

ROCHFORD'S NURSERIES
AND THE
STONEY COMMON COMMUNITY



Margaret E. Silvester

ROCHFORD'S NURSERIES

My family's link with the Nurseries goes back to 1902 when my grandfather started work there. He had had a job in London but he needed a house and this need was answered by finding employment at Rochford's Nurseries. He and my grandmother were allocated no. 27 Stoney Common and that year my father was born. Thirteen years later, in 1915, he was to follow in his father's footsteps and get employment at the Nurseries. His two younger brothers looked elsewhere for employment.

My father worked at the Nurseries until he was a little over 65 years. At this stage, Mr. Edmund Cawkell, a member of the Rochford family and the one who ran the Stansted branch of the Nurseries business, asked him to be his gardener at his home in Burton End, namely Burton Bury.

The year my father retired from the Nurseries job was 1967 and this was the year before there were wholesale sackings. It all happened at the end of September 1968 and took most people by surprise although a letter sent out to employees on November 3rd 1967 gave an indication of the 70+ year old business having to face up to severe economic difficulties. Mrs. Rose Trundle retained the letter that was sent to her; it is replicated below.

*The Nurseries,
STANSTED
Essex.*

3rd November, 1967.

To All Employees.

Dear Mrs. Trundle,

We are all aware that the Nursery (now over 70 years old) has suffered a major surgical operation due to severe economic pressures. Two glasshouse blocks have been taken out of production.

Many of you have been with us for a long time - some all your working lives - consequently I am sure that we are all saddened by what has overtaken us.

By looking forward instead of backwards I hope that we shall ride out the storm - though in a smaller boat. This is a challenge that I am sure we can meet.

We will always give the fullest consideration to any and every suggestion that you or any of your fellows might make to help us in the struggle.

Poor trading results over the past years have prevented us from rewarding you as we would have liked to have done. Nothing ever gave me such pleasure as the years when we were able to give an annual bonus.

When we make an offer for any job to be done at piece-work rates it will not be because we desire to screw extra work out of you but as a way that enables us to pay you more.

In thanking you for your consideration may I ask one further thing - that is that you will give our New Manager (Mr. W. Turner, one of ourselves) your full support - I know that he will be fair in all his dealing with you all.

Yours sincerely,

Edmund Cawkell

Returning to the end of September 1968 it was a matter of foremen as well as 'hands' having to leave. Other jobs had to be found without delay and in a few weeks my father heard of one becoming the caretaker at the Convent School, one finding work for Pope and Chapman and another gaining employment at Stansted Airport.

My father was glad that he was already otherwise employed and did not have to join the general scurry for alternative employment. But on a personal level he had had to suffer a severe jