

THE OLD POST OFFICE

The red brick building shown in Jenni Nix's drawing that is labelled the Old Post Office was never known by that name. Before the village shop's closure in 1998 it was called Playford Post Office Stores but the then postmistress and her husband, June and Derek Gosling, on their retirement changed its name to The Goose's Nest and continued to live in the property.¹ Following their move to the Seckford Almshouses in Woodbridge and the sale of their premises in 2013, the new owners changed its name yet again to Sonnet House. The designation 'The Old Post Office' properly belongs to one of the two cottages, now a single dwelling, on the corner of Hill Farm Road that is covered in this series under the title Glenham. Confusingly there was never a post office there in the



The road through the village giving a pleasing impression that nothing has changed since the former shop, rear left, was built in 1887. Copyhold, to its right, is C15 early C16 while the cottages nearest camera are early C19

modern sense of the term as only the porch was used for the posting and collecting of mail.² When the new and proper post office was built in the village in 1887, that porch was redundant but the house retained its former association with the postal service by being given a name. On moving into the property in Hill Farm Road a few years ago, the new owners changed its name back to what it originally was. This article therefore deals not with The Old Post Office but with the present-day Sonnet House and, for good measure, will include its timber framed neighbour Copyhold and the development of the four acre field in which the two houses once sat.

¹ June Gosling (1938-2015) shopkeeper from 1976 to 1998, was the first to own rather than rent the premises having bought it from the Biddell family in 1975.

² White's Directories of Suffolk. The 1855 edition states that mail 'was [delivered] from Ipswich daily' and the 1885 edition, two years before the new shop and Post Office had been built, informs that 'a wall letter box is cleared at 5.00 pm'. This would suggest that use of the 'Old Post Office' letter box had finished before the new building had begun and that a new one had been fitted to the old brick shed that was soon to be an integral part of the new shop premises.

Arthur Biddell (1783-1860), first of his family to own the property, 1833 to 1860

That field on the north side of Church Lane and stretching from Butts Hill up to The Courts was bought by Arthur Biddell in June 1833 following the death of the previous owner's widow. It had been sold at auction by a Mr Cana at the Angel Inn in Theatre Street, Woodbridge, where it was firstly purchased for £305 by the Revd Charles Day the then perpetual curate of Playford. Just one month later Day sold it to Biddell by private treaty for the same money, a tactic no doubt employed to show that there was no deceit in the purchase as Biddell and Cana had been in partnership as estate agents since at least 1816.³

Biddell had come to Playford from West Suffolk in 1808 and farmed Hill Farm under the 1st Marquis of Bristol who owned practically every acre in the parish. Almost exceptionally, the four acres of land that Biddell purchased had belonged to a John Gayfer (also written at the time as Gayford) who had died in 1825 and in whose will had left it and the two double cottage properties to his widow Ann.⁴ On Ann's death it was to be sold but no date for Ann's demise has been found. However, from an Abstract of Title drawn up in 1882, it is known that she did not sell in her lifetime.⁵ Gayfer was resident in the village at the time of writing his will in 1815 and it can be presumed that he farmed the land himself but in which of the four cottage properties he then lived is not known. One or two of his tenants might well have been employed by him but on his death it is most likely that his widow moved away letting the land to a working husbandman as was the norm in the days before her late husband first bought the property in 1805.



Arthur Biddell who bought the former Gayfer property in 1833. Ownership was to pass through eight members of his family over a period of 180 years

Pre-Biddell owners of Copyhold and the three acre field

From early records it is learnt that a Robert Leyborne, 'a Doctor in Divinity', took possession in 1735, retained ownership for some eight years before selling it on in 1743.⁶ The property was then known as Webb's and consisted of 'a tenement with a close to the same containing by estimation three acres and a half'. It was not the four and a quarter acres that Biddell was to buy almost 100 years later and neither was there any mention of a second tenement such as the brick built double cottage that is now known as Gayfer's. There were however included in this and subsequent sales two small strips of land, both half an acre in size, that lay in the Common Field just to the north of the Webb property one called Sheep Coats and the other called Charnells, medieval peasant

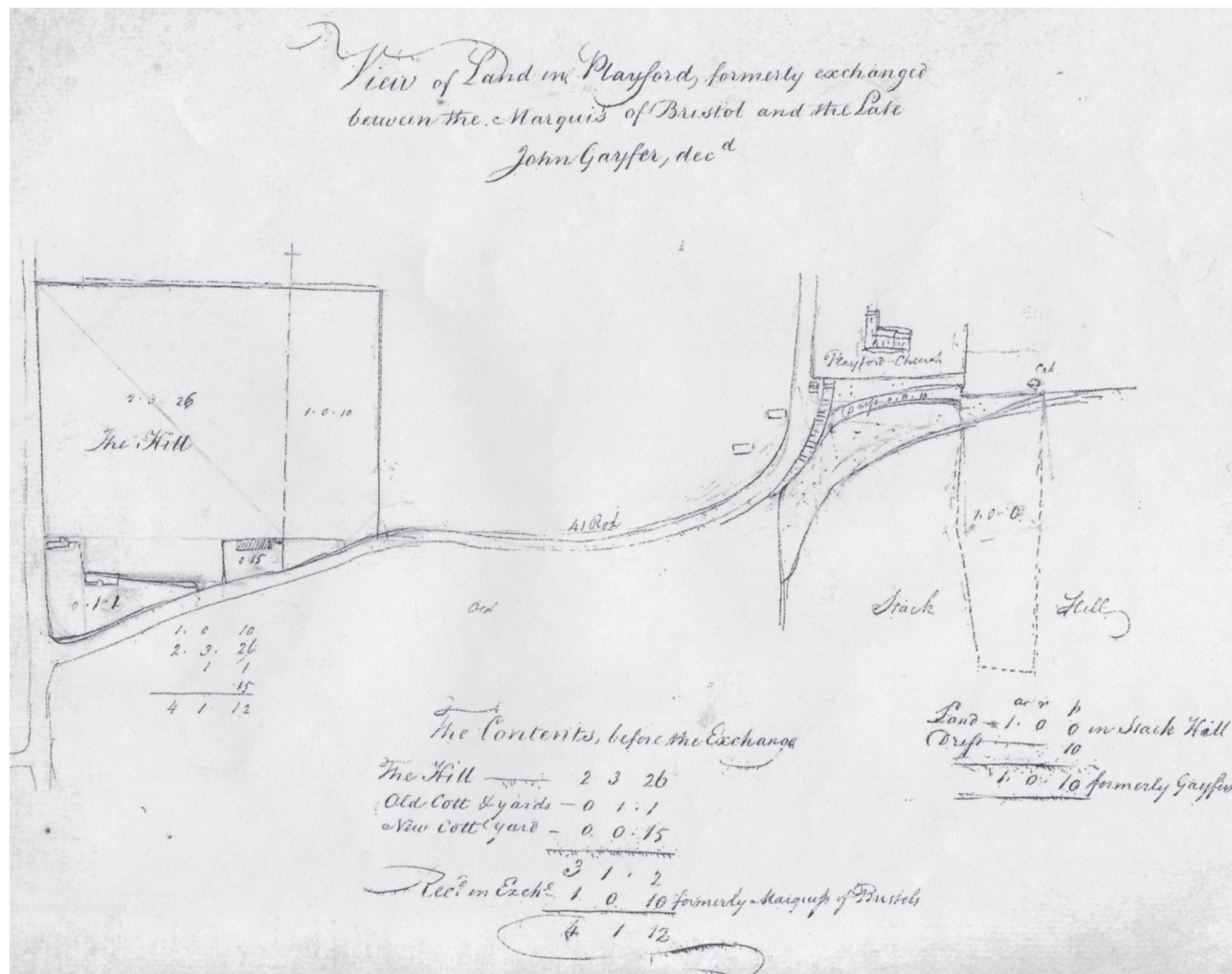
³ See Hill House in this series, 4, for work that Biddell and Cana did together.

⁴ SROI, IC/AA1/245/63, will of John Gayfer, 2 July 1815.

⁵ Abstract of Title of the Trustees under the Will of Arthur Biddell who died 25 May 1860, dated 1882. Private possession. *Ipswich Journal*, 4 May 1833, advertising the sale of Gayfer's land, messuage and double cottage.

⁶ Abstract of Title of Mr John Gayfer to Premises Copyhold of the Manor of Playford cum Mitchells and Mere Hall, 1833. Private possession.

holdings that retained their identity up to the time of the Biddell purchase in 1833. John Mills, the tenant farmer at Lux Farm, bought the field from Leyborne and on his death some 20 years later passed it first to his nephew and then to his nephew's young son 'an infant [represented] by Attorney' who was admitted to the copyhold property in 1763. Towards the end of the century John Cutting of Playford Hall Farm assumed ownership and in 1805 it was bought by Gayfer. All owners previous to the Gayfer purchases were without exception absentee landlords in that they did not live



The two one acre strips of land, shown by dotted lines, exchanged between Lord Bristol in Church Lane and the late John Gayfer in Stack Hill south of the church in 1808-10. Plan drawn by Isaac Johnson in 1833 at the time of Biddell's purchase

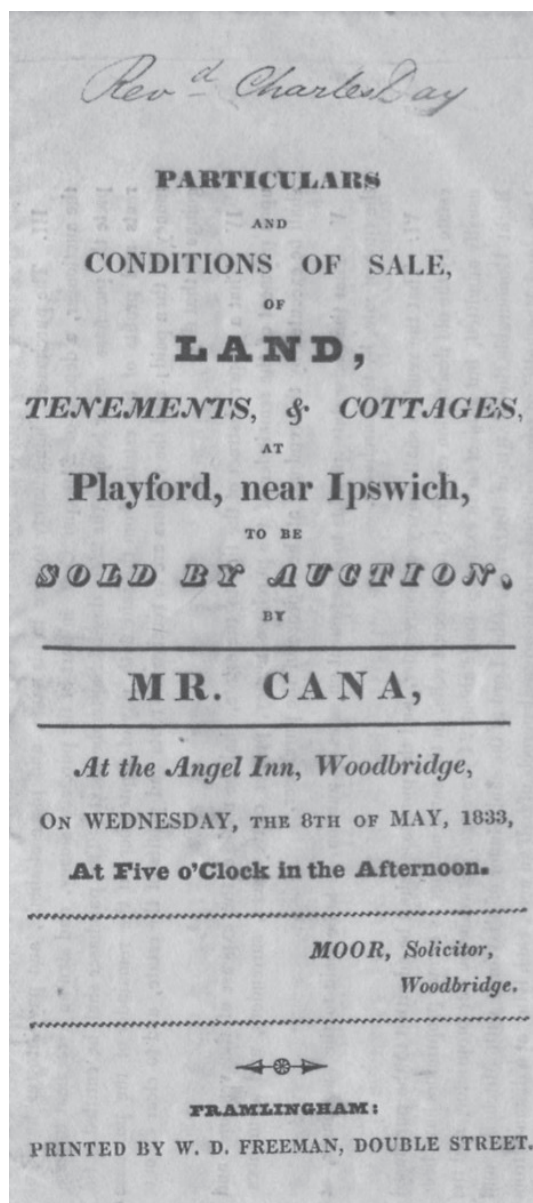
on site but let the property to a lower class of rent-paying husbandmen of whom not a single name survives. Gayfer, who had come from neighbouring Tuddenham, was an exception. He was a hands-on owner-occupier, the first of his kind, who both owned and worked the land himself not necessarily single-handedly but possibly with the help of his own permanent or casual labourers.

John Gayfer (d. 1825), owner from 1805-1825

His widow Ann and her exors owners from 1825-1833

Gayfer was illiterate but he was not the parochial individual that might be imagined. He had for example arranged for no less a figure than Isaac Johnson to witness his will and his executors and beneficiaries came from well spread out parts of East Suffolk indicating a wide circle of family and

friends.⁷ His wife Ann had originally come from Hollesley. And the occupations of those family and friends as farmer, husbandman, labourer and blacksmith support the view that Gayfer himself was a practical sort of man. He had ownership of one other piece of land in the parish, a one acre strip in



The 1833 sale catalogue of John Gayfer's Church Lane property

professional manner. Isaac Johnson, who had witnessed Gayfer's will, surveyed the land and mapped out the area in great detail putting on record the omissions of the earlier exchange. Johnson was more used to surveying and mapping much larger areas across the county, his patrons including

Stack Hill to the south of Playford church which in 'around the year 1808 or 1810 he gave to the Marquis of Bristol' who at that time was tidying up such small parcels as part of the Enclosure Movement then sweeping the country. In exchange Gayfer was given another strip of the same size which was added to the eastern end of his holding in Church Lane, an addition that extended his field some 40 yards up Church Lane taking his new boundary to where The Courts are today.

With no 'development potential' or inflated house pricing that there might well be today and indeed at a time of severe agricultural depression, it is of interest that in present day money (2019) Biddell paid around £7,000 an acre for the land and buildings, an agricultural value for the field that would not look too out of place at the present time. It is of interest also that the single acre that Gayfer owned in Stack Hill was exchanged with another of the same poor quality: thin, dry sandy soil on which a more recent occupier has admitted that 'he could never get anything to grow'. By contrast the Common Field immediately to the north, which ultimately was to end up in Estate hands, was of far superior quality. The two areas are still divided today by an impressive ditch that stretches the width of the field from Butts Hill to Church Hill and acts as a cruel reminder that landowners were not only able to distinguish good soil from bad but knew how to look after themselves at the expense of others.⁸

The exchange of land between Gayfer and Lord Bristol in around 1808 or 1810 had been 'without deeds or writings' but the sale of Gayfer's estate some 25 years later was conducted in a much different and more

⁷ Isaac Johnson (1754-1835) was a Woodbridge based topographical artist and land surveyor who mapped estates in practically every parish in East Suffolk. His collection of maps, plans and drawings is in the Ipswich Record Office (HD11/475). See also John Blatchly, *Isaac Johnson of Woodbridge, Georgian Surveyor and Artist*, (Dorchester, 2014).

⁸ While it could be argued that allotments were always placed close to the village for reasons of access, they were invariably to be found on the poorer, drier soils. Allotment Field to the east of Gayfer's property where Roots and The Courts are today is a case in point. Other allotments have been in Archway Field until Herman Biddell built Archway House and had them moved to what is now the Playing Field. Others were in St Mary's Drive between the Vicarage and Hill Farm Cottages. Perhaps the best were in the north-west corner of Railway Field which were there in the mid C19.

the nobility, clergy and gentry and it comes as something of a surprise therefore to find his involvement in this humble project.

John Field, tenant from before 1833 to c. 1842 **First recorded tenant of the four acre field**

On Gayfer's death in 1825 his widow inherited the property, moved out of the village and organised tenants to farm the land. Copyhold was the tied house that provided their accommodation or, more precisely, half of Copyhold as by then it had been divided into two to accommodate the village's rapidly rising population.⁹ Ann and John Gayfer were the last for over a hundred years to have the house to themselves. The only occupants' names to survive the period of Ann Gayfer's ownership are those that appear on Isaac Johnson's map drawn up for the 1833 sale. Of the four names that he recorded, John Field was living in the 'messuage' (that is in Copyhold) rather than in the 'new cottage' (that is in Gayfer's) and in the 1841 Census he is also described as being a 'gardener' suggesting that of the four he was the most likely to have been the farming or market gardening tenant. In what year he started is not known but his tenancy straddled both Ann Gayfer's and Biddell's ownership; by the time of the 1844 Tithe Apportionment he had gone.¹⁰ Additionally John Field is thought to have come from the same self-employed small farmer stock as William Field who at that time owned and ran the 12 acre holding on the Tuddenham to Great Bealings road which in 1866 was to become the house and gardens of Playford Mount.¹¹

George Clarke, tenant c. 1842 to mid-1850s **William Woby, tenant mid-1850s to pre-1871**

Some 11 years after Biddell's original purchase the tenant recorded in the 1844 Tithe Commutation was a George Clarke who, somewhat strangely, had been born and brought up in far away Epping in the neighbouring county of Essex. Classed as a market gardener, he was still there ten years later but by 1858 William Woby (1818-1906) had taken over.¹² Woby came from a much respected village family. A brother John (1816-1893) played the violin in church from the west end gallery before it was taken down in 1859 and was awarded a long service medal from the Suffolk Agricultural Association for his 58 years on Lux Farm. His wife Mary ran the Dame School from her cottage at The Brook before it was transferred to Hill Farm cottages in around 1864.¹³



The shed on Butts Road that was used by tenants as both a store and an outlet for their produce before the shop, nearest camera, was built in 1887

⁹ The population had risen from 189 in 1811 to 299 by 1831 an increase of almost 60% in the space of 20 years. At least part of that increase was due to men returning from the garrison towns of Ipswich and Woodbridge at the end of the Napoleonic Wars where they had found better paid employment than working on local farms

¹⁰ SROI FDA 196/41/19 Tithe map, 25 November 1844; HD 11:475/2230 key to Tithe map.

¹¹ The land was bought by E.C. Hakewill, the prominent Victorian church architect, whose home in Brompton, London, was required by the Metropolitan Railway.

¹² Post Office Directory of Suffolk, 1858. William Woby was described as a market gardener and shopkeeper.

¹³ See Foxboro in this series, pp. 9,11.

Another brother George (1822-1888) married Mary Sheldrake whose family, on both the male and female sides, were much favoured servants of the Clarksons at Playford Hall. Before William took over Gayfer's former field in the centre of the village, he had been a carrier with regular trips into Ipswich and was nearing 40 when he turned to gardening for a living.¹⁴ By 1858 he was selling his produce and was classed in the Directories as a shopkeeper and market gardener and by 1861 as a market gardener and a grocer. Living in one of the four houses on site, the brick built shed on Butts Hill, only recently demolished, would have served as his shop. But some time before 1871 both he and his wife Jane vanished from the records. William reappeared ten years later, as a widower, in far away Wolferton on the Sandringham Estate where he was working as gardener for the rector there, the Revd Willoughby Dickinson, a one time incumbent at Playford.¹⁵ But no record of his wife's death has yet been found.¹⁶

When Arthur Biddell died in 1860 sometime prior to Woby's disappearance, ownership of the field was put in the hands of his executors. Biddell had taken great care in his will to ensure that all his nine surviving children were treated equally and to that end his locally owned property, that is Branson's, the double cottage at the bottom of Hill Farm Road, cottages at Grundisburgh near the chapel as well as Gayfer's field itself, were to be held in trust for 20 years after his death and the rent divided equally between all family members. At the end of the 20 years the properties were to be sold and the proceeds similarly shared out between the family. By 1880 the four sons were all well established in their various occupations: Herman, the youngest, was the tenant at Hill Farm and logically acquired Branson's as he was already farming the land there; William who apart from farming 1,000 acres at Lavenham and Hawstead was by then senior partner at Biddell & Blencoe the Bury estate agent acquired the two cottages at the bottom of Hill Farm Road; George who was Chief Engineer of Ransome's is presumed to have acquired the Grundisburgh cottages while Manfred who was farming Lux Farm got possession of Gayfer's four acre field in Church Lane.

Elijah Amoss, tenant pre 1871-1884

Woby's successor as tenant was Elijah Amoss (1814-1893) who came from another highly regarded village family and who lived with his parents and three brothers at Colonel Pogson's Old Farm House, the present day Colonel's Farm Cottage, on the Martlesham Road.¹⁷ Father and three boys all worked on Lux Farm first for Arthur Biddell and then for his son Manfred when he took over in 1842.



Bridge Cottage where Elijah and Sarah Amoss lived and ran their shop. Numerous storage sheds filled the gap between their cottage and the river but were razed when Sarah died in 1884 and Elijah moved away

¹⁴ White's Directory of Suffolk, 1855.

¹⁵ 1881 Census, Wolferton.

¹⁶ See Brook Cottages in this series, 16, for more detailed information on both George and John Woby. *Ipswich Post*, 31 May 1879. *Bury & Norwich Post*, 3 June 1879.

¹⁷ The house was actually just over the border in the parish of Little Bealings and remained so until the boundary changes of 1984. Its geographical location gave the false impression that it had nothing to do with Playford. Additionally, the house as well as the land surrounding it did not belong to the Marquis of Bristol but to James Colville who owned the Grove Estate. Both house and land were rented separately by the tenant of Lux Farm and in that way the occupants of Colonel's Cottage became part of the Biddells' general labour force.

Premises in
Playford Suff.
late the property
of Mr. John Gayfer, dec'd.
Taken
April 9th. 1833.

Tenants
Messrs. John Ford
Rene & Coles
Cottages of Mrs. Green
John Payne

Playford Suff.
1833.

The Field 3. 5. 30

Garden 0. 1. 9

PLAYFORD STREET.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

about the year 1821
The late John Gayfer gave to the
present Marquis of Bristol a piece of
open land lying in the back field of the
Marquis containing one acre for a
piece of land lying in the NE Corner of these
Premises, bounded as in this plan containing one
acre and two Rods

A B C D
The Field — 3. 5. 30
Garden — 0. 1. 9
Total — 4. 1. 11

increased the size of the business substantially. Now styled a pork butcher and retail grocer, he employed his 21 year old daughter Sarah full time to help him in the shop.

¹⁸ SROI, FC 22/D1/5, Playford Marriage Registers. The couple married in Playford church on Christmas Day 1844. White's Directory, 1844.

²⁰ SROI HD11:475/2230, key to Tithe Apportionment map, 25 November 1844.

Meadow between the house and the river before the house was extended and the garden laid out in the 1930s. On the railway plan of 1840 the storage facilities were surprisingly extensive and included ‘stables, sheds, pig styes, cart shed, out-buildings’ and there was even a stack yard.²¹ These were still shown on the OS map of 1881 but had all gone by 1904 after Amoss had died. As village shopkeeper, his standing in the community was already high but his being classed as ‘a tenant farmer of four acres’ enhanced his status yet further entitling him to be one of only five electors in the parish qualified to vote under the occupation franchise of 1884.²² The other four in this high ranking list were no lesser persons than Herman and Manfred Biddell farmers of Hill and Lux Farms respectively, Joseph Bromley a retired landowner and the second owner of Playford Mount after E. C. Hakewill the architect who had built it and the Revd. John Freeman who qualified under the parson’s freehold.²³

The purpose-built shop put up in 1887 by Manfred Biddell (1822-1894), Arthur Biddell’s eldest son. He was the second family owner of the field from 1882-1894

Elijah Amoss was 70 when his wife, the former Sarah Garrod, died in 1884 and, unable to cope on his own, moved away to Hasketon to be with his daughter. What happened to the market garden and who provided the village with vegetables and other foodstuffs over the next two or three years is not known but Manfred Biddell, who had acquired the Gayfer’s field only four years earlier under the terms of his father’s will, gave thought to the provision of a proper purpose-built shop. Until then sales of produce had been

from brick or wooden sheds run by local labouring families but Biddell’s plans were to upgrade and modernise the way in which shopping was carried out in the village. In 1887 he built a new two storey premises that not only accommodated the shop but the shopkeeper and his family as well. And to run it he would recruit someone, most likely from outside the village, with proven commercial



The new shop: a photograph taken at the turn of the C20 with shopkeeper Samuel Oxborrow and his wife Eliza peering over their garden hedge. Copyhold can be seen in the background, its roof with a covering of straw rather than thatch

experience and build it on the empty corner site between Copyhold and Butts Hill. The lease of the premises was to include the field ‘lately occupied by Elijah Amoss’, an addition that was taken up by successive tenants until the mid-1920s after which the field was allowed to lie derelict.

²¹ SROI, 150/2/5.70, Ipswich and Yarmouth Railway, Book of Reference, 1840.

²² The Representation of the People Act 1884 extended the same voting qualifications as existed in the towns to the countryside. All men paying an annual rent of £10 and those holding land valued at £10 now had the vote.

²³ In the Church of England the rector or vicar holds title to benefice property such as the church, churchyard and parsonage the ownership passing to his successor rather than to his heirs

Samuel Oxborrow (1830-1911), first tenant of the new shop 1887-1908

In the event Manfred Biddell recruited a Samuel Oxborrow the landlord of The Staff of Life public house on Bramford Road in Ipswich who had previously worked with his son as a blacksmith in Witnesham. How Biddell came to recruit him is not known but, as the business was to be run on a more professional footing, for the first time a proper contract was drawn up:²⁴

TERMS

of an Agreement between Manfred Biddell of Playford and Samuel Oxborrow of Playford for the letting of New House and of the Premises and land lately occupied by Elijah Amos to Samuel Oxborrow by M. Biddell.

Rent to be 15£ yearly to commence 11 Oct 1887 to be paid half yearly - April and October. Six months notice to be given by either party to terminate the hire.

Hire to consist of New House, all the out Houses and all the Land lately occupied by Elijah Amos except a piece of two Rods wide from Page's Garden to the end of New Shed built for the Occupier of the thatched House [Copyhold] which House is not included in Saml. Oxborrow's hire.

All the fixtures in the House and Shop including the Counter in Shop and in Bake House belong to the Landlord to be kept in repair by the Tenant.

Rates to be paid by tenant. Tithe to be paid by Landlord.

Gooseberry, Currant & Raspberries Bushes not to be paid for but the same number to be left whenever the tenant leaves so that there is to be no valuation when the tenant gives up possession.

Any pig styes or other Buildings that the tenant may erect to be removed by him at the end of his hire or the Landlord to have the option of taking them by Valuation.

The following Buildings to be placed or Built by Landlord - Brick oven and Copper in Bake House, Pig Stye and Cart Shed to be built, Shed for Granary, Counter and Shelves to be fitted in Shop.

We hereby agree to the above terms.

Manfred Biddell
Samuel Oxborrow

witness A B Biddell

Playford, Nov 2nd 1887

Oxborrow was already 57 when he moved to Playford with his wife Eliza (1835-1923), daughter Alice and granddaughter Sybilla. Their new home was known as the Post Office from the start. In the Census of 1891 he classes himself as a grocer and ten years later as a 'sub postmaster' with his granddaughter Sybilla helping him on the postal side of the business. He remained at the shop for 21 years retiring in 1908 when he was 78. Interestingly in the census of 1911 he termed himself 'old aged pensioner and farm labourer'. Lloyd George's Old Age Pensions Act had been passed in the year in which he retired and for the first time provision was made for state pensions to be financed

²⁴ The Staff of Life public house on Bramford Road closed in 1962. A pub of the same name off Wherstead Road closed in 1918.

out of central taxation. For those over 70, as Oxborrow was, it was worth five shillings a week. On retirement the Oxborrows continued to live in Church Lane most probably in either Copyhold or one of the Gayfer cottages as all four were in the same Biddell family ownership as the shop. But Samuel Oxborrow had little time in which to do any work on the farm as he died in 1911 just three years into his retirement. His wife Eliza lived on until 1923 to the great age of 89. Five years after their arrival in the village, in 1892, the Oxborrows lost their younger son Ephraim when he was only 27 and erected an impressive headstone to his memory close to the footpath at the west end of the church. Both parents are also buried in Playford but their family never granted them the same generosity and they lie buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in the churchyard.²⁵

Henry Barnes Mendham (1864-1932), tenant 1908-1923

If Samuel Oxborrow was selected for his business acumen and experience in handling money, Henry Barnes Mendham who followed him was most likely chosen because of his prowess as a gardener and as someone who would look after the field. He had started out in life as a page boy for the bachelor rector of Clopton, risen within the ranks of domestic service and finally become head gardener. On marriage in 1888, his wife Alice (1862-1942) took on the job of cook. It is of note that

once in Playford, unlike his predecessor, he referred to himself not just as a shopkeeper but as a market gardener adding weight to the thought that he most likely got more to grips with the field than Oxborrow had done. At the time of Mendham's recruitment, his proficiency as a gardener would have been known to Herman Biddell as, some 30 years before, Biddell had married the daughter of the rector of



The Coronation of King George V, 22 June 1911, when Henry Barnes Mendham was shopkeeper: the shop in celebratory mood. Note that the roof of Copyhold is now tiled

neighbouring Burgh and he would have been familiar with all the goings on in the wider Church in that part of Suffolk. It is quite possible that he would have put Mendham's name forward to his nephew Arthur Blencowe Biddell who by that time had become the shop's owner following the death of his mother just two years earlier. Herman lived at Archway House just across the road from the shop and was in a much better position to have a finger on the pulse than was his nephew who, on his father Manfred's death in 1894, had moved from Lux Farm with his mother and siblings into Crescent Road in the St Matthew's district of Ipswich.

Mendham brought with him one other skill that would also have appealed to Biddell: he played the organ. He was organist at Clopton church and even went so far as to call himself organist in the

²⁵ SROI, FC 22/D1/6, Playford Burial Register.

1891 Census when he was still a young man of 27.²⁶ And although Biddell had stood down from being sole churchwarden at Playford following an acrimonious dispute with the vicar only four years earlier, his heart and soul were still very much in the church; those of his nephew Arthur, living in Ipswich, were more likely to have been elsewhere.

James Read tenant, 1923-1927

Mendham stayed for 15 years leaving in 1923. He moved to Ipswich when he was 59 just two years before the pension age, for both men and women, was reduced to 65. It is likely therefore that he took further paid employment for the next six years but it is not known what that was. Both he and his wife died in Ipswich, he in 1932 and Elizabeth during the war. They were followed at Playford by James and Florence Read whose credentials for running a village shop are hard to fathom; a daughter felt obliged to confess that her father was 'fulfilling a childhood dream'. James Read was freshly out of the navy with no previous commercial experience and had to learn as he went along. That he was offered the tenancy can only be explained by the fact that the then landlord Arthur Blencowe Biddell had died somewhat suddenly in the September of that year and the property had passed to his younger brother John. John had an altogether different character. While Arthur was serious, outgoing, aloof and opinionated, John was far more reserved and kindly, an intellectual who



A 1920 Sunbeam. Was this model the second car in the village? James Read followed the Crisps at The Hall becoming the second car owner in Playford. His second hand 1920s Sunbeam was available for hire

enjoyed chatting with anyone across a wide range of topics no matter what their station in life. It could well have been John who was responsible for his recruitment as there was little more that he would have enjoyed than the exchange of an intelligent few words when calling in on his tenant at the shop.

Unlike the first two tenants, James Read was of middle class stock: his father had been to Winchester College and he too was educating three girls through private school. It is from the Reads' middle daughter Dorothy that a good insight into the workings of the shop under her father's tenure is learned but, although the family were satisfying a village demand, it has to be remembered that they were no ordinary

shopkeepers. They were for example only the second family in the village after the Crisps at The Hall to own a motor car and, unlike other shopkeepers too, James enjoyed the benefit of a navy pension which could well have provided the family with a greater income than the shop.²⁷ But in the end not even two sources of money proved sufficient to support their way of life and, perhaps unsurprisingly, after just three or four short years they left. Dorothy was just ten when she first came to Playford and her memories of the time that she spent in the village were indelibly etched in

²⁶ There is however no evidence that Mendham ever played the organ in Playford church. Until 1921, when payment for an organist is first recorded, it is more than likely that it was played without charge and quite probably by Harriet Biddell, the wife of Herman Biddell, who was known to play the piano. She died in 1925.

²⁷ He was soon followed as a car owner by George Fiske of Hill House and then by the Revd. George Kirkpatrick, vicar of Playford with Culpho 1926-29.

her mind. In later life she married, became a journalist and was still writing articles for the Bristol Times Supplement at the age of 86.^{28 29}

To help the Reads look after and farm the four acre field, they employed young Sydney Felgate who came straight from school and who lived with his parents down at The Brook.³⁰ And to help with the daffodil season, for example, they took on additional women from the village to bunch up the blooms. James would then deliver them to Ipswich by car although he still kept a pony and cart for more local deliveries. A donkey was also kept as a pet for the children. James was a car enthusiast and was forever changing models but he eventually settled on a second hand Sunbeam which he let out for private hire.³¹ He also bought a smaller car so that his eldest daughter could make deliveries around the village and fetch the other two girls home from boarding school at weekends. The family also kept a little governess cart so that the eldest girl could give village children joy rides around the neighbourhood. On the field, or what they termed 'the meadow', James kept a large number of different



As well as two cars, the Reads had a governess cart but it seems to have done little more than give children joy rides around the village

breeds of chicken in sizeable pens that he and young Felgate had constructed: large White Wyandottes for table birds and White Leghorns for layers. He also kept Rhode Island Reds for their better coloured eggs as well as a number of Light Sussex and speckled Plymouth Rocks. And, specially for the children, there were a few bantams as well. Pigs were kept 'in the pit' against Butts Hill. As the amount of work increased an older man was taken on so that with the two parents and the elder daughter there were five full time people working there as well as Mrs Sadd the cleaner who came in three mornings a week. She was the wife of William Sadd, a bricklayer, who lived at Brook House and who some 25 years earlier had built the Village Hall for the Stevensons.

The shop itself was very congested. As the only one in the village a comprehensive range of stock had to be kept to satisfy a wide variety of needs. In addition space had to be found for the Post Office. When Phyllis Turner was living at Lower Lodge as companion help to Caroline Pipe in 1920-21 during the Mendhams' time, she wrote 'that you could buy everything from bread and butter to darning wool and paraffin'.³² A great variety of patent remedies was kept. Beecham's Pills had pride of place as great faith was placed in their medicinal qualities. There was Sloan's Liniment

²⁸ Letter from Dorothy Bowdren née Read to Brian Seward, 28 April 2000. Private possession.

²⁹ Dorothy Bowdren, née Read, was born in Chatham naval base in 1913 and died in Bristol in 2012 aged 98. In September 1998 she wrote a good humoured article in *Past Time, East Anglia* No. 2, Vol. 2, 32 in which she reminisced about her time in Playford in the early and mid 1920s entitled *An' The Livin' Is Easy*.

³⁰ Sydney Felgate, born 1910, was the younger son of Ella Felgate who lived down at The Brook for 63 years. She receives frequent mention in 'Lower Lodge' and 'Brook Cottages' both in this series.

³¹ The Reads left the village in 1927 before compulsory motor insurance was introduced in 1930 and the driving test established in 1935.

³² In later life in the 1960s, Phyllis Palmer (née Turner) was relating her Playford experiences to a Women's Own Meeting in Reading where she then lived. Quoted in Lower Lodge in this series, 3.

for aching limbs, Doan's Backache and Kidney Pills, every kind of syrup, headache pills, toothache tincture, Snowfire Tablets to smooth the hands and protect the lips from icy winds, little rolls of cotton bandages (no packs of plasters then) and Harvey's Gripe Water for easing a baby's wind and stomach upsets.³³

All the usual everyday groceries were of course stocked. Flour, sugar and oatmeal were delivered in big sacks and had to be weighed out into usable quantities. Cocoa, a great favourite then, and a few tins of the new food drinks such as Ovaltine were sold but they were expensive. Bread was delivered to the shop by a baker from Ipswich and distributed around the village by the eldest daughter Flo in the second car. Large hams were bought that had to be sliced. Tins of biscuits were delivered direct from Carr's of Carlisle.



The shop acted as the local pharmacy

All kinds of cheap sweets were on sale which the Reads bought from an Ipswich wholesaler. There were Sherbert dabs and suckers for the children and liquorice bootlaces, gob stoppers, love hearts with little messages on them, Dolly mixtures and lemon drops together with acid drops came in big square glass jars. There were also various chocolates and sugared almonds, Turkish delight and crystallised ginger. And there were special sweets for special customers: 'Mr John Biddell had formidable white hard peppermints while Miss Amy Biddell had peppermint creams'.

Most of the cheaper grades of pipe tobacco were stocked such as shag as well as some that was in big black lumps. Cigarettes were very primitive. Woodbines were sold in little paper cases, five for tuppence, and there was also Black Cat, Craven 'A', Passing Cloud but even then 'Players were the top working man's smoke'.

About twice a year a big crate would arrive from Stoke-on-Trent containing a great miscellany of common china, plates, cups and saucers, dishes, pudding basins and often a few pieces of nice patterned tea sets. These were quickly sold out unless they were held back for the Christmas trade. Big bales of cotton goods would also arrive from Manchester containing a great assortment of useful things from men's hard wearing work shirts, men's long johns, pretty aprons for the women and coarse everyday overalls and pinafores. There would be a few sheets and pillowcases and towels, tea cloths, socks for men and boys, though the women knitted many socks themselves, and ladies stockings, mostly thick and black or brown with perhaps two or three pairs of light summer cotton or lisle stockings and even a few pretty handkerchiefs, which again might be held back for the Christmas trade, and maybe a good quality white cotton blouse. The arrival of these goods was always welcome in the village as they were very low priced and 'brought a touch of luxury to many a cottage'.

Three very unsettled years followed the Read's departure in 1927. The change in tempo and the loss of services must have come as a huge loss to the village.

³³ Although aspirin had been introduced by Bayer as early as 1899, it was not universally available between the wars.

Three very unsettled years, 1927 - 1929

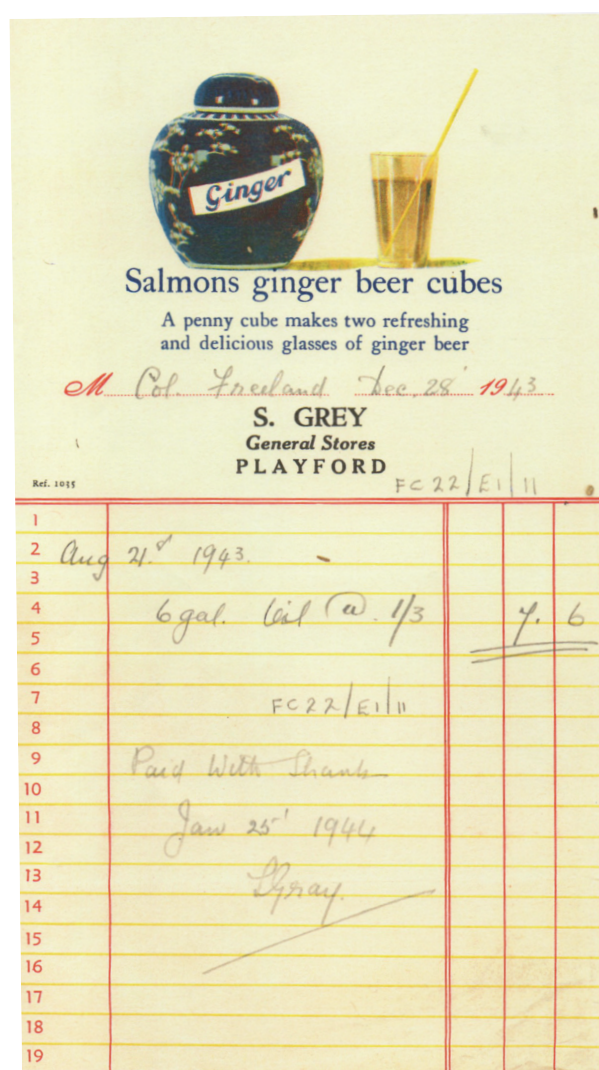
It was at the end of this period that Amy Biddell, who lived at Archway House, stepped in to fill a vacancy - a move that she would undoubtedly have made out of the goodness of her heart rather than for any personal gain.³⁴ Always well intentioned, she was however 'not good with money' and was quickly declared bankrupt through being over generous to her customers. Her undoing caused a great scandal in the village and a full sixty years later families that were around at the time of her downfall were still reluctant to talk about it and then only in whispers.³⁵ For 120 years the Biddells had reigned supreme within the parish exclusively holding all the offices of authority from churchwarden to overseer and surveyor. They were the sole employers, greatly respected and looked up to by the lower orders and Amy had blackened their name.

Susie Gray (1897-1986), tenant 1929-1961

In 1927-28 a Victor Bloomfield appears in the Directories as running the Post Office but how he acquired the job is an even bigger mystery than how some of his predecessors had acquired theirs. As a young lad of 18 he had been a kennel man and a master of hounds but, now in his early 30s, he took on the tenancy of the shop but he was not to last long. It was at this point that Amy Biddell stepped in to fill a vacancy. Susie Gray who took over in 1929 and, unable to use the word bankrupt even after 50 years, is on record as saying that her predecessor was 'unable to carry on'.³⁶

In complete contrast to the comings and goings of the previous three years, Susie Gray was to rent the shop for the next 32 years, longer than any other

SROI, FC22/E1/11. A Susie Gray invoice for oil bought for lamps in the church in the summer of 1943 by Col. Freeland, churchwarden and PCC treasurer. During the war, times of services were adjusted to accommodate the blackout although this purchase demonstrates that at least some artificial lighting was used. By way of comparison, in the 1930s oil was purchased 40 gallons at a time from wholesalers in Ipswich. When assessing wartime daylight saving, it has to be borne in mind that from 1940 to 1947 Britain remained on British Summer Time throughout the year and that Double Summer Time, which operated from 1941 to 1945, ran from April to August rather than from March to October. The spelling of her surname on the bill does not accord with that in any of the official records such as births, deaths and 1939 Register



³⁴ Kelly's Directory of Suffolk, 1929. Amy Biddell is recorded as running the shop as well as organising a mobile library.

³⁵ See Archway House in this series, page 5, for a cousin's comments on her life style and total inability to handle money. The two deferential families reluctant to discuss the matter after a gap of 60 years were that of José Booker which had lived in the parish since the 1820s and that of Mrs Wright of Woodbridge whose Hogger antecedents are first mentioned in the Playford records in 1794. Both families had lived under the Biddells and had witnessed their decline.

³⁶ Grundisburgh News, 1982. Interview with Martin Redstall.

tenant in its entire history. She had been born in Woodbridge but later moved with her parents to Eyke when her father took over the family joinery business there. Her mother was a one-time school mistress at Bealings. Miss Gray was 32 when she came to the shop. She had been working for the Biddells at Archway House and that is how she came to hear of the vacancy. But it was not with her father's consent. She never married although soon after her arrival in Playford she met and subsequently lived with a Harry Rush, a 'Permanent Way Length Man' from Railway Cottage. He not only helped her by serving in the shop but would cycle into Ipswich to fetch any item that was not in stock. She sold mainly groceries but also sweets and tobacco; there is no mention of any items such as clothing and china that the Reads used to sell. Neither did she make any use of the four acre field that had once been an integral part of the tenancy and which was allowed to lie untended.



Rationing began in early 1940; some foodstuffs, such as meat, remained on ration until 1954

Susie Gray was there throughout the war years when most foodstuffs were rationed. People had to register at a shop or shops of their choice and were issued with a ration book containing coupons. The shopkeeper was provided with enough food to supply his registered customers and, on making a purchase, the relevant coupons in the customer's book were cancelled. The rations themselves, certainly by today's standards, were meagre indeed allowing individuals for example just two ounces of butter a week and one ounce of cheese. The shopkeeper had to break down his weekly allowance into these tiny portions and at the same time ensure that his supply stretched to

everyone who had registered with him. Susie Gray was forever grateful for the help that Col. Freeland gave her with the additional work that this entailed even though Freeland died in September 1944 before war had ended and indeed long before most items had come off ration. Susie and Harry Rush must therefore have coped for much of the time on their own but Freeland would have given them a good start. John Freeland had moved to Bridge Cottage on retirement from the Indian Army in 1936 and had chosen to live in Playford as his wife's sister Jean was married to George Fiske of Hill House.³⁷



Known by some as Miss Gray: a pre-war photograph

During those war years Susie Gray witnessed through her shop window the RAF Hurricane as it crashed into the first council house in Hill Farm Road rendering it uninhabitable for the rest of the war. The only damage done to the pilot was a broken nose. The incident happened on 1 February during the bitter winter of 1940 and the

ambulance had great difficulty in reaching the village. The scars on the house can still be made out but were far more obvious before about 2000 when the house was newly colour washed. The other

³⁷ For more on Col. Freeland see Bridge Cottage in this series, 6-7.

war-time incident that she recalls is the landing of the V2 rocket in a field to the south of New Buildings, one of only four to have hit Suffolk towards the end of the war. The blast ‘threw her to the shop floor and broke the front window’. The windows at Archway House suffered a similar fate. Thanks to meticulous record keeping on the part of the Germans, the rocket is known to have left northern Holland at 1419 GMT on Wednesday 11 October 1944 a time that corresponds precisely with that given by two young girls who were in service there at the time and who ‘were busy washing up the dinner things’.³⁸

Playford remained very much a working class village throughout the whole of Susie Gray’s time with only a small minority able to afford a car. The council houses that were put up in Church Lane in 1948, for example, were not only built without a garage but no allowance was made for parking. Even post war, farm workers were never expected to own a car. The Co-op made occasional deliveries of certain items such as paraffin and some wives would walk all the way into Lattice Barn or even into Ipswich proper to do some shopping but villagers on the whole remained heavily dependent on their local shop. And even when working men could afford a car, their wives never learnt to drive and as late as 1970 there was still only one bus a week into town.³⁹ It was not until the social structure of the village changed with its redevelopment starting in the 1960s that the shop started to get real competition from the outside world. Susie was 64 when she retired to Eyke in 1961 to be with her mother and in 1975 she moved to a bungalow in Ransome Road, Woodbridge, where she died in 1986 aged 89.

Mr and Mrs Wright, tenants 1961-1976

Susie Gray was followed very briefly by Daphne Ebdon, wife of Bill Ebdon a one-time cowman for Brian Johnson at Culpho Hall who later worked as a telephone engineer and then for the Department of Health and Social Security in Ipswich. A keen churchman, he had been made a Lay Reader by the then vicar, the Revd. Ernest Broadbent, who served the parish from 1956 to 1959. But it was rumoured that the disappearance of a sum of money cut short Daphne’s time at the shop.

Mr and Mrs Wright then took over the business but almost nothing is known about them, not even their first names, despite their having been tenants in the recent past and having lived in the village for the best part of 15 years. They played no part in community life neither was any fuss made of them when they left. They were the last occupiers to rent the shop as their successor, June Gosling proprietor from 1976 to 1998, was successful in buying it from Owen Goldsmith before she moved in.

June Gosling (1938-2015), proprietor 1976-1998

June bought in 1975 and took possession the following February. She was to stay as shopkeeper and postmistress for nearly 23 years but it was not until May 2004, after her retirement, that she was able to buy the whole of the brick built shed against Butts Hill which C19 tenants had used both as a store and an outlet for their produce. The baking oven was still there at the time of her purchase whereas on her arrival she had removed the two coppers from the lower part of the shed in which the hams had been boiled, the accompanying chimney stack having blown down in the violent

³⁸ *Fynn-Lark News*, April 2017, 12-13 for full details of the Playford V2.

³⁹ It left at 9.30 on Friday mornings and returned at around midday.

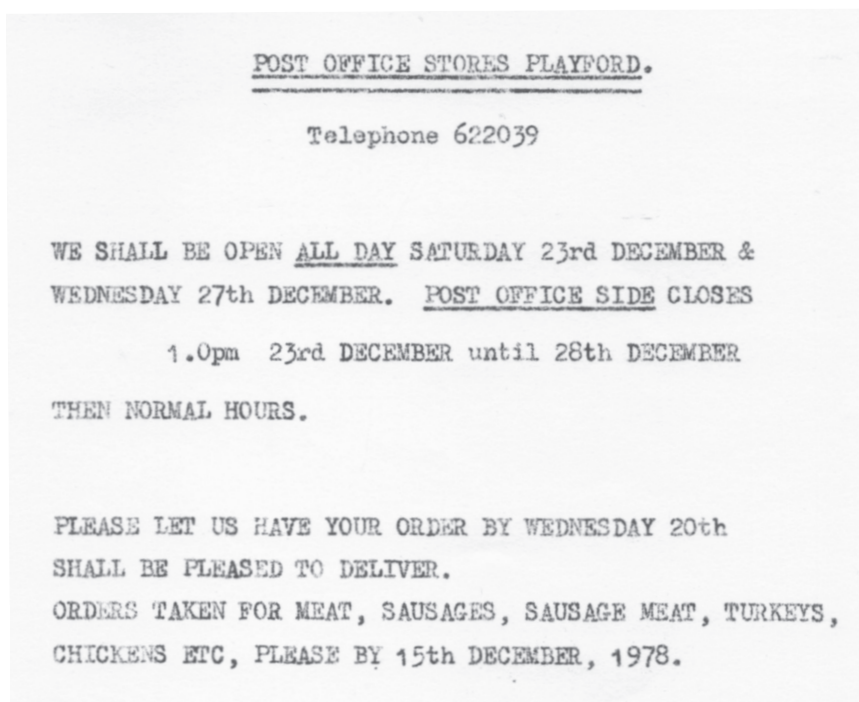
storm of 1 January 1976 which wreaked havoc across the south of the country. The northern end of the shed which Owen Goldsmith had been reluctant to sell had been used by Arthur Gardiner when he ran the post office and mended boots and shoes.⁴⁰ Gardiner lived in The Meadows and moved to Grundisburgh in 1965 when the Spring Meadow development began. The shed has only very recently been demolished (2019).



June and Derek Gosling outside their shop at the time of its closure in June 1998 EADT

It is surprising that the shop stayed open for as long as it did as, even by the 1970s when June arrived, the social make-up of the village had already changed. The Spring Meadow development

had been completed and the first new residents at The Brook were soon to move in. By then just about every family in the village had a car, even the dwindling number of farm workers, and for the first time the shop had to face competition with villagers now able to go elsewhere. Despite her best efforts in offering a wide selection of goods and a delivery service for those who required it, it could not keep pace with the choice of goods available at larger outlets such as Kesgrave or indeed Ipswich or



Much of June's advertising was ignored and she 'did not get the support from the village that she should have done'. Christmas trade, 1978

⁴⁰ Arthur Gardiner (1895-1980) was the son of Frank Gardiner, a horseman on Hill Farm. He had lost a leg at Gallipoli in 1915 and this may be the reason why the Biddells took him under their wing and provided him with a place in which he could work. Arthur and John Biddell's niece, Margaret Goldsmith, had lost a younger brother Owen at Gallipoli and she named her son Owen after him. Owen Biddell Wolton (1888-1915) was a 2nd Lt in the 5th Bn Suffolk Regiment and was killed at Gallipoli on 12 August 1915 aged 27.

Woodbridge. Dorothy Bowdren, on a visit in 1997 a year before the shop's closure, reported that nothing inside the shop had changed since she had lived there as a girl some 70 years earlier except for the repositioning of the Post Office counter. The shelves were just as she remembered them and even the bell to summon the attention of the shopkeeper was the same.

Towards the end of its life the shop was kept going as much by the contribution made by the Post Office as by the passing trade on its way to and from work in Ipswich where the ease of parking was appreciated by motorists. The final straw came in the autumn of 1994 when Tesco opened two stores in quick succession, one at Kesgrave and the other at Martlesham. June held on for another four years until the summer of 1998 by which time she had reached her then State Pension age of 60.⁴¹ Her husband Derrick, who had worked with the car company Volvo Concessionaires in Ipswich, had already finished full time employment and the couple continued to live in the premises as a private house renaming it The Goose's Nest. On applying for a change of use to Suffolk Coastal District Council, their accountant reported that the business was no longer viable revealing that takings were of the order of £350-£450 a week with a profit margin of 10%; the Post Office salary was less than £100 a week making it unsaleable as a going concern.⁴² ⁴³ In contrast to the Wrights, June was active in village life: she was on the Parish Council, she was one of the leading lights in the Women's Institute, she was a church-goer and after her retirement played a key role as Booking Secretary of the newly refurbished Village Hall where her shopkeeper's charm in welcoming prospective customers paid dividends.

20th century owners of Copyhold, Gayfer's and the four acre field

**Sarah Lucy Biddell (1829-1906), widow of Manfred Biddell, owner 1894-1906;
her elder son Arthur Blencowe Biddell (1856-1923), owner 1906-1923;
and his younger brother John Lyall Biddell (1866-1932), owner 1923-1932**

All Arthur Biddell's personally owned property had passed on his death in 1860 first to his executors for 20 years and then in 1882 to his four sons who agreed amongst themselves what each of them would have.⁴⁴ Manfred, the eldest, chose the Gayfer property which on his death in 1894 passed to his widow Sarah. She and her family, sons Arthur Blencoe then 38, John Lyall 28 and daughter Mary 34, all unmarried, had to vacate Lux farmhouse and they moved to a grand residence in Crescent Road, Ipswich,



Sarah Lucy Biddell, left, widow of Manfred Biddell, became the third family owner of the former Gayfer property in 1894

⁴¹ *East Anglian Daily Times*, 10 June 1998.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27 August 1998.

⁴³ Shops in neighbouring villages had also been closing: Little Bealings in 1972 and Tuddenham in 1987. Great Bealings kept going, thanks to its Post Office facilities, until 2007.

⁴⁴ SROI, IC/AA2/130/285, will of Arthur Biddell, 18 January 1860.



Arthur Biddell was left the property on his mother's death in 1906

where the two sons sat back and did nothing.⁴⁵ Seven years later, at the time of the 1901 Census, Arthur then aged 44 is recorded as a retired farmer and John, ten years his junior, as a retired maltster. At Crescent Road they were no doubt waited on by both their mother and their sister as well as, of course, by the live-in domestic servant. Indeed, on their mother's death in 1906 their sister Mary is recognised as the housekeeper even though the servant is retained.

On leaving Framlingham College, then known as the Albert Middle Class College, Arthur first helped his father on Lux Farm and later took charge of Monument Farm in Foxhall a 172 acre farm that had been left to his grandfather by Henstridge Cobbold from the well-to-do Ipswich brewing family. It would appear that, no sooner had his father died, young Arthur stopped working and put his feet up. A cousin Eric Wolton strangely recorded that Manfred 'never trained him for farming perhaps thinking that he had no bent that way'. But whether the fault lay with the father or with

the son, it is of note that he never succeeded to the tenancy of Lux Farm as might have been expected suggesting that either he was just not interested or that the Estate regarded him as an inadequate successor.

On Sarah Biddell's death in 1906 the Gayfer property passed to Arthur who held it for 17 years until his own death in 1923. Just three months before he died of an internal strangulation, he had married his first cousin Amy Biddell, second daughter of Herman Biddell, who lived at Archway House. It was a first marriage for both of them; Arthur was then 67 and Amy 43 but it was by all accounts a romantic relationship with the couple not only going off to the New Forest for the honeymoon but for the ceremony as well. In those three short months of married life, Arthur found the time to update his will and, while Amy came into the bulk of her husband's money, she did not get her hands on the Gayfer property which then passed to his younger brother John.

The two boys' sister Mary died in 1921 at the age of 61 two years before Arthur had left to get married. John by that time had moved away from Crescent

John Lyall Biddell inherited the property from his elder brother Arthur (above) on his unexpected death in 1923 aged only 66. John died in 1932 leaving Gayfer's double cottage and half the field to the church but the churchwardens were ordered by the Charity Commissioners to sell it. Margaret Goldsmith, mother of Owen who had already inherited the other half, was the buyer



⁴⁵ They moved to Birnam Lodge next door to their cousin Horace Wolton, a retired farmer from Newbourne Hall where he had farmed 850 acres. It was through the Biddells that he employed William and Hannah Mann, grandparents of Frank Mann (1922-1997), as gardener and domestic servant when the couple were no longer required by the new tenant at Lux Farm. For greater detail on the family connection between the Biddells and the Woltons see Church Corner Cottage in this series, foot note 37.



Les Powter, the last agricultural worker to rent the eastern half of Gayfer's. He had been a shepherd on Lux and other Bristol Estate farms

Road and had gone to live with his sister Lucy and brother-in-law Cordy Samuel Wolton at Lavenham Hall where he referred to himself as a farmer.⁴⁶ Still only 57 and having inherited the Playford property from his elder brother, he took up residence in the western half of the brick-built double cottage in Church Lane, the first of his family to live in any of the village properties that they owned. And in order to distinguish his new home from the one next door, he named his side of the house Gayfer's after its original owner and person responsible for having it built and the eastern half, which continued to be let to rent-paying working class families, he named Vale View.⁴⁷ Les Powter, a former shepherd on Lux Farm, was the last such tenant.⁴⁸ His son Charlie joined him after his mother's death in 1977 and the two lived on in the house for the next six years until Powter himself died in 1983. Charlie then moved away to live in Kesgrave.

The Gayfer side of the property continued to be occupied by members of the Biddell family. After John Biddell's death in 1932 ownership passed to his niece Margaret

Goldsmith who three years later moved up from Eltham in Kent with her husband Edward, a naval captain, and their 16 year old son Owen. Owen married in 1943 and, though still serving in the army, made his new home at Copyhold. His father Edward died in 1951. Margaret continued to live at Gayfer's and was joined by her younger sister, a spinster, Sybil Wolton. On Margaret's death in 1974 followed by Sybil's the following year, the house was briefly let to a divorcée from South Africa who was soon to move to Grundisburgh. Following her departure in the late 1980s, the two cottages were made into one.⁴⁹ Both east and west sides had been bought in the early 1970s by a Helen Scott, an escapee from London who looked after the administration at Branson's College while the Principal



John Biddell named the eastern half of Gayfer's 'Vale View' so as to distinguish it from the western half where he himself lived and which his niece, Margaret Goldsmith, was to occupy after his death in 1932

⁴⁶ Conveyance, Exors of Arthur Blencowe Biddell, who died 24 September 1923, to John Lyall Biddell, 26 April 1924.

⁴⁷ In the Electoral Registers it is named The Vale.

⁴⁸ Les Powter (1899-1983) had been a shepherd in the 1930s but converted to general farm work when the flock was dispersed. Employed on a succession of Bristol Estate farms, firstly in Cambridgeshire and then Eyke before moving to Lux Farm in 1936, he relocated to Gayfer's on his retirement in 1964. Starting out as a regular soldier, he caught the tail end of the First World War serving firstly in the Northamptonshire Regiment and later, in the 1920s, transferring to the Suffolks. He was frequently called upon to lay the wreath at the Remembrance Sunday service in Playford church.

⁴⁹ It is of interest that in the 1833 Particulars and Conditions of Sale, mentioned above, it states that the double cottage could be 'at a small expense convertible into a very respectable Dwelling House'.

was in Canada. The sale to Helen Scott had been Margaret Goldsmith's last disposal and it was Helen Scott who oversaw the cottages' conversion a few years before her death in 1991. Forty years on, her daughter and son-in-law continue to live in the property (2019).

It was in or about 1924 that John Biddell moved to the village; the Reads, who had arrived the previous year, remember 'Mr John coming'. He was warmly welcomed not only as landlord by the shopkeeper and his family but by many in the village who took to his affable personality. In this respect he was in complete contrast to his brother who had been an absentee landlord and who in any case was of a totally different disposition. Arthur was aloof, arrogant and opinionated with strongly held views on any subject whereas John was a different character entirely: tolerant and

someone who could see another person's point of view. He did however lack self confidence and was certainly not an 'achiever' as his work record shows. After Yarmouth Grammar School, he found employment as a maltster at the Falcon Inn on the Playford Road but it is highly unlikely that, given his physique and more so his social background, that he worked as a labourer there. Far more probable is that he was in some sort of management or supervisory role in which case it would



The Falcon maltings on the Playford Road from which John Biddell had 'retired' by the time that he was 35. Precisely what he did there is not known. The maltings closed at the time of WWI and was converted into housing. The pub, at the far end from the kiln, closed in 2011. Brewers Steward & Patteson were the original owners

not have taken up more than half an hour of his time each day. Malting in any case in those days was a seasonal occupation and operated only between the months of September and May because of lower ambient temperatures. Nevertheless aged only 35, in the 1901 Census he labels himself as retired and in 1911 as a photographer but whether he earned any money from photography is not known. At some point in his early life he had wanted to run a shop but that harebrained scheme was firmly quashed by the family. On leaving school he may well have spent time with his father on the farm as by the early 1920s he classed himself as a farmer while working with his brother-in-law at Lavenham. Knowing what Eric, Cordy's son, thought of some of the Biddell family, it is not hard to imagine Cordy's irritation with his in-laws idling their time away. It is more than likely that he felt obliged to goad John into making something of his life.⁵⁰

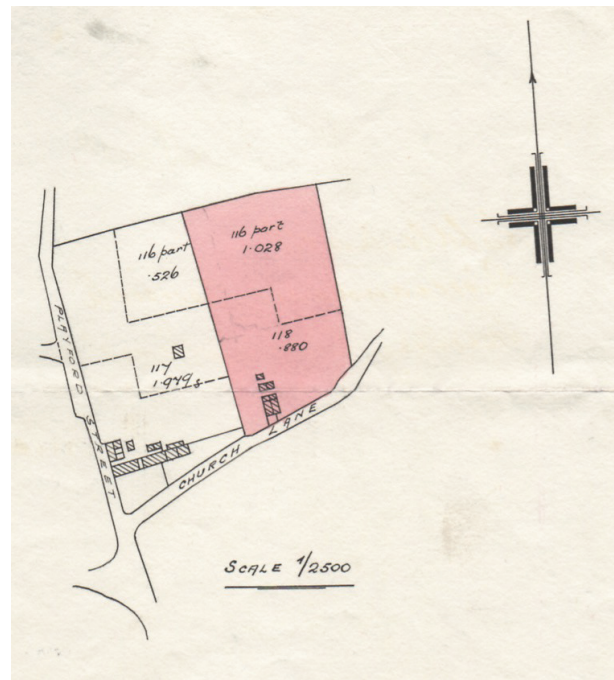
But away from the world of work, John Biddell was held in high regard. His time at Yarmouth Grammar School, where Dr. J. J. Raven was headmaster, paid dividends and he could well have pursued an academic career. On his death he was given glowing tributes in the scholarly *Journal of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society* which said of him that he was 'beloved by everyone whose good fortune it was to encounter his genial personality'.⁵¹ It is from that obituary too that his wide

⁵⁰ See also Hill House in this series, 23-24.

⁵¹ *Transactions and Proceedings of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society*, Vol. 2, 1932-34.

interests in 'Botany, Geology, Entomology and Astronomy' are learned and that he kept in touch with Raven helping him in the compilation of his book on Suffolk church bells.⁵² And in the *Proceedings* of the then Suffolk Institute of Archaeology & Natural History his death merited a mention by no less an intellectual than Francis Seymour Stevenson who, with a First in Greats at Balliol, was himself a historian of some merit. Stevenson added that he was 'a familiar figure at the Society's Excursions'.⁵³

John Biddell spent some nine years at Gayfer's before he died in 1932. During the early part of his time back in the parish, the four acre field had been well managed by the shop's then tenants, the Reads, but how much of the field they actually took in hand is not known. After their departure in 1927 the succession of occupiers, who stayed for months rather than years, as well as Susie Gray who took over in 1929, appear to have had nothing to do with the field's cultivation. It was during these and later years that the greater part of it reverted to scrub as is evidenced in the 1939



The eastern half of the property, shaded pink, that John Biddell had intended leaving to the church on his death

photographs of the newly built 'Ridge' as well as later ones of 'Sevenoaks' in 1954. Further suspicions that nature had already taken over the site comes in John Biddell's will written in 1930 where he makes reference to 'the double tenement with the upland at the back'.



John Biddell's sister Lucy Wolton, five years his senior, was already 71 at the time of his death. She inherited the western half of the property from him but quickly passed it on to her daughter Margaret Goldsmith

On Sarah Biddell's death in 1906 the property had passed to her elder son Arthur Blencowe and on his death in 1923, having no children, it passed to his brother John Lyall ten years his junior. When John Lyall died in 1932, being both a bachelor and a God-fearing man, he left to Playford church 'with my sister's happy approval.... the double tenement in which I am now living together with the upland at the back hoping that the property may be of some use to the church and be thought of in connection with our beloved parents who passed it to me'. John Biddell was referring to both Gayfer's and Vale View as well as the eastern half of the field itself. The other half, which included the shop and Copyhold, he left to his sister Lucy Wolton his only surviving sibling. Lucy was five years his senior and the third person of the same generation to have inherited ownership.

⁵² Raven's *Church Bells of Suffolk*, published in 1890, still remains the standard work. J. J. Raven (1833-1906) was a Cambridge graduate and headmaster of Yarmouth Grammar School from 1866 to 1885 following which he went into the Church. In 1891 he was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

⁵³ *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology & Natural History*, Vol. XXI, Part 1, 77. F. S. Stevenson (1862-1938) was Liberal Member of Parliament for the Eye Division of Suffolk from 1885 to 1906 and lived at Playford Mount.

Additionally she had married and had married well. Her husband Cordy Samuel Wolton, from an established Suffolk farming family, had himself farmed successfully at Ixworth and Lavenham Hall. In retirement the couple had moved to Constitution Hill in Ipswich and were in no need of the money. She was now over 70 and not wanting the bother of having to deal with tenants. It was a strange bequest.

Margaret Goldsmith (1887-1974) and the land and properties that she sold

Still keeping the property within the family, Lucy disposed of it immediately to Margaret her second daughter who had good reason for wanting to buy. For 25 years she had been married to a naval officer, followed him to numerous postings around the country and had no home of her own. With her husband's retirement only three years away, the idea of moving back to the family's roots and living in the house in which her uncle had lived had an obvious appeal. Coincidentally, while John Lyall's bequest of the other half of the property had been gratefully received by the vicar and churchwardens, they had been 'ordered by The Charity Commissioners that it had to be sold'.⁵⁴ Margaret bought both halves paying £350 for the shop, Copyhold and the larger piece of land that came from her mother Lucy and £400 to the church for the Gayfer double tenement and the smaller piece of land, the money for the western half presumably being shared among the other seven children.⁵⁵ The money received for the eastern half was used to form a Trust which still remains intact and whose income was until 2015 declared as a separate item in the church's Annual Accounts.⁵⁶



Margaret Goldsmith who, after her uncle John Biddell's death in 1932, came into the whole of the Gayfer property. By 1939 she had started to sell parts of it off

The Ridge

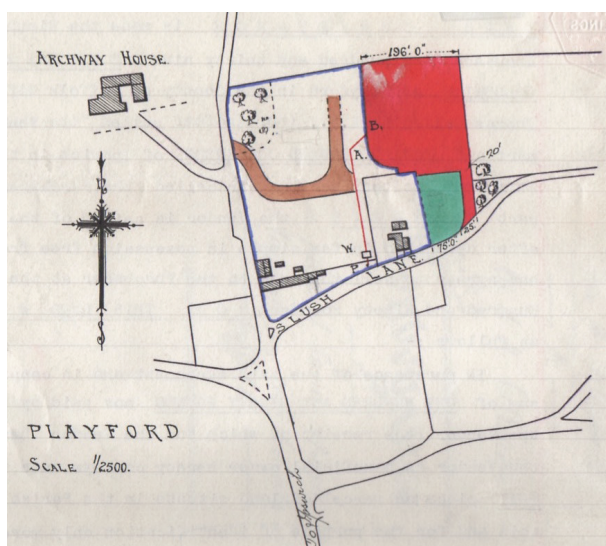
In selling off a large plot of land in 1939 to Edward Collinson, Margaret Goldsmith was the first in a long line of family owners to dispose of any part of the field. Collinson's house was only the third to have been built in the village since Archway in 1892 although the Bristol Estate, who owned practically all the land in the parish, as early as 1929 had sold off a piece of ground at the southern end of the parish to the Church Commissioners on which they were to build the new Kesgrave vicarage more or less opposite the church.⁵⁷ Other building quickly followed on Estate land along

⁵⁴ SROI, FC 22/A1/5, Playford Church Council Minutes 1927-1954, meeting of the PCC 28 November 1932.

⁵⁵ The western half was 2.5 acres and the smaller eastern half was 1.9 acres. Both conveyances were signed on the same day: 18 November 1932.

⁵⁶ Immediately prior to the John Biddell Trust being set up, Miss Emma Crisp of Playford Hall had made a donation to the church of £500 4% Consols vested in the Diocesan Board of Finance. The Biddell Trust was set up in the same way.

⁵⁷ Lower Lodge in Brook Lane was built on the cheap in 1914 by Herman Biddell as presumed temporary accommodation for Caroline Pipe, the family's former nanny, who had developed a serious heart condition. She was unable to climb the stairs at Archway and was not expected to live long. See Lower Lodge in this series, p. 1. Stonylands was built in 1937 at the top of Butts Hill by David. Ransome of the renowned Ipswich engineering firm on a field of that name that he had bought from Henry Bond of Archway House. Stonylands was bought by George Ditton in 1946 and by the 1960s had been renamed Nightingales Hill.



The Ridge 1939. The large plot which Edward Collinson bought from Margaret Goldsmith is shown in red; his option to buy what was later known as Hassocks is in green. Note that Sevenoaks' drive was laid out before the war but the house was not built until 1954

the northern side of the former A12 trunk road including the school in 1930-31 but there was never any attempt to build anything in or near the village itself which could so easily have been done. By contrast in Kesgrave, building between the wars continued apace albeit of low-priced bungalows for the bottom end of the market: in 1924 there were just 17 houses in the entire parish but by the outbreak of war in 1939, just 15 years later, that number had increased to 140.⁵⁸

Edward Howard Collinson (1903-1990) was senior partner at Ipswich solicitors Block & Cullingham (now Blocks) a firm that had acted for John Biddell in drawing up Biddell's will. Collinson named his new house The Ridge and, like Henry Bond at Archway before him, was fortunate in being one of only three houses in the village to have mains electricity connected before war broke out.⁵⁹ Like Henry Bond too who, on arrival was

seen as someone who would prove useful in the village, he was quickly made Chairman of the Parish Council for the years 1940-41. However in 1941 as a member of the Friends' War Victims Committee, a Quaker organisation, he stood down from his Parish Council duties and went to London to help with relief work. The war over, he chaired the newly re-formed Council in 1946 and remained its leader until 1954-55 when he moved to Culpho End.⁶⁰ He was also elected to the Parish Hall Management Committee in 1945 and Chairman the following year. On his move to Culpho The Ridge was sold to a Dr Cane from Beccles but bought back again, for the same money, five years later in 1959. It was then let to several tenants until in 1967 it passed to his son John and his family. In 1972 Collinson moved to Snape and when his wife Eileen died in 1979 he purchased for his last home Spindleberry in the corner of The Courts as it was conveniently near The Ridge and his son John. Collinson died there in 1990 at the age of 86. Spindleberry had been built in c. 1965 for Peggy Fiske, the younger daughter of George Fiske who farmed Hill Farm for 50 years from 1896 until his death in 1946. Peggy had bought the two acre field from the Bristol Estate two years after he had died.



The Ridge 1939, prominent on the skyline between Copyhold and Gayfer's

⁵⁸ *The Story of Kesgrave*, Gerald and Margaret Ponting, (Privately published), 1981, 138.

⁵⁹ The other two houses in the village were The Hall which was undergoing a major refurbishment after 60 years occupation by the Crisp family, and Archway House. The Village Hall was connected in 1942 at a time when it was thought about to be commandeered by the military. The rest of the village was connected after the war on Charles Lofts' arrival at Hill House in the autumn of 1946; the church was connected later in 1950.

⁶⁰ Culpho End had been built some years before by Sunderland Taylor on land that he had bought from Lord Cranworth.

Edward Collinson was as well known nationally in astronomical circles as he was locally for being a respected Ipswich solicitor. His fledgling interest in astronomy had begun at school when he was



Edward Collinson: a BAA Presidential portrait

just ten years old and his carefully kept astronomical notebooks date back to 1914. He was elected to the British Astronomical Association in 1920 and the following year his records were on display at the BAA Exhibition Meeting that year. In 1927 he joined the BAA Council when still only 24 years old and in 1950 became a Vice-President. In 1952 he took the chair as President for the customary two year term of office.⁶¹ It is of interest that he bought the site at Playford because he considered it a good place on which to set up an observatory, one that was free from light pollution that even then was causing increasing problems.

Hassocks

In 1939 when Collinson bought his plot of land, he took out an option ‘exercisable in certain events that did not take place’ on a smaller site immediately below his proposed house and which fronted on to Church Lane. In 1963 Margaret Goldsmith regained possession, now subject to the condition that only one bungalow or semi-bungalow be erected there, and sold it to Claude Goldsmith her brother-in-law.

Margaret Goldsmith’s grandfather was Manfred Biddell of Lux Farm and her mother Lucy had married Cordy Samuel Wolton. In 1908 Margaret married Edward Goldsmith from Bardwell Hall on the other side of Bury where the Goldsmith family ran the 400 acre farm. Margaret and Edward’s second son Owen was born in 1919 and named after the brother that Margaret had lost in the First World War. Edward Goldsmith was the oldest child and when he was thirteen he had nine siblings under the age of eleven, eight of them girls, the youngest of all was his only brother Claude. And to look after this large number of children in their rambling C16 home the family employed a resident governess and three nurses and for their own comfort a footman and the more usual, cook and housemaid. Other staff, both domestic and garden, would doubtless have come in from the village on a daily basis. Such extravagance might be regarded as unusual in a farming family but that is what they were as, prior to Bardwell, the Goldsmiths had been farmers at Ixworth in the early C19 but neither of the boys followed in that tradition.

Edward Goldsmith was born in 1878, went to Balliol College, Oxford, from where he became an instructor at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth. His name appears on the Oxford University Roll of Service 1914-1916 but it is not known what form that service took. On retirement in 1935 at the age of 57, he and his family came to live at Gayfer’s, that is in the western side of the double

⁶¹ *J. Brit. Astron. Assoc.*, **101** (1), 12-14 (1991). Edward Collinson’s BAA obituary notice gives full details of his life. *QJRS*, **32** (1991), p. 207. His obituary in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society was written by no less a figure than Patrick Moore who, like Collinson, was a past President of the British Astronomical Association. Moore was most famous for presenting *The Sky at Night*, the world’s longest running TV series with the same presenter. See also <http://www.oasi.org.uk/OPO/EHC/EHC.php> for a resumé of Collinson’s work by the Orwell Astronomical Society (Ipswich) and https://www.ast.cam.ac.uk/~ipswich/Hist_Obs/EHC.htm for an article written by the late Ken Goward, a one-time Chairman of the Orwell Society, for the University of Cambridge Institute of Astronomy.

cottage in Church Lane, and in 1939 he filled in the Register of that year with the comment that he 'still does a little examiner work for the Admiralty'.

His younger brother Claude, born in 1889, served throughout the 1914-18 war in the 1/5th Bn Suffolk Regiment. He became an Acting Captain and was awarded the MC in Palestine. When his father died he was only 13; he later he went away to London to do his articles with a firm of solicitors. In 1912, having qualified, he returned to Suffolk and joined the firm of Aldous & Gotelee in Ipswich. He became a partner in 1927 and it was at this time that the name Gotelee & Goldsmith was established remaining unchanged until 2010 when it became Gotelee Solicitors. It was this family firm that his nephew, the 16 year old Owen Goldsmith, joined in 1935. Claude retired in 1971 at the age of 82 and died in Playford four years later.



Capt. Edward Goldsmith R.N.

Copyhold

The adjoining house, Copyhold, is one of only three listed domestic dwellings in the parish the others being Playford Hall and the combined Playford Mount and Playford Grange.⁶² There might have been one or two more had they not been demolished in the destructive 1950s and '60s to make way for new development.⁶³ Copyhold itself might even have suffered a similar fate but for the fact that it was in different ownership. Copyhold is considered by Historic England to date from C15 or early C16 having an upper floor that was inserted in C16 and, similar to many other houses in the village, was subdivided into two cottages in the early C19. It is a former open-hall house that was



Copyhold in 2001 at the time of Catherine Broadbent's return to Yorkshire

once home to the husbandman who farmed the three acre field in which the house once stood. Its ownership runs in parallel with that of the field so that, when Arthur Biddell bought the Gayfer property in 1833, he bought Copyhold with it and it was to remain in Biddell family hands for the next 127 years.

In 1960 it was bought by Catherine Broadbent. Her husband, the Revd. Ernest Broadbent Vicar of Tuddenham with Playford & Culpho, had died of a heart attack the year before and she had to vacate Playford Vicarage but, with the special consent of Bishop Leslie Brown, she was permitted to remain in the parish. She lived in the

⁶² <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1377297> for a full architectural description by Historic England. Copyhold is listed Grade II.

⁶³ The former yeoman's house that stood on the edge of Playford Green (see Glenham in this series, 4) was demolished to make way for Cobblers in 1959. Its walls were of wattle and daub construction but no other architectural details are on record. The property had been converted into two cottages by the early C19. The Old Vicarage, also known as The Meadows, close to the Village Hall was knocked down in 1963 prior to the redevelopment of the centre of the village. It is worth noting that Playford Hall was first listed in 1966 while Copyhold and the combined Playford Mount and Playford Grange had to wait until 1985 before they received any protection.

house for 42 years returning to her native Yorkshire after a slight stroke in 2001 when she was 93. She died in a residential home in Ilkley four years later. Ernest Broadbent had been suffering from ill health for some little while and, looking for a less demanding living, turned to his close friend the Bishop of Dunwich for help. In 1954 the couple moved to Playford from the Leeds area.

After Ernest's death, Catherine returned to teaching and found a position at the kindergarten in Little Bealings Primary School. She was highly active in Playford village life. She was on the Church Council in her early years in the parish. She ran the Fellowship group for many years, organising speakers on religious and moral topics and it was this group, with Catherine's considerable input, that was responsible for the fine cross stitch kneelers that are in the church. She held all the top offices in the Women's Institute and attended meetings until her late 80s. She is



Catherine Broadbent, second left, ever the active villager celebrating Playford WI's Diamond Jubilee in 1983 in 1920s style

remembered most however for her long association with the Village Hall having been appointed a Special Trustee in 1958 and Secretary in 1965, posts that she held for some 30 years until she was 85.⁶⁴ The house remains in her family's ownership (2019).

Copyhold had already been divided in two by the time of the 1833 sale most likely in the 1820s when other properties in the village were being split up to accommodate a rising population. According to the sale catalogue, one of the two halves was an established beer shop 'in which trade considerable business is carried on', the only evidence that exists of an outlet for beer in the village before the White Horse beer house opened in Church Lane in around the middle of the century. The arrival of a beer shop, and later of two successive beer houses, came as a result of government attempts in the early C19 to wean the population off gin and the widespread drunkenness that went

⁶⁴ *Benefice Newsletter of Great and Little Bealings with Playford & Culpho*, April 2005, 15-16. A fuller obituary, adapted from the eulogy given at her funeral service in Playford church on 25 February 2005, can be found.

with it. The Beer House Act of 1830 was introduced by Wellington's Tory government. It abolished the tax on beer and, for a fee of just two guineas paid to the local excise officer, permitted anyone to sell it. It also made a distinction between a beer house, where beer was permitted to be consumed on the premises, and a beer shop which permitted off-sales only. The success of the Act was immediate and as many as 24,000 such licenses were granted nationwide in the first few months.

Suspensions had been raised in recent years that some such business had been operating there as the present owner of the house had found large numbers of early C19 bottles buried in his garden. Such a find tallies with the 1833 sale catalogue's mention of a beer shop and further points to a beer shop rather than a beer house as the beer was sold in bottles to be taken away. That a cache of bottles had been found dumped in the garden would indicate that they derived either from the shopkeeper's own private consumption or that the terms of his licence were broken and villagers drank illegally on the premises. Home brewing was commonplace in the C19 especially after the repeal of the malt tax in 1880 and many farm workers continued to brew their own beer, even if only at harvest time, right up to the 1930s.⁶⁵ ⁶⁶ It is assumed therefore that both of Playford's beer houses, which



Mary Pryke with some of her family outside their home in the eastern half of Copyhold

followed on from the beer shop, also did their own brewing.⁶⁷ But for beer to be sold in bottle would suggest that it had most probably been bought from a local brewer, perhaps one of the larger concerns in Ipswich or Woodbridge, and merely retailed through the shop.

Later in the century the eastern half of the house was given over to quite different uses. John Pryke (1830-1899) was a miller's labourer in the late 1840s working for George Baker and, having been born and brought up in faraway Ringshall, lived-in with the miller and his family. In 1851 he married Mary Edwards (1828-1912) then working as cook and dairy maid for Arthur Biddell at Hill House and, with perfect timing, he acquired the requisite wedding ring for free as he ploughed one

up while working in the Miller's Field where the Village Hall and 1920s council houses now stand. Mary Edwards was not local either. She had originally moved from Snetterton near Thetford to work for the Clarksons who had connections there and would have been 18 when old Thomas Clarkson died in 1846.

On marrying, John and Mary moved into Copyhold and lived next door to William Woby who was then the market gardener renting the four acre field from Arthur Biddell. John Pryke continued

⁶⁵ Gladstone, in his Budget Speech 10 June 1880, replaced the tax on malt with a duty on beer. Government revenue was thereby maintained but brewers were at last free to experiment with their raw materials. The farming lobby was also appeased as the change in taxation boosted demand for barleys of average quality rather than only the best.

⁶⁶ Domestic brewers between the wars acquired their malt from Barnards on the Woodbridge Road in Ipswich, a company that is still in business today (2019).

⁶⁷ Playford's first beer *house* was The White Horse, later called the Eel's Foot, which stood in Church Lane where the present council houses now are. It is not known when it opened but it was demolished in 1872. In that year the Blaring Dickie, also known as the Kicking Donkey, opened in Barrack Cottages and that was pulled down in 1892 when Herman Biddell built Archway House for his retirement.

working at the mill for some while becoming a carter not only delivering the finished flour and barley meal to domestic and farming customers but fetching raw grain for the mill at least some of which is known to have come from the then relatively new Ipswich Wet Dock.⁶⁸ Such experience was to give him the idea and the confidence to become self-employed and he set about running his own carrier's business from Copyhold until he died in 1899.

John and Mary Pryke were to have seven girls, and no boys, so what better employment than to put them to work running a laundry. By 1881 three of them were old enough to have joined their mother and they greatly expanded the business that had been started some ten years earlier. The operation was far greater than one of 'an old woman taking in washing'. It was a flourishing concern and involved John Pryke's help as a carrier in returning 'large hampers of clean linen to the important houses in the area as well as to Bealings station for onward delivery to Woodbridge'.⁶⁹ The laundry itself was a brick built extension on the east side of



Jane Pryke, left, who made the sampler below in 1867



the house the foundations of which were visible until the early 2000s. Both businesses, carrier and laundry, continued into the next generation and indeed into the next century. Sarah Pryke, the fifth daughter, maintained the laundry on her own but, while it is not known exactly for how long, it was still running at the outbreak of the First World War. The year after her father died Sarah married a James Battley (b. 1865) who lived next door and who, besides continuing with his own local coal trade, took on his father-in-law's carrier's business as well. He now kept two horses rather than just the one and would certainly have employed someone, most probably from the village, to work for him. The carrier's business continued for a commendable 60 years, until at least 1932, by which time it had doubtless met with competition from newly motorised transport.

The sampler made by Jane Pryke, above, when she lived with her family in the eastern part of Copyhold. Her school had only recently moved in c. 1864 from The Brook to the left hand cottage at the top of Hill Farm Road. It closed in 1877 when the Board School opened in Sandy Lane, Little Bealings

⁶⁸ James Frost (1835-1906) succeeded John Pryke as a carter at the mill. He was José Booker's great-grandfather and the last person to operate the machinery after the tenant, William Howell, had bought the tower mill at Martlesham and moved away to live in the miller's house there. James Frost became a gardener when the mill ceased working in 1874.

⁶⁹ Janet Selby, ex. inf. Janet was a great-granddaughter of John and Mary Pryke and therefore a granddaughter of Jane Pryke (b.1856) who worked the sampler at Playford School in 1867. In 1884 Jane Pryke married Jo Kidby, bailiff for Herman Biddell at Hill Farm. The couple moved to Culpho Hall Farm where Jo became cowman with the help of three of his four young sons. Janet, whose mother was born in Culpho, was active in church affairs there until she moved to Glastonbury in Somerset to be with her sister, the custodian of the Jane Pryke sampler. Janet died there in 2007.

Gayfer's

The other house that stood in the former Gayfer field was purpose built as a double dwelling and only recently was it converted into a single home. Of brick construction with a slate roof, it appears early C19th in date although no precise indication of its age can be gleaned from the documents. But, as owner of the field from 1805 to 1825, John Gayfer is the most likely person to have had it built, a notion supported by the will that he made in 1815. In it he refers to 'my Messuage and Land, tenements and hereditaments....now in the Occupation of myself and Tenants'. As Gayfer was resident in one or other of his houses and, as the word tenants is in the plural, he clearly owned more than one cottage at the time of writing his will.

Further help in putting a date on the house comes from Isaac Johnson's map of 1833 on which he relates the story of the exchange of the one acre of land referred to above. Johnson recorded that the exchange took place in 1821 but this was later corrected in another hand to 'about the year 1808 to 1810'. The change was most likely made by Arthur Biddell who had arrived in Playford in 1808 and, who as a newcomer, would have had a clear recollection of the swap taking place. Biddell refers to it in his will written in 1860 as being

'about 50 years ago' thereby agreeing with the 1808 to 1810 date. On one copy of Johnson's 1833 map of the enlarged four acre field a light pencil line has been drawn indicating precisely where the additional acre had been added. It extended the property a further 40 yards up Church Lane so that it formed a new boundary with the Marquis of Bristol's land which had at that time been given over to allotments. That extended boundary of 1808-1810 is now marked on the ground by the drive that leads up to The Ridge.



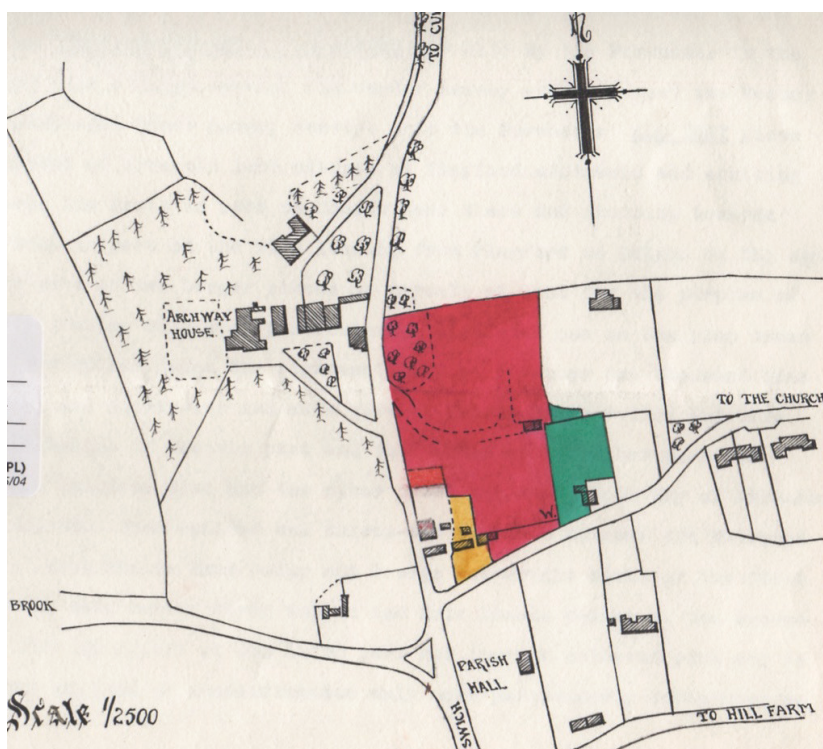
Built as a double cottage by John Gayfer between 1810 and 1815, the western half became home to the Biddell family from c. 1924 to the early 1970s at which time they sold both properties. It was converted into a single dwelling in the late 1980s

On one of Isaac Johnson's drawings the pencil line goes right through Gayfer's double cottage meaning that the house was built after the field was extended but other copies show the house to be right in the south-east corner of the original three acre field. But in dating the house to between 1810 when the field was extended and 1815 when he wrote his will, the timing neatly corresponds with other house building that was going on in the village at that time. As the Napoleonic Wars were drawing to a close, three other properties were being built out of materials salvaged from St Helen's Barracks on the Woodbridge Road in Ipswich when they were being pulled down in 1814-1815 before the war had actually ended. A pair were built on the corner of Hill Farm Road, another pair at the top of the road and a further pair in the corner of Archway field at the bottom of Butts Hill. It could well be that the enlargement of Gayfer's field from three acres to four and, more particularly,

the building of his two cottages which added considerable value to his property, was the prompt for Gayfer to draw up his will a full ten years before he died.

Sevenoaks

In the years immediately following the Second World War priority was given not only to replacing or repairing houses that had been lost or damaged by German bombing but to continuing slum clearance programmes that had been set in motion before 1939. Building materials were in short supply and indeed were rationed and precedence was given to social housing with all private building put on hold.⁷⁰ No further land sales like that of The Ridge could therefore be contemplated and Margaret Goldsmith had to wait until 1954 before her next disposal which was, albeit within the family, to her son Owen.



The large plot of land, coloured red, that Owen Goldsmith acquired from his mother in 1954 on which he built Sevenoaks. It remained intact for over 50 years until he sold three building sites just a few years before his death in 2012

Margaret Goldsmith had come into the whole of the Gayfer property that is the shop, Copyhold, Gayfer's and of course the four acre field, following her uncle John Biddell's death in 1932 and, three years later, on her husband Edward's retirement as captain from the Royal Navy, the couple moved up to Playford from Kent. With them came their 16 year old son Owen the three of them living in Gayfer's cottage that John Biddell had previously occupied. Like both Henry Bond at Archway and Edward Collinson at The Ridge, Edward Goldsmith found himself in immediate demand within the village being elected to the Parish Council just two years after his arrival and at the same time to the twin positions of Clerk and

Treasurer. The following year 1938-39 he became Chairman but did not relinquish his other responsibilities. However, with the threat of hostilities becoming more likely by the day, his time in office was cut short and at the Parish Meeting in April 1941 he announced that, as he 'expected to be shortly called up for service in the Royal Navy, he would resign his membership of the Council'.⁷¹ The Parish Meeting in May the following year was to be the last held until 1946 but, on his return after the war, he never again became chairman. He was however re-elected to his

⁷⁰ Playford's two war damaged houses, for example, were given priority: No. 1 Council House in Hill Farm Road which had been hit by an RAF Hurricane fighter aircraft on 1 February 1940 and Playford Mount which was damaged by incendiary bombs jettisoned by German aircraft after a big raid on Ipswich on 3 November 1943. Both houses had been rendered uninhabitable for the duration of the war. The four council houses in Church Lane, built in 1948, were also considered a post-war priority as, surprisingly, was the church lychgate. But private building had to wait until 1952.

⁷¹ SROI, EG 94/B1/1, 28 April 1941, Annual Parish Meeting, Playford Parish Council Minute Book.

previous posts of Clerk and Treasurer and, additionally, to the new position of Vice-Chairman. In the immediate post-war years he exerted considerable authority within the community but at a meeting of the Council in January 1950 he announced that 'due to increasing age he would resign but continue to act till the end of the financial year'.⁷² He died in January 1951 aged just 73; his son Owen was elected in his place as Clerk.

Owen Goldsmith (1919-2012), Margaret Goldsmith's younger son

Owen had joined the Territorials in Ipswich in 1938 when he was 19 and went to France in September the following year as a gunner with the 58th Suffolk Medium Regiment. After action there and in Belgium he came back in May 1940 through the beaches of Dunkirk where he spent four days and four nights before being evacuated. A letter that he wrote to his elder sister Peggy on his safe return home is included here as a record of a Playford man's involvement in that historic event early in the Second World War:

Two days after Hitler invaded Belgium we had orders to advance into Belgium towards Brussels. At the time we were near Lille on the Franco-Belgian frontier. We left at 4.00 am in the morning, I forget what day, and advanced into Belgium until about 2.00 pm. Our guns had gone on by rail but were nearly captured when the Germans broke through near Brussels. Colin McQueen managed to rescue them. For this he has been awarded the MC. We took up positions and dug ourselves in near Oudenarde at the extreme left flank of the B.E.F. [British Expeditionary Force] next to the Belgians. On the Monday evening we went into action. We were firing all night and the next morning. Owing to them breaking through just north of Oudenarde we had to withdraw about 3 miles. Then we again went into action for the next two days. We had then been without sleep for several nights and in spite of the constant firing of our guns and ceaseless shelling of us by the Germans, I went to sleep for a couple of hours, quite unaware that shells were landing 25 yards away! In spite of minor damage to some of our tanks and lorries, marvellously there were no casualties amongst us. In the afternoon of the third day we withdrew a long way to a wood on the Menin-Ypres road just by Paschandaele. The other battery then took over our guns as theirs were useless after the escapade round Brussels, for the next three days. During the whole time we were being bombed by German planes who seemed to have definite mastery of the skies. By this time our supplies had been completely cut off by the German forces reaching Boulogne. We had to live on half rations and sometimes on only such things as pigs and poultry which we killed from evacuated farms. We were almost surrounded in this wood by the German forces who broke through but by the matter of minutes just managed to escape across the last remaining bridge over a river. We then crossed the frontier into France and took over from the other battery and went into action for 12 hours. We then had orders to blow up the guns and make for the coast. We again were nearly encircled but just managed to slip out - at the time we did not realise it luckily. Whilst on the way to the coast we were constantly bombed and machine-gunned. This I think was the worst experience. Eleven miles from Dunkirk we had to burn our trucks, lorries, gear, instruments and any kit we could not carry. We then on Monday evening set out for the coast arriving at about midnight. By then we were thoroughly worn out, we had had no sleep for a long time, no food worth talking about and our feet were sore with the march yet we dare not sleep lest we missed our boat. And so we just waited with thousands of others on the beaches a few miles north of Dunkirk. By midday on the Tuesday we did not care what happened, we were absolutely done in and were constantly bombed and machine-gunned. At 3 o'clock we were told to be ready to embark so we tramp 3 miles along the beach already swarming with men and stand there until 9 pm in the

⁷² It was, for example, Edward Goldsmith who made sure that the post-war council houses in Church Lane were not built opposite his family's property as Deben RDC had intended. Instead he suggested that they were built further up the lane on the one acre site only recently vacated by market gardener William Noller in 1946.

evening when we were told no more could go. We returned to the dunes dismayed. Anything could happen now, we did not care. It had been pouring with rain all day and we were soaked through. An hour later we were told 7 more destroyers had arrived and we could embark. Three quarters of the regiment were aboard by 3 o'clock Wednesday morning but there was no more room for the rest. I was fortunate to get aboard one. Two destroyers close by were torpedoed. We landed at Margate about 11 in the morning and from then on were treated wonderfully. Plenty of food and rest. We went to Oxford. There we were equipped with essentials and a few days later the Regiment assembled at Larkhill [on Salisbury Plain]. The unfortunate fellows left behind at Dunkirk did not get off till the Friday, they had an awful time. The whole time we were in Belgium we never realised that we were in such a bad position. We never heard until we arrived in England that Leopold had capitulated several days earlier. Our regiment was remarkably lucky, during the whole ten days or so we were bombed, shelled and machine-gunned yet we only had 2 killed, 2 missing, 1 drowned on one of the destroyers sunk and 2 very slightly wounded. We were very lucky. After assembling at Larkhill we were given 48 hours leave which we really wanted. We then went to Poole for a fortnight. Wasn't it funny? It was lovely down there. From there we moved to Hengistbury Head [between Bournemouth and Mudeford] which we guarded constantly. From there we came here [wartime censorship has not allowed the location to be divulged]. We had a second 48 hours leave from Poole. We were going to get 7 days but this was cancelled when France collapsed.

I have now got great news. The Colonel has recommended me to the War Office for an immediate commission. Isn't it marvellous? I am now waiting for it very excitedly. However, if there is going to be a considerable delay I will go to a training unit with the others. I was the only one out of the group recommended for an immediate commission. I think this was partly because at Bordon [in east Hampshire] I had volunteered to go to France first rather than go to a training unit then and Colonel has remembered it. I am so pleased. I hope to get a few days leave when my commission arrives.

After receiving his commission at OCTU, the Officer Cadet Training Unit, in Ilkley he was posted to the 55th (Suffolk Yeomanry) Anti-Tank Regiment and landed on the Normandy beaches on D + 3, 9 June 1944. He fought his way through Caen, Belgium and Holland finally becoming part of the Allied occupying force in Germany.⁷³ Hostilities over, he helped the Red Cross distribute food to the Dutch who were starving and later went to Dortmund where he was in charge of a PoW camp. He returned home in 1947 and rejoined the family solicitors Gotelee & Goldsmith (now Gotelee) where he had started his articles before the war. He remained with the firm for 50 years retiring as senior partner in 1978. In retirement he organised the East Suffolk Macmillan Nurse Appeal, raising £80,000 in six months and a total of



Owen Goldsmith came to live in Gayfer's with his parents in 1935 when he was 16. Including his eight years absence during and after the war, he lived in the village for 77 years

⁷³ Patrick Delaforce, *The Polar Bears, Monty's Left Flank* (Stroud, 1995), passim. See also Margaret Thomas & Nick Sign, *The Loyal Suffolk Hussars, The History of the Suffolk Yeomanry 1794-1967* (Solihull, 2012).

£600,000 after six or seven years, a fund sufficient to provide a further seven nurses. For this he was presented with a Gold Medal in London by the Duchess of Kent, President of the Association.



A village fete at Sevenoaks in the 1950s; Lux Wood in the background. It was a popular venue combining outdoor space with good kitchen facilities but, as with Archway House, car parking had to be on the Playing Field

In the autumn of 1943 Owen had married Gabrielle Chapman and they made Copyhold their home. A daughter, Rosemary, was born there in 1951. But when post-war building restrictions were eventually lifted he bought from his mother the large plot of land to the west of The Ridge on which he built Sevenoaks in 1954. On being demobbed in 1947, he threw himself into village life following his father as Clerk to the Parish Council; he became Vice-Chairman of the PCC and Chairman of the Parish Hall Management Committee. In addition he ran the annual village fete. He would, however, have regarded the

Coronation celebrations of 1953 as his most memorable and satisfying undertaking coming as they did while the social make-up of the village remained largely unchanged since before the war.⁷⁴

Owen did not like change. When the Revd. Cyril Stevens, vicar of Playford with Culpho & Tuddenham St Martin from 1965-67, decided to return to New Zealand, the then Benefice was broken up and in its place Playford & Culpho were joined with the Bealings. Even more upsetting, Playford vicarage was sold. Owen wrote a strongly worded letter to both the local Church Council and to the Archdeacon saying that he was standing down from all church responsibilities and thereafter for many years he and Gabrielle attended Dedham church in Essex it being the nearest parish to Playford that was outside the offending Diocese. Just a few years earlier in April 1961 another bombshell had hit the village. A Parish Meeting had been called to discuss the proposal to build 42 new houses between Church Lane and Hill Farm Road, a plan put forward by Charles Lofts who some eight years earlier had bought the land and cottages from the Bristol Estate.⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, Owen was outraged and quickly became a leading opponent of the scheme but, despite the number of homes being reduced to half that originally put forward, he continued to object and all but disappeared from public life. He did however retain the chairmanship of the Parish hall where he had met with no such troubles and remained its chairman for the best part of 30 years finally retiring in 1995. With at least 50% of the proceeds going to the hall, Sevenoaks continued throughout the 1970s to be one of the venues to host the fete although its organisation, as with that of national celebrations as the 1977 Silver Jubilee, was now in other hands.

He continued to live on at Sevenoaks until he died in 2012 at the age of 93. In his last two years he was wheelchair bound but remained mentally alert to the end having sold three building plots out of his large garden just a few years before his death: one against Butts Hill for his son Richard,

⁷⁴ See Archway House in this series, 10 and 14.

⁷⁵ See Brook Cottages in this series, 18.

which was never taken up, and the other two on the former tennis lawn against Church Lane. Sevenoaks itself was put on the market and sold within three weeks. It was the last of the Biddell property in the village. Richard moved to Hasketon and in doing so put an end to the family's 200 years continuous residence in the parish.