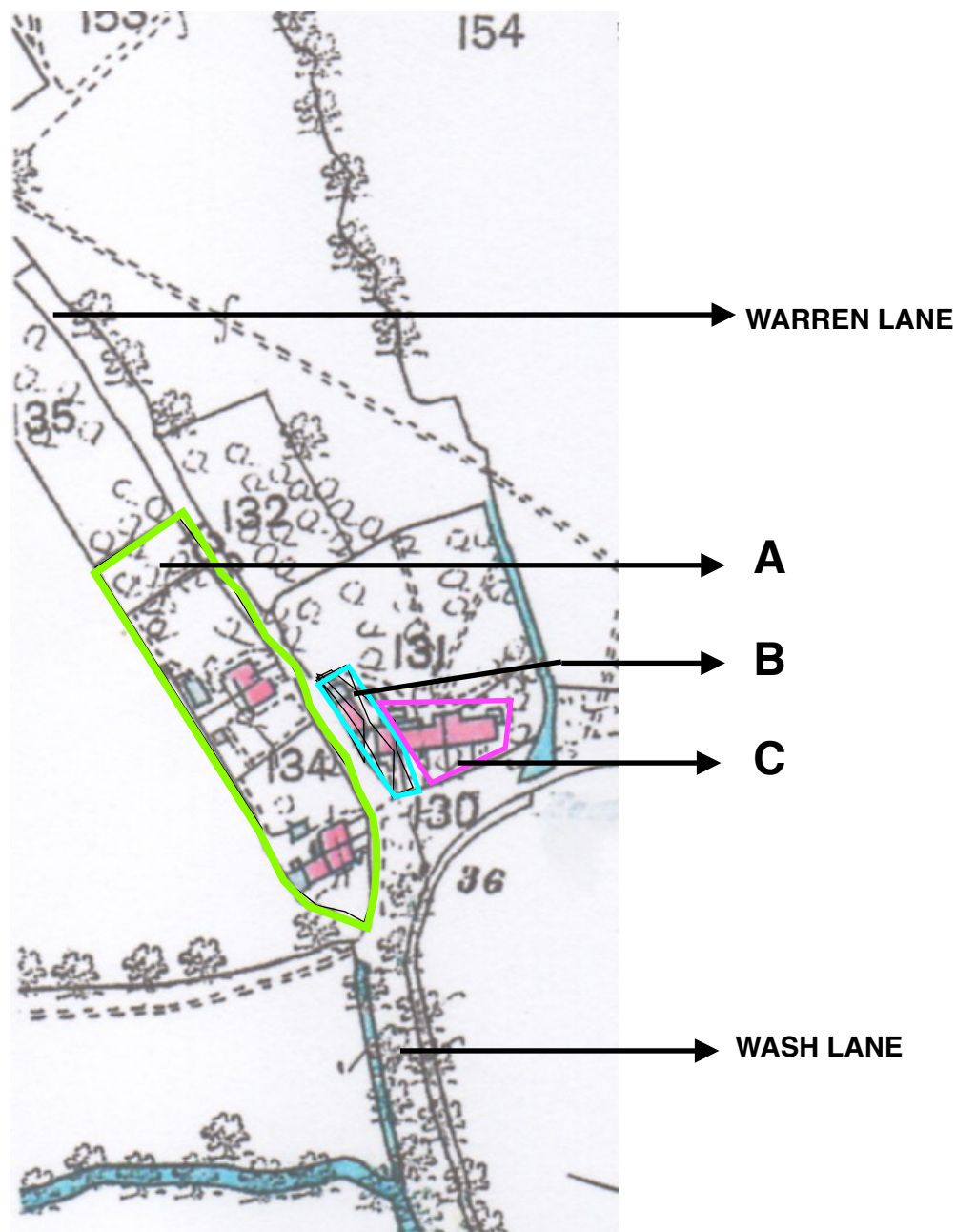
Brook cottages. Only the two cottages centre left escaped demolition in the 1970s; the other six were cleared to make way for executive homes. The brook itself was covered over in 1968

replaced by improved accommodation for agricultural labourers as cottages were at that time, the homes that were built in the 1970s were for a new influx of middle class residents that had been steadily taking over the English countryside since the Second World War.¹

The Brook was just one small part of a ‘closed’ parish, one that is owned more or less in its entirety by a single family, in Playford’s case the Bristols of Ickworth. Certain aspects of its history are therefore well documented as nearly all cottage properties were held by copyhold the records of which are to be found among their Estate papers in the Record Office at Bury. The history of copyhold tenure goes back to earliest times when labourers, in return for working on the lord’s

¹ The first of the new owners moved in at The Brook in 1978.

demesne, were permitted to cultivate small parcels of land of their own, a benefit that in the course of time became recognised by custom and later by law. But the lord of the manor still maintained a degree of control: for example a 'heriot' might have to be paid on the death of a tenant or some other sum of money when the property was sold as it had first to be surrendered to the lord and its new tenant formally admitted by him. It is the record of these transactions that enables the history of such properties to be traced but, while the buildings continued to provide housing for labourers who



The three groups of cottages as discussed in the text: A are Warren Lane Cottages (note the brick building added to the lower house), B are Brook House and Journey's End and C are the Wests' three cottages that never belonged to the Estate. They stood in half an acre of garden and orchard whose exact boundaries are not known

worked locally on the land, their owners more often than not were absentee landlords with no connection to the parish whatever and who were concerned only with the return they received on their investment in the form of rent.

When farming fell into deep depression at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, there was great deterioration in the rural housing stock and much misery amongst farm workers. By 1837 however the tide had turned and a long period of prosperity followed, the years 1853 to 1862 being particularly favourable and became known as the Golden Age of English farming. A new mood swept the country with progressive landlords wanting the labouring classes to share the good times and many of the large estates led the way in improving their workers' housing.² The Bristol family



The two remaining cottages overlooking the brook.... and the footbridge that still survives

were happy to follow suit but had first to buy back the properties as most of them still lay in third party hands. Such ownership, where all that mattered was the rent they created, had not served either the tenant or the landowner well. The housing had often been put up cheaply by 'cottage jobbers' and much of it had been poorly maintained. By the time that Lord Bristol instigated his survey of every cottage on his Suffolk estate in 1870-71, many were already in total disrepair.³ His report gives details of the number of rooms, the size of the family and, more particularly, what needed to be put right if the property was not to be pulled down. Many of those that were demolished were replaced in the early 1880s by the red brick cottages seen scattered around the parish today. Built closer to where they were required, particularly on Lux Farm where only two cottages had existed on the heath, the bulk of the workforce had previously to walk from Playford village to their place of work.

Assisting this change of ownership were the various Copyhold Acts that were passed from the middle of the 19th century onwards whereby copyholds, for a small fee, could be gradually enfranchised to become freeholds allowing servitude to the lord of the manor to become merely

² Some of the finest model cottages of this period are to be seen locally in the parish of Framsdon, the estate village of Helmingham Hall to the north of Ipswich. They were built by the 1st Lord Tollemache who was described by Gladstone as 'the greatest estate manager of his day'.

³ SROB, HA507/3/747.

token. Starting in 1848 with the two double cottages in Warren Lane and followed in 1855 by the three-dwelling terrace on The Green opposite to where the telephone kiosk now stands, the Estate had already made a start on buying back its former properties. Two further cottages followed in 1863: the former yeoman's house in Hill Farm Road, and a single cottage close by but progress was slow as some owners were either reluctant or unable to sell. Desperate to regain control, the report



Ella Felgate outside her cottage at the top of Warren Lane where she was to live for 63 years

suggested that the Barrack Cottages opposite the end of Church Lane would be 'advisable to purchase and pull down as they are old and dilapidated' but their owner George Waller Bates of Blaxhall Hall had no wish to dispose of them and they remained standing, and occupied, for a further 20 years, not finally being demolished until Archway House was built in 1892.⁴ The report did however prompt further successful purchases for within a year the Eel's Foot beer house in Church Lane had gone and the brick built cottages in Sink Meadow had been bought. And down at The Brook two more cottages, Journey's End and Brook House, were acquired in 1883. The Estate however failed to get its hands on the two south facing properties there just over the stream and they remained in the same third party hands for a further 90 years until their demolition in the 1970s.

The eight Brook Cottages, as can already be seen, fall into three quite distinct groups: those to the west of Warren Lane with its two semi-detached houses standing in an acre of ground, the two to the east of it which were acquired by the Estate in 1883 and lastly the two fronting on to Brook Lane that the Estate failed to acquire. The history of The Brook, therefore, will be conveniently discussed under these three headings.

Warren Lane Cottages

The first record of the one acre piece of land to the west of Warren Lane (A on the plan) appears in 1721 when the two lower cottages, barns, garden and orchard were sold by an Esther Jackson to William Leggett a yeoman of Playford.⁵ When Leggett moved away to Bramford in 1735 the property was bought by Thomas Scarff, another Playford yeoman, on whose death in 1748 it passed to his brother John. John Scarff died young in 1758 and left the property to his son William who was 'an infant of the age of nine'. Guardianship was granted to William's uncle, also called William, 'as well of his body as of his lands and tenements' until he reached the age of majority. But young William too died young in 1776 at the early age of 27 and the property then passed to his married sister Christine Brame who quickly sold it to Edmund Page a yeoman from Rushmere.

⁴ Barrack Cottages, so called because they were built from materials from St Helen's Barracks at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, were bought by the Bates family in 1843. G. W. Bates farmed the 500 acre Blaxhall Hall Farm and had the advowson of the church to which he appointed his brother who was Rector there from 1865-86.

⁵ SROB, HA507/2/474.

The first mention of Edmund Page in connection with Playford is of interest not only because the family were to stay in the parish for over 200 years but because, in common with many other small farmers at the time, their status was about to be reduced to that of labourers.⁶ José Booker's family, who arrived in the village some 50 years later, suffered a similar fate. Her predecessors had come from Ramsholt where they had lost their grazing rights during a period of land enclosure there and could find employment only by working on larger farms.⁷ Edmund Page, although similarly classed as a yeoman, was also a man of property having holdings not only in Playford and Rushmere but in Barham as well and in his will dated 1777 he left the Playford property to his son Edmund who later went to live there with his wife Elizabeth.⁸ A grandson, yet another Edmund, was born there in 1790 but the property did not remain in the family for long as in 1808 it was sold by auction at the Admiral's Head in Little Bealings.

Both the son and the grandson suffered from terrible but quite differing disorders. While the son was 'afflicted by a Cancer Evil that had destroyed part of his Face and greatly hurt his Nose, Mouth and Eyes which was thought to be incurable' he was supposedly restored to health by a surgeon who lived below the Baptist Chapel in Grundisburgh. Be that as it may, modern medicine might well have diagnosed the real cause as being the cold sore virus which can produce dreadful facial ulcerations but which if left alone can heal spontaneously in which case the 'doctor' would have been a quack.⁹ But at least he recovered whereas his poor son, who



Page's Cottage in Hill Farm Road where Edmund Page the grandson lived before moving up to Crossing Keeper's Cottage when the Ipswich to Lowestoft railway opened in 1859

had been born with only one arm, could not. Despite such serious incapacity the grandson, born in Playford in December 1790, lived to the great age of 85 dying in the village in 1875.¹⁰ It might be considered that these twin misfortunes were responsible for or at least helped bring about the family's decline but it would surely have been easier for them had they continued in self-employment rather than having to tout their labour in an already overcrowded market.¹¹ The

⁶ Anne Woods (1929-2010), born Annie Page, was the sixth generation of her family to have lived in Playford. In 2003, following the death of her husband Jim the previous year and after 41 years at Playford Corner, she moved to Playford Lane in Rushmere. Jim had worked on Lux Farm for 57 years and, on first getting married in 1947, the couple had lived at Mill Cottages. For greater detail on the Page family see Glenham in this series, 11-12.

⁷ See Glenham in this series, 6.

⁸ SROI, IC/AA1/201/53, will of Edmund Page of Rushmere dated 1777. Edmund his son married Elizabeth Pannifer in Rushmere in 1788 some seven years after his father had died.

⁹ *East Anglian Daily Times*, 21 May 2011, 48. Article by John Blatchly.

¹⁰ SROI, FC22/D1/1, Playford Baptism Register, 1660-1812, FC22/D1/6, Playford Burial Register 1813-1976.

¹¹ SROI, FC22/G7/9, List of men employed by Messrs Clarkson, Biddell, Manning and Gooding on their respective farms. Not dated but considered to be c. 1834. Edmund Page worked for Arthur Biddell and it is of interest that one other labourer employed by Biddell (Samuel Holden jnr) also had only one arm.

grandson Edmund remained a labourer all his life living at one point in 'Page's Cottage' in Hill Farm Road when it was sketched by the 14 year old Christabel Airy in 1856.¹² From there he and his wife Emily moved to Crossing Keeper's Cottage when the Ipswich to Lowestoft railway opened in 1859. The couple lived there with a young railway plate layer and, while Edmund's wife Emily opened and closed the gates on the level crossing, Edmund himself continued to work on the farm. Emily was the first person to operate the gates but died within five years of taking on the job.



Ella Felgate's cottage, left, awaiting demolition in the early 1970s. After her neighbour had moved to Kesgrave following her husband's death in 1968, Ella moved next door as her own 'house was falling down'

At the Admiral's Head sale in 1808, the Warren Lane property was bought by an Edward Bowman, a hurdle maker of Playford who later moved to Grundisburgh. It was Edward Bowman who, by 1821 during the time of huge pressure on housing in the village when properties were being subdivided to accommodate a greater number of families, added a third dwelling to the bottom pair of cottages and built the other two at the top of the lane.¹³ The additional accommodation that was added to the lowermost cottage appears, from surviving marks on the brickwork, to have been a single storey dwelling. It is recorded on the OS map of 1881 but in later editions it is no longer there. Agreement with the timing of its demolition comes from the Census returns as in 1881 there were ten

separate families recorded at The Brook while by 1891 that number had reduced to nine. Bowman sold all five dwellings in 1827 to Thomas Grimwood, a timber merchant from Woodbridge, on whose death in 1847 his executors sold to the Marquis of Bristol making the Warren Lane cottages the first in the parish to have been brought back into Estate ownership.^{14 15}

¹² Christabel Airy (1842-1917) was the seventh child of George Biddell and Richarda Airy.

¹³ *Ipswich Journal*, 30 October 1824. 'Five tenements in good repair with an acre of superior garden ground adjoining, situated near Playford Hall in the pleasant village of Playford.... producing an annual income of £23. The land affords an eligible opportunity of building a windmill upon. Further particulars from.... Mr Bowman of Grundisburgh'.

¹⁴ SROB, HA507/2/464. Indenture 11 October 1848. '.... to make sale &c. all those his five cottages....divided into three tenements now divided into five tenements or dwellings....'.

¹⁵ SROI, FDA 196/41/19. Tithe map, dated 25 November 1844, confirms that there were two pairs of semi-detached cottages on the one acre site with Thomas Grimwood as owner but there is insufficient detail to state with assurance the existence of the fifth dwelling. Charles Mann (1816-1881), great-grandfather of Frank Mann, is named as one of the occupiers.

Though the higher pair of cottages had been built some years after those at the bottom, it was the top pair that were demolished in the 1970s while the lower pair were reprieved. That this was so has to lie in the quality of the building. The top pair had lasted 150 years, a life that compares favourably with the brick built cottages put up for John Mann in the corner of Archway Field and which were taken down after little more than 60 years of neglect. The Barrack cottages too, albeit constructed from second-hand materials, were also in very poor shape at the time of their demolition and lasted only a very few years longer.

In demolishing sub-standard housing in the 1870s and '80s and replacing it with new nearer to where it was required, the Bristol Estate was following the then fashion of being good landlords showing concern for their cottagers but their beneficence was not to last. By 1874 agriculture had fallen into deep depression once again and was to remain so more or less up to the outbreak of the Second World War. Declining rents produced neither sufficient money nor the incentive for the upkeep of properties and throughout these years the condition of the housing stock declined once more. C. W. Parker, builders of Tuddenham, carried out all repairs between the wars but, according to contemporary evidence, 'only did a bodging job' and when Charles Lofts took possession of the 13 cottages in 1953, matters did not improve. Never one to spend money either on his own house or that of his mother who lived at the top of Hill Farm Road, he had the added disincentive to maintain them knowing that one day he would pull them all down.

Ella Felgate lived in the higher pair of cottages in Warren Lane for 63 years from 1910, two years after she married, until 1974 the year that she died.¹⁶ Her letters to a friend paint a very sorry picture of the state of the property just prior to demolition.¹⁷ There was of course no indoor toilet just a 'bumbie' near the back door and her water came from an external well just deep enough in which to dip a bucket. It was supplied from a spring above the present-day pumping station with water flowing from one cottage well to the next, eventually exiting under the field gate to the Alder Carr meadows into a ditch to the river. The bottommost cottage had two such wells, one of which is still there today, no doubt a survivor from the days of the single storey addition. But Ella was not complaining about the lack of amenities. She was used to that. Her grumble was with the very fabric of the building with critical comments littering her pages: 'My house is falling down; it's well past repairing', 'my house is gradually falling to bits', 'moved next door in January [1971] as my old house is falling down. The



Ella Felgate's next door neighbour, Constance Nicholls, the no-nonsense caretaker of the Village Hall

¹⁶ Her husband William, 11 years her senior, had been a regular soldier before they married in 1908. At the outbreak of the First World War he re-enlisted although by 1917 he would have reached the army's upper age limit of 41 for active service. Together with the 23 years following his death in 1951, Ella would have spent a large part of her time in Warren Lane living on her own.

¹⁷ Letters from Ella Felgate to Phyllis Palmer (née Turner) from April 1964 to October 1973. Phyllis Turner had lived as companion help with Caroline Pipe at Lower Lodge 1920-21.

farmer won't have it repaired as it would cost too much'. And 'although I have moved, it's a poor old house but better in some ways as [her neighbour] did a lot when he was alive but the doors are terrible also the windows and when we had the blackouts [during the miners' strike of January-February 1972] I had to go to bed with a candle.... the wind nearly blew it out as I was going upstairs'. Further confirmation of the poor state of the fabric comes from two men on the farm sent to repair the guttering: that when they put their ladder up, the wall of the house actually moved. Ella Felgate went to live in Playford Lane, Rushmere, but died within weeks amid cries from the village that she should have been allowed to stay where she was.

Her neighbour into whose house she had moved was Constance Nicholls who had been active in village life and whose principal responsibility had been the Village Hall. Among her duties as caretaker was the lighting of the coal fire before winter bookings, a job that became redundant on her departure when electric heating was installed. A formidable lady, she spoke on behalf of her husband Hector at meetings of the Parish Council for the brook to be bridged as in times of wet weather the water was deep enough to impair the effectiveness of his brakes. Hector was a car owner and groundsman for Fison's at their playing field on the Playford Road. He died suddenly in August 1968 living just long enough to see the brook covered over.¹⁸

Beyond the higher pair of cottages on the same side of the lane were two allotments one of which was last used by the Wrights of Journey's End. Mrs Wright, who did most of the gardening, looked after it until she died in the late 1960s but within less than 25 years the area had reverted to secondary woodland such that it was impossible to tell where the original garden had ended and the original wood had begun.¹⁹ A parallel instance of reversion was to be seen in the abandoned gardens and allotments where St Mary's Drive is now between the former vicarage and Hill Farm cottages. Last occupied in the early 1950s, by the time that the land was developed for building some 20 years later, it was indistinguishable from the small triangular shaped copse that had originally separated the two areas of cultivated ground.²⁰

Journey's End and Brook House

The two cottages in the second group (B on the plan) were both single dwellings. One stood on the corner of Brook and Warren Lanes, the other behind it. The two came together as a pair through the purchase by Robert Davey (1751-1829), a successful cordwainer or shoemaker, who in 1790 bought the one on the corner (known later as Journey's End) from a Jonathan Minter, 'a yeoman of Playford', and at the same time the one further up the lane (Brook House) from the same Edmund Page as has been discussed above. Journey's End had devolved by law to John Branson in 1734 following the death of his father who had died intestate. No provision had been made for other members of the family whereupon John



Brook House, left, and Journey's End on the corner of Brook and Warren Lanes awaiting demolition in the early 1970s

¹⁸ SROI, EG94/B1/2, Playford Parish Council Minute Book 1948-71, 18 September 1968. Work on covering the brook was recorded as having been completed.

¹⁹ Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*, (London, 1986), 67-68.

²⁰ See Foxboro in this series, 15.



Fred Dunnett, father of Basil and Geoffrey, on his wedding day 1933. He was the last occupant of Brook House dieing in July 1973 immediately prior to its demolition

gave the cottage, a part of his inheritance, to his sister Sarah on her marriage as 'a smal (sic) subsistence for her' but, within a short space of time, she had sold it to a George Denny in whose family it was to remain for the best part of 50 years. It was then sold again in 1781 to Jonathan Minter before being bought nine years later by Davey.

