

HEART OF THE VILLAGE



The White Hart, now the only pub in the village, as it was a few decades ago.

Days when a pint of beer cost tuppence

WEEKLY NEWS, Thursday, December 12, 1991

WHERE do you find the heart of a village which in reality has no central core?

Drive through Wimbish any day and you will realise why it has been described as a "typical dispersed parish of Eastern England." Meaning, that Wimbish is actually a collection of small hamlets, each with at least one manor house, many dating back to Domesday.

Even the church stands in almost lonely exile. Here, no church clock chimes the hour, no bell's swing joyfully from the belfry or toll mournfully for some departed soul. The single bell, in its wooden frame behind the church, is alone responsible for calling the faithful to pray, mourn or celebrate.

Handsome

It seems that the church tower was destroyed by lightning in 1745 and pulled down in 1883 never to be rebuilt. Apart from the bell in the churchyard, two more are surprisingly tucked away out of sight behind a pew at the back of the church.

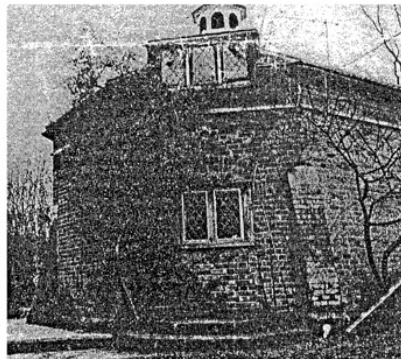
Outside in the churchyard, the old tombstones read like a chapter of social history. Whilst the Old Vicarage close by is a large, handsome red-brick many gabled building with sweeping lawns reminiscent of golden summer afternoons and cucumber sandwiches!

But present-day Wimbish bears little resemblance to Wimbish at the

JEAN GUMBRELL pays her first visit to Wimbish which is really a collection of hamlets.

turn of the century. No longer does the travelling fairground set up its swing-boats and roundabouts on the green near the White Hart on the first weekend in May. And the village blacksmith has long since departed the Old Forge which remains now in name only. In those days most

fishmonger who sold herrings at a penny a piece or, if especially big, three ha'pence. This was the time when most people were self sufficient, grew their own vegetables, kept hens and a pig. The latter usually killed in the 'killing shop' opposite the Royal Oak at Howlett End.



The old windmill which is now a private house.

villagers drew their water from wells and ponds which, during the summer months, often dried up.

There was also a windmill which ground the wheat gleaned from the fields by the wives of the farmworkers after harvest. The mill continued to operate until about 1930 and was later converted into a house.

It was the day of the

Next door to the killing shop stood the 'mangle room.' Here for a penny you could hire the large mangle for the weekly wash.

The Royal Oak closed its doors many years ago, as did The Star. Only the White Hart remains to recall the bygone days when beer was twopence a pint.

But twopence for a pint of beer was no small

sum for a farmworker who worked from six o'clock in the morning until five-thirty or six at night for twelve shillings a week. His cottage might cost him £4 or £5 a year in rent, and more than likely he would have quite a brood of young, hungry mouths to feed.

Beaters

Most of the men would work on the big farms—the original manor houses — Westleys, Tiptofts, Wimbish Hall, Thunderley Hall, to name but a few.

It was, of course, the day of the horse-drawn plough, although steam traction engines were also much in evidence, and the farmers might have over 20 men working for them.

Sometimes during the winter months some of the men would be employed as beaters for the big shoots. Then a man could earn 2/6 (25p) a day, plus a lunch of bread, cheese and beer.

But gone are the days of the self-sufficient village and villager. Present-day Wimbish has a different tale to tell as we shall see later.

□ From now until December 20, Jean Gumbrell will be happy to send copies of her book, *Down Your Street in Saffron Walden—Part One*, to any address in the UK.

Write to Jean Gumbrell, Little Mortimers, Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2NA, enclosing a cheque or postal order to the value of £8.50.



The parish church where the tower was hit by lightning in 1745 and demolished in 1883.