The early history of the other cottage (Brook House) before Davey's acquisition is far less clear but, by the time that he died in 1829, he had amassed a number of properties. Not only had he acquired these two cottages at The Brook but also the three-dwelling terrace on The Green where he lived facing the grass triangle at the top of Brook Lane. He also owned the two acre strip of land behind his house that ran parallel to Butts Road and almost to the top of the hill and from which in 1814 he had sold off a couple of building plots. On the lower of these two sites the Barrack Cottages were built while the higher one was bought by a builder in the village from whom Davey later bought back the cottages as soon as they had been completed.²¹ Dying childless he left this considerable estate of seven properties firstly to his wife Betsey and then after her death to the two sons of his 'great friend' Abraham Mann (1741-1829), Abraham junior (1775-1854) and John (c.1786-1849).²²

Both Mann brothers had served apprenticeships under Davey but the two were to lead very different lives. While Abraham stayed in the village until he died as indeed did his son William who also worked as a shoemaker all his life, John married a girl from Dedham and was soon to move away. He and his family

retained ownership of the two cottages on Butts Hill but, as absentee landlords, the properties quickly fell into disrepair and were pulled down in the early 1880s after a life of less than 70 years. By contrast Abraham Mann, who lived as a tenant in Journey's End up to the time of Betsey's death in 1834, continued to live there as owner occupier until he died in 1848. Furthermore his son William moved into Brook House on marriage but appears to have transferred back to the family home of Journey's End when his father died. William's two sons, George and Harry, also took on apprenticeships under their father but soon gave up and found other employment. An elder daughter Elizabeth was disabled while Emma became a teacher when the village school moved up to Hill Cottages in 1866-67.²³ A younger son was also to become a pupil teacher. William Mann like his father Abraham, though living at Journey's End, carried on his shoemaking business in a shed that originally had belonged to Davey and which stood in front of the three-terraced cottages on The Green where he had lived. When the terrace was bought by the Estate in 1855, with demolition in mind, the shed became part of the sale but was left standing while the houses behind it were pulled

²¹ The history of these properties is discussed in some detail in *Archway House* in this series.

²² SROI, IC/AA1/249/103. Will of Robert Davey. It is a mark of his standing in the village that his will was witnessed by no lesser persons than the first Thomas Clarkson and the then vicar, the Revd. Charles Day.

²³ Elizabeth is recorded in the 1871 Census as suffering from 'spinal affection' (sic).

down. It was still there long after William's death in 1887 and in fact is recorded on the OS map of 1926-28.²⁴

In 1879 Lord Bristol, as part of his programme for regaining control of Playford's cottages, showed an interest in buying William and John Mann's properties. But by 1871 the John Mann cottages were unoccupied and in a dilapidated state awaiting demolition. Furthermore ownership had descended not only to John's children, some of whom had died intestate, but to some of his grandchildren as well. Tracing the owners, who had long since lost touch not only with the village but with each other, proved a nightmare. After years of searching all were found scattered across London where the family had originally migrated. Once traced, the £60 that Lord Bristol paid for the copyhold was shared among six of John's descendants one of whom was Lucy who on her death in Fulham in 1904 left £100 to Playford church.²⁵ By contrast, the purchase of William's two cottages was, as would be expected, perfectly straightforward although even here there was nothing in writing to show that he owned them.²⁶ After swearing on oath, and a declaration from Herman Biddell, the sale went through and in 1883 William received his £80 from Lord Bristol some four years before he died.²⁷



Fred Hogger in 1909. One of the first of the new agricultural tenants of Journey's End, he followed a long occupation and ownership by Abraham and William Mann, father and son, who were boot and shoe makers by trade

After some 60 years of occupation by a family of self employed shoemakers, tenants for Journey's End could now be chosen by the local farmers. One of the first to move in was Fred Hogger whose grandfather William had run the blacksmith's shop which reportedly in the early years of the century had stood between the brook and the first pair of south facing cottages. In 1794 the responsibility for the smithy was in the hands of the tenant of Playford Hall Farm, as indeed it was for the Falcon Inn but, when the farm tenancy was renewed in 1806, that role had been taken over by the Estate.²⁸ While William Hogger was undoubtedly the blacksmith in the 1790s, it was with a Mr Wright that Arthur Biddell dealt in 1815 when wanting someone to manufacture his patented hay-borer. However, following Wright's death in 1821, Hogger was back having agreed an annual contract with Biddell for the

²⁴ SROB, HA507/3/747. The Bristol Estate survey of its Suffolk properties 1870-71 establishes that it was the proud owner of a shoemaker's shed on The Green for which it charged William Mann a rent of £2 a year.

²⁵ SROI, FC 22/L1/3, Playford Parish Records. Miss Lucy Mann's legacy. 1901 Census: Lucy Mann had married Alexander Young and the couple in fact shared a quarter part of the £60 from the sale of the copyhold. Yet 20 years later she was living 'on her own means' in upmarket Fulham having reverted to her maiden name and describing herself as single rather than widowed.

²⁶ SROI, FDA 196/41/19. Playford Tithe Map, 25 November 1844. No. 56 on the map shows William's father, Abraham, as both owner and occupier - the only recorded evidence that the family held possession of the two properties.

²⁷ SROB, HA507/2/487. 1 September 1883.

²⁸ SROB, HA558/3/7/22/21, lease of Playford Hall Farm 1794 and HA507/3/580 lease of 1806.

shoeing of nine cart horses.²⁹ It was most likely when the smithy ceased to operate that William Hogger stayed on in the parish as a farmworker; both his son William and his grandson Frederick (b. 1860) were to follow him on the land. But neither of Fred Hogger's two sons stayed in the parish. Bizarrely, they went to London where they worked as page boys, aged 13 and 16, in the Constitutional Club off Trafalgar Square.³⁰ Both served in the First World War, and survived, by which time they had long lost connection with the village of their youth although their names are recorded on the plaque in the Village Hall. It was perhaps in their memory that the parents named the house *Journey's End* after the R. C. Sherriff Great War play that was first performed in 1928 a little more than a year before Fred died in Tattingstone House Infirmary.

The West family's cottages

The last two dwellings (C on the plan), both south facing and lying between Journey's End and the brook, were already under a single landlord when available records begin in 1809. They were then owned by John Wilson, a farmer from Sternfield who in 1828 sold to a John White of Melton. White died intestate and without issue in 1839 when ownership passed to his three nieces one of whom lived in Woodbridge, another in Jamaica while a third was married to and lived with a captain in the 63rd Regiment of Foot in Van Diemen's Land.³¹ It is of interest that it was during John White's period of ownership in the decade from 1828 that the two cottages were divided into three. The timing of such partitioning is in line with what was happening elsewhere in the village when, because of the housing shortage, many labourers were being forced into ever more cramped accommodation. In 1864 a Charles Wright from Ipswich bought the properties and acquired the freehold.³² He kept them until 1869 before selling them to John Hilyard, a watchmaker from Woodbridge³³ and, following Hilyard's death in 1883, his Trustees sold them in 1891 to Daniel Kemp West (1838-1916) who three years earlier had bought Playford Mount as a country retreat.³⁴



The two, one-time three, cottages looking north from Wash Lane that were in the West family for 80 years from 1891 until their demolition in the 1970s.

²⁹ SROI, HA2/A3/2. Arthur Biddell's Day Books, 5 March 1822.

³⁰ Census 1901, St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

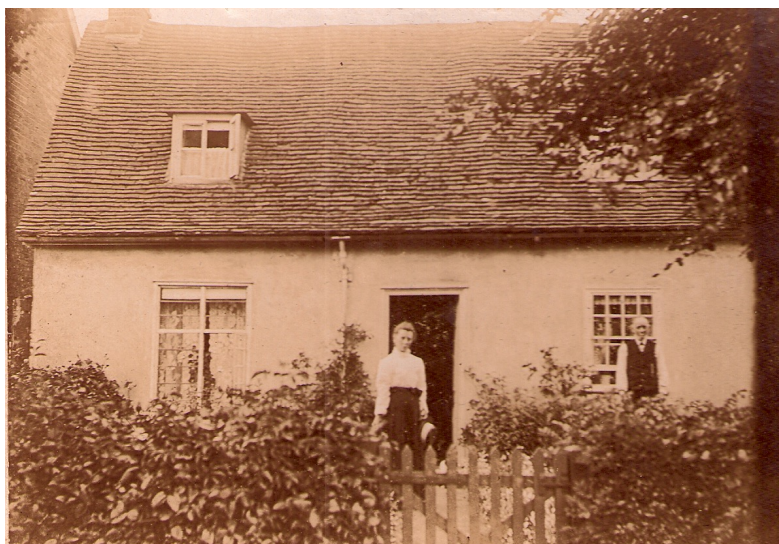
³¹ The name changed to Tasmania in 1856.

³² *Ipswich Journal*, 11 June 1864. The sale was by the Trustees of Capt. Vicary who also owned property in Charsfield, Hoo and Melton.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1869.

³⁴ The Wests were the third family to live at The Mount. They were preceded by James Bromley, a retired landowner, who had bought it in 1878 and by E. C. Hakewill, the eminent church architect, who had built it in 1866. There are brass plaques on the south chancel wall to two of the Wests' sons: Dudley Gordon (1870-1918) who died in Delhi aged 47 and Gilbert Witter (b. 1871) who served as a major in the Royal Lancaster Regiment in the 1914-18 war.

West was, like his father, a successful chartered engineer based in London but, following his wife Amelia's early death in 1890 at the age of 45, he returned to the capital having spent little more than three years in the parish. Although he remarried, on his death 26 years later in 1916, he chose to be buried with his first wife in Playford churchyard. In their very short time in Playford, the couple not only bought the three Brook cottages but spent a lot of money repairing and upgrading them. They were to remain in West family hands for 80 years until bought by Charles Lofts in the early 1970s. Lofts had owned the other six cottages at The Brook since buying them from the Estate in 1953 and the acquisition of the West properties gave added value to the site that he could offer the builder for redevelopment.³⁵ It is hard to fathom the Wests' motive. Was it an investment or a purely altruistic move? Daniel Kemp West was not short of money but, in the days when buy-to-let properties presented one of the few opportunities for investment, he may well have seen it as a financial move. In later years, in the 1920s and '30s when the rent was paid to a Miss West in Felixstowe then Bushey in Hertfordshire and again in the 1950s and '60s to Sandy in Bedfordshire, it is easier to see that the family needed the money. According to contemporaries the cottages were 'never cheap' and, at a time when wages were around £10 a week, the rent was a pound. This compared most unfavourably with farm rents in the village at the time which, regulated by the Agricultural Wages Board, stood at a maximum figure of six shillings.



The larger of the West cottages whose accommodation some time after 1828 was shared with its smaller neighbours to the right so making three dwellings of equal size. West's refurbishment in the 1890s, however, reinstated their former differing arrangement

West's repairs of 1891 included work to the roofs and chimneys, re-laying floors in back kitchens and fitting new ranges, all carried out by William Sadd, a bricklayer who lived at Brook House and who a few years later was to build the new village hall for the Stevensons of Playford Mount.³⁶ Sadd also made new doorways and bricked up old ones - something that is difficult to understand as that pair of cottages nearest the brook were not made into one until Dorothea (Dot) Biddell (1876-1965), eldest daughter of Herman Biddell, moved there in the early 1960s on her return from London.³⁷ The answer must be that there was communication between the two principal buildings which

were already physically joined despite being of different external appearance. It is a view supported by the deeds which treat the three cottages as one - 'all that cottage lately divided into three' - and that, when first partitioned, the three dwellings were of more uniform size. The work that Sadd was

³⁵ The West cottages were never bought back by the Estate and the deeds of the properties therefore remained in the hands of the various owners. Charles Lofts became their ultimate custodian and it can be assumed that they have since been destroyed. They were however roughly transcribed before their disappearance and, together with a photocopy of the repair work that Sadd carried out, form a useful archive that has not been entirely lost.

³⁶ Wm Sadd invoice to D. K. West for work done at cottages, 27 January 1892. Private possession.

³⁷ For more on Dorothea (Dot) Biddell see Archway House in this series, 4.

doing in the early 1890s was to make them into three of significantly differing sizes as borne out by the individual rents that were charged. The highest at 2s 8d a week was for the largest which abutted Journey's End and where the widow Mary Woby in the 1891 Census had sufficient space to take in not only three lodgers and employ a live-in servant girl (one of the Page family as it happens) but to take in washing and do needle work for better off folk. Next was Belinda Robinson from the large market gardening family at Branson's with her three young children who lived in the larger half of the pair nearest the brook, a two-up and two down premises, and who paid 1s 6d a week while the lowest was for 27 year old Richard Kidby, a grandfather of José Booker, who lived with his wife and two young girls in the smaller half, a one-up and one-down dwelling for which he paid just a shilling a week.



Brook Cottages, a watercolour by Geoffrey Buckingham Pocock husband of Anna Airy, 1938. <http://www.suffolkpainters.co.uk/index.cgi?choice=painter&pid=499>

While water was supplied to the cottages on the western side of Warren Lane from a spring, those on the other side drew their water from the brook. But as with the cottages at Sink Meadow, which were pulled down in 1963, they did have a supply from a well but for some reason it was never used. To fill a bucket, tenants at Brook House for example had a particularly long walk down the garden path, a practice that was maintained until the house was demolished. However, it may not always have been like that as in a letter of 1902 from the agent for the Bristol Estate

to D. K. West it is learned that there was a standpipe supplying water to West's cottage, that it had been there for several years and that 'in due course it would become a right'. The pipe was for the benefit of Bristol Estate tenants and was a 'neighbourly privilege' for those who rented under the Wests. The agent suggested that as Sadd the builder collected cottage rents for the Estate, he could collect 6d a year from West's tenants for the water, the same as Estate tenants were then paying.³⁸ Brook House apparently had such a pipe as late as the early 1970s but no water was known to have ever come out of it neither has anyone in post-war years ever mentioned a piped supply.³⁹ How something so beneficial could have been allowed to fall into disuse remains a mystery.

³⁸ SROB, HA558/3/7/22/39. Letter from Henry Donne, agent for the Bristol Estate, to D. K. West, 7 August 1902.

³⁹ Geoff Dunnett, ex. inf., son of Fred and Eva Dunnett, the last occupants of Brook House before its demolition.

The three West cottages stood in half an acre of gardens and orchard which lay behind them to the north.⁴⁰ They ‘abutted upon a Common called Bullocks Green towards the east and upon Warren Lane towards the west’.⁴¹ The extent of the built area remains within this same curtilage but in earlier times the field on the other side of the brook, and indeed most likely that on the same side of the brook, was once common meadow land where cottagers would have had rights to graze their small numbers of sheep and cattle. Arable common land lay in the 60 acre field behind The Ridge in Church Lane and the 20 acre part of it nearest the houses continues to go by the name of Common Field today. Better known, it probably also gave its name to Butts Road and Butts Hill, a butt being associated with medieval field systems specifically being a triangular area of land that did not fit into the ploughing scheme.⁴²



The brook with its well worn footbridge, 1950s. The stream was bridged in 1968 following complaints by Hector Nicholls a car owner who lived next to Ella Felgate at the top of Warren Lane

While enclosure of common land had been going on since the 13th century, its pace accelerated markedly between the years 1760 and 1820 in the drive to increase output to feed a rapidly growing industrial population. Those who were displaced were compensated in part by the provision of allotments which sprung up in many places around the village. At The Brook there were two at the top of Warren Lane already discussed, one used by the occupant of Journey’s End while the other was probably used by the tenant in Brook House though latterly his garden was on his own side of the lane. In the early 19th century there were allotments in the field where Roots and The Courts now are which was called Allotment Field up to the time that building work began in the 1950s. More allotments lay in the north-west corner of Railway Field adjoining the track to the mill while there were many others in Burnt House Field, now Archway Field, which transferred to the Miller’s Field, now the Playing Field, when Archway House was built in 1892. These continued in use until the 1930s while two more in St Mary’s Drive, between the former vicarage and Hill Farm Cottages, were cultivated until around 1950. In addition there were extensive market gardens at Branson’s, Cherry Bank in Church Lane and the one acre plot of ground on which the post-war council houses were built in Church Lane.

⁴⁰ SROI, FDA196/41/19, Tithe map, 25 November 1844. The extent of half an acre quoted in the deeds comes from the Tithe map of 1844 where the area is shown as 2 roods and 12 perches which is just a fraction over that size. It also shows ownership to be in the hands of ‘the heirs of John White’.

⁴¹ The boundary description appears in property transactions between 1828 and 1864 but this does not imply that Bullocks Green was common land at that time. It does however inform that it was *once* common land without giving any indication as to when it was ‘enclosed’ and absorbed into either Hall or Hill Farm. Private possession.

⁴² David Dymond, *The Business of the Suffolk Parish 1558 - 1625* (Needham Market, 2018), 75. The building and upkeep of archery butts was a responsibility imposed on medieval parishes before the creation of a regular standing army. The survival of the term ‘Butts’ could therefore also have a military derivation.

Mary Woby and the Dame School

Mary Woby had probably the highest profile of anyone who occupied this particular group of cottages. It is thought to have been in the eastern part of the cottage nearest the brook that she held the dame school before it moved to Hill Farm Cottages in around 1864.⁴³ But when her husband John moved to New Buildings, most probably to be a stockman there, it was considered too far out of the village for children to go. Mary gave up teaching while still in middle age and the village lost not only its teacher but also its school-room whereupon Lord Bristol offered the western half of the cottage at the top of Hill Farm Road. Ellen Mann, Mary's near neighbour and a daughter of William Mann the shoemaker of Journey's End, filled the vacancy at the new location.

Mary's husband John was a talented musician far beyond what might be expected of a farm labourer and 'could play the violin as well as Sheldrake at The Hall'. He played the hymns from the singing



Perry Nursey (1771-1840) whose talents with the violin raised musical standards within the village to commendable heights <https://www.google.com/search?q=Perry+Nursey&client=firefox-b&tbm=isch>

gallery at the west end of the church before it was taken down in 1859 'on the recommendation of the Rural Dean'. Hymn singing by the congregation, rather than by just a small choir, achieved popularity in mid century as is witnessed by the publication in 1861 of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* a work that remains in print to this day. The change in liturgy heralded the arrival of a portable hurdy-gurdy following which the present organ was installed in 1883.⁴⁴ While William Sheldrake had been trained in the violin by Nursey of The Grove in Little Bealings, John Woby had studied under Cullingford who was later to become leader of the Woodbridge Orchestral Band. It was not at all uncommon for working people in those days to be able to read music, and to read it well, while at the same time being unable to read a single page in a book.⁴⁵ Herman Biddell regarded Sheldrake as 'an exquisite performer' on the violin and stated that he was fortunate indeed to have had Nursey as a tutor. Nursey was a man of many gifts. He had trained as a doctor and as an architect where he put his skills not only to enlarging The Grove where he lived from 1795 to 1824 but to designing Kesgrave Hall which was built

in 1812.⁴⁶ His musical talent had been encouraged by the study of the violin in Italy although he is far better known as a landscape painter and the teacher of Thomas Churchyard.⁴⁷

⁴³ See Foxboro in this series (page 11) for greater detail on Mary Woby and on early education in the village.

⁴⁴ Anna Airy, *Playford Church* (1956). The information given in this short church leaflet would undoubtedly have come from her grandfather Sir George Biddell Airy (1801-92) who acquired the family home in 1844 and from his uncle, Arthur Biddell of Hill House, who was Playford's sole churchwarden for 44 years from 1816 until his death in 1860.

⁴⁵ Amy Biddell notes. Private possession. Amy Biddell (1880-1959) was the second daughter of Herman Biddell of Hill Farm and Archway House and a granddaughter of Arthur Biddell. Her notes were gathered from information provided not only by family but also from David Amoss (1843-1930) who worked for three generations of the her family.

⁴⁶ Perry Nursey (1771-1840) moved to Foxhall and in 1831 to Foxburrow Hall in Melton at which latter two places he would have instructed William Sheldrake. He counted Sir David Wilkie (1785-1841), the well known Scottish painter, and Edward FitzGerald of Boulge (1809-1883), the translator of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, among his friends.

⁴⁷ SROI, qS Playford 9, *Thomas Clarkson and Playford Hall*, Herman Biddell, 60.

Mary Woby's brother-in-law, William, also had a high but differing profile in the village. He became a carrier while still a young man with a regular service to Ipswich but in his 40s he rented the four and a quarter acre piece of ground in the middle of the village that had once belonged to John Gayfer and became a market gardener and grocer. For the outlet of his produce he would have used the red brick shed on Butts Hill that has only recently been demolished. William was however even better known for some misfortune that befell him the nature of which eludes people today but which at the time must have caused considerable anguish amongst those who knew him. The mystery starts around 1871 when neither he nor his wife Jane can be traced. Within ten years, he is found in north Norfolk - as a widower - working as gardener for Willoughby Dickinson the former Playford incumbent who had taken the Wolferton living in 1862. No evidence of his wife's death has yet been found. With him as housekeeper was his unmarried niece Ellen Mann,



The red brick shed on Butts Hill, left, that William Woby would have used in his years as a market gardener. The shop was added later in 1887

daughter of William Mann the shoemaker at Journey's End and the teacher at the newly located school at the top of Hill Farm Road. Questions have to be asked: Why did Dickinson employ a gardener from far away Playford and why was no one available locally? Why was he doing him such a favour? And after Dickinson retired to Leamington Spa in 1883, William and Ellen moved to a house in Camden Road, Ipswich, where he is described as 'living on his own means'. It can only be assumed that it was Dickinson who had not only purchased or rented the property but who had set William up with an annuity.⁴⁸ But, again, why was he being so generous? After both the Dickinsons had died in the late 1880s, William and his niece moved back to Playford where in 1906 William died at the great age of 90. Ellen died in 1923 almost 50 years after the closure of the village school where she had once been teacher and from where she had moved to be with her uncle in Norfolk.

The 'Great Rebuilding'

The well intentioned efforts of the Estate in the 1870s and '80s left many of the old cottages still standing and, as the agricultural depression that began in 1874 continued for nearly 70 years, nothing more had been done towards their improvement when war broke out in 1939. Those cottages not in bad enough condition to be pulled down were by then not only extremely outmoded but in a very poor state of repair. With the war over, conscious of the situation and no doubt buoyed up by the Labour landslide of only a few months earlier, the Parish Council at its first meeting after

⁴⁸ William Woby and Ellen Mann lived at Mabel Villa, 5 Camden Road, part of a green field development on the former 98 acre Cauldwell Hall Estate on the eastern outskirts of Ipswich. It had been bought by the Freehold Land Society (now the Ipswich Building Society) in 1849 to provide housing for the working classes.

the ending of hostilities, sent a strongly worded motion to the District Council.⁴⁹ Proposed by Arthur Gardiner and seconded by Fred Dunnett, two working class members of the Council, the letter stated that ‘the [Parish] Council is perturbed by the very bad state of the housing in the village and at no steps having been so far taken by the District Council to remedy this. Fifteen cases of inadequate housing have already been brought to the notice of the [Parish] Council in which the occupants would be willing to pay the increased rent for better houses. The [Parish] Council realises that all of them cannot be at once provided; accordingly [it] has picked out two most urgent cases of aged agricultural workers or their widows requiring bungalows and four most urgent cases of gross overcrowding and unhealthy conditions, three of these being agricultural workers and one a particularly hard case of a young man and his wife both of whose families have long resided in Playford. The Council further draws attention to the fact that no houses for agricultural workers have been erected in Playford for the last quarter of a century.⁵⁰ The [Parish] Council directs that this resolution should be sent to the Rural District Council and copies to the District Councillor of the area. The [Parish] Council appeals to the District Council to now take the preliminary steps so that one pair of bungalows and two pairs of houses may be included in the active building programme of 1947’.⁵¹

In the event, the Parish Council got its way but only with the two pairs of council houses and not with the bungalows.⁵² The houses were built in Church Lane but not where it was originally suggested. It had been proposed that at least one pair be built on the eastern half of the former Miller’s Field backing on to the two council houses already there in Hill Farm Road. Capt. Goldsmith, who was both Honorary Clerk and Treasurer, however thought otherwise. A vocal critic of the quality of housing in the village and a strong proponent of more council housing, he drew a line at having them opposite his family’s property in Church Lane and was instrumental in moving them nearer the church. They were eventually built on the one acre piece of ground that the Estate had acquired in 1872 with the demolition of the Eel’s



William Noller (1869-1947) the last tenant to occupy the one acre market garden where the council houses in Church Lane now stand

Foot beer house and which had since been used as a market garden. The last tenant, William Noller, had conveniently moved away in 1946 leaving an ideal piece of empty ground for development. The new houses were in huge contrast to previous accommodation: they were roomy with four bedrooms one of which was later, in 1967, taken for a bathroom; water came from the spring at the top of Footpath 7 (Church Path) but was pumped electrically into a tank in No. 4 Church Lane and

⁴⁹ The Parish Council was dissolved in 1943 and did not meet again until 8 May 1946 when a new Council was elected.

⁵⁰ They were alluding to the pair of council houses in Hill Farm Road built as part of Lloyd George’s ‘homes fit for heroes’ after the First World War. The site had been acquired from the Bristol Estate by Deben District Council in November 1920.

⁵¹ SROI, EG94/B1/1, Playford Parish Council Minute Book, 1895-1948, 8 May 1946.

⁵² The two pairs of council houses were completed in 1948. No. 1 was first occupied by a man named Rose who worked on the railway but had previously driven a steam engine for a threshing contractor; No. 2 was occupied by Ernest Harvey who was a gardener; No.3 by Vernon Phillips, a cowman at Culpho Hall and No.4 by Ivan Woods who worked on Lux Farm. He was quickly followed by Albert Durrell who was a tractor driver on Hill Farm for 45 years.

fed by gravity to the other three houses; there were indoor toilets but still only Elsans whose contents, as before, had to be disposed of in the garden; and there was still a cesspit in the garden of No.1 to take the waste from sink and washing water from all four houses. They were connected to mains drainage in 1967 after the sewage works in Hill Farm Road had been installed for the new houses in Spring Meadow. Water for clothes washing was still heated in a solid fuel copper.

When the 4th Marquis of Bristol died in 1951, the family agreed to dispose of its outlying East Suffolk properties in Playford and Rushmere to pay for death duties. The two Playford farms were offered to the sitting tenants: Hill Farm was bought by the young Charles Lofts then only 28 years old and a tenant for just seven years while Lux Farm, which then included Kiln Farm, was bought by George Stennett. Lofts bought for £12,500 not only Hill House and the 385 acre farm but 13 cottages in the central part of the village. At that time, so soon after the war, all thoughts were concentrated on repairing or replacing bomb damage, continuing slum clearance programmes that had been set in motion in the 1930s and particularly on building social housing. No consideration had then been given to 'development potential' which lay in the future. But it was not long in coming. As living standards rose throughout the 1950s and, with mechanisation on farms leading to fewer workers being required, many middle class people in towns saw an opportunity to move out to the countryside.

Just eight years after Lofts had made his purchase, a Parish Meeting was called in April 1961 to discuss a proposal to build 42 new houses in the middle of the village between Hill Farm Road and Church Lane. Leonard Pipe of Rushmere Garden Estate, the builder who later came to live in one of his properties, was in attendance and informed the meeting that they were to be in the price range of £3-4,000. Charles Lofts who was effecting the sale, unhelpfully but truthfully, stated that 'whether you liked it or not, development would have to take place sooner or later' and that you had better get used to it.⁵³ Many of the cottagers present did indeed vote in favour, seeing Playford as 'a dying village and feeling that development would bring in a younger generation with the greater possibility of services being extended.' And they no doubt felt too that in demolishing their old cottages, their own housing would somehow improve if not in this parish then in some other.

It was the older middle class residents - the likes of the vicar the Revd Paul Biddlecombe and Catherine Broadbent, widow of the late incumbent Ernest Broadbent, but particularly Anna Airy and Owen Goldsmith - who were up in arms but, after a heated discussion, a vote was taken at which 17 were in favour of a reduced number of houses, 25 instead of 42, while nine wanted the higher density. A year later, in July 1962, a plan for 23 houses was approved by Deben Rural District Council although Playford Parish Council had only wanted 19.⁵⁴ The first two bungalows in Hill Farm Road were put up in 1963; the houses in the middle of the village including St Mary's Drive followed close behind. But by the time that The Brook was redeveloped in the middle 1970s all dissent had gone. Perhaps it was because only five new houses were proposed, that they would be less conspicuous in an out of the way part of the village and perhaps also it was that people had grown used to new houses being in the village and that the resettlement of those who had been displaced had worked out better than had been imagined. Whatever the reason, there were no public

⁵³ SROI, EG94/B1/2, Playford Parish Council Minute Book, 1948-71, 27 April 1961. Anticipating an upsurge in the population, it was at this time that the number of Parish Councillors was increased from five to seven but the rise in numbers was very short lived. Census figures for 1951 had been 207 and for 1961 they were 213. But in 1971 they peaked at 277 after which there was a steady fall to the level that they had been before redevelopment. In 1981 they were 252, in 1991 220, in 2001 203 and in 2011 215.

⁵⁴ In the event 20 were built or 21 if *Cobblers*, which was built in 1959, is included.

meetings, no public discussion and nothing was ever recorded in the Council Minute Book. The building just happened. The houses were put up by Gordon Nunn, from a family of Ipswich builders, who in 1970 had bought The Cottage at the foot of Church Hill from Col. Airy where he lived for a while.⁵⁵

Where did all the cottagers go?

In total, 13 cottages were pulled down in the space of little over ten years. Six were demolished at The Brook following seven in the main part of the village that had been flattened some ten years before. The social change was dramatic. Yet the evictions were perhaps less harsh than might have been expected accompanied as they were by a degree of shuffling around of tenancies and, in a few cases, aided by timely deaths that left only widows to be rehoused. The first cottage to go was the former yeoman's house half way up Hill Farm Road which at one time had stood on the edge of The Green. Made of wattle and daub, it is recorded as a single dwelling in 1772 but, along with many other properties in the village, by 1837 had been converted into two farm cottages.⁵⁶ Soon after Alfred Phillips (b. 1871) died in 1956, Jack Titshall (b. 1914), who lived in the other half, was given notice by Lofts and found new work as pigman for Jock Causton at Brightwell Hall. Both Phillips and Titshall had been horsemen on Hill Farm and Titshall had acted as foreman in the weeks leading up to George Fiske's death in 1946. In 1959 the new chalet style house named *Cobblers* was the first of the new wave of houses to be built.

Demolition of the remaining cottages in the centre of the village was complete by 1963. They were *The Meadows*, the former vicarage that had been converted into three dwellings when the new vicarage was built in 1845 and which stood near the Village Hall, and the red brick pair of cottages in Sink Meadow next to Alfred Phillips' house described above. Of the three families in *The Meadows* Arthur Gardiner and his wife moved to Post Mill Gardens in Grundisburgh, Walter Dunnett died in 1960 and his widow Hannah moved to what is now 2, Brook Lane while Basil and Joyce Dunnett moved up to the newly built farm cottages at the top of Hill Farm Road. Arthur Gardiner was the son of Frank Gardiner, a horseman on Hill Farm who had moved up from Ardleigh and who lived in the right hand half of Hill Cottages for over 50 years. Arthur followed his father on the farm as a poultryman, served in the Wiltshire Regiment in the First World War and lost a leg at Gallipoli. He became a postman and did boot and shoe repairs in the red brick shed adjoining the village shop on the corner of Church Lane and Butts Road and which has only recently been demolished. Walter Dunnett was a stockman on Hill Farm for 60 years. His son Fred followed him firstly as a cowman in George Fiske's time and then as a general farm worker, dying in service when he had done 50 years, while Fred's son Basil, who took over the pigs from his grandfather, completed 48. Will Grimsey, another key worker on Hill Farm as senior tractor driver, also moved up from Sink Meadow to the new cottages at the top of Hill Farm Road.

Down at The Brook, Fred Dunnett died in 1973 while living at Brook House and his widow Eva moved across the lane into 1, Brook Lane. She died in a home in Dale Hall Lane in Ipswich in 1994. At Journey's End, Charlie Wright, a gardener, and his wife both died and the house was left empty. In the central south facing cottage, Leslie Addison and her husband Ben, who was a digger driver for a local construction company, moved to a council house in Hasketon. And in the cottage closest to the brook, Bill Ebdon moved into council accommodation at 2 Church Lane. He latterly

⁵⁵ SROI, EG94/B1/2, Playford Parish Council Minute Book, 1948-71, 27 April 1961.

⁵⁶ See Glenham in this series, p.4. See also Archway House footnote 8 for information on a painting of the house.

worked in Ipswich with the Department of Health and Social Security and had been appointed a Lay Reader by the Revd Ernest Broadbent taking services at Playford church. On the far side of Warren Lane, as has already been mentioned, Ella Felgate moved very briefly to Playford Lane in Rushmere before she died while her neighbour Constance Nicholls had earlier moved to The Walk in Kesgrave soon after her husband's death.

Had plans for redevelopment been implemented at some later date, Charles Lofts would undoubtedly have made a greater amount of money. House price inflation over the last several decades had greatly exceeded all other rising costs. But while demand for building plots outstripped supply, at the same time the post war fashion for wanton destruction had changed and it is now arguable that permission would have been granted to push through the blitz that followed. Today three houses 'of character' might possibly have been saved - namely The Meadows, Alfred Phillip's old house on the former Green and the one down at The Brook nearest the stream. Not only might legislation and planning reviews have come to their rescue but also popular demand as the fashion for converting old buildings had not then fully developed. And yet in 1960s and '70s Playford, under different ownership, the Miller's House was converted from two farm cottages into a most desirable residence as indeed were the two on The Heath. And Church Corner Cottage, which the Airys had owned for 125 years, is yet another example where conservation triumphed over demolition when it was sold in 1970.

The village pound

Mention has already been made of the blacksmith's shop which reportedly lay between the stream and the first pair of Wests' cottages and no history of The Brook would be complete without the inclusion of the village pound which lay on the other side of the water. It is still there with its outline clearly discernible today, the original fencing long gone and the area now much overgrown. A pound, or pinfold, was a small enclosure in which stray farm livestock were held until claimed by their owner who in early times had to pay a fine to the person on whose land they had strayed. If any such animals were not claimed within a set period of time, often three weeks, they could be sold with the proceeds going both to the person who first detained them as well as to their keeper while they were in custody. By the 16th century most villages would have had a pound and its use would have continued well into the 19th and possibly even into the early years of the 20th century though doubtless without the financial penalties that had previously been imposed.



The former Playford pound, much overgrown, lying beyond Barn Field gateway on the approach to The Brook.

It is of note that it remains recognisable not only on the ground but that it still appears on large scale maps though without identifying marks to inform what it once was. It is also clearly shown on the plan included with the sale catalogue of October 1995 when Charles Lofts retired from farming and put all his arable land up for sale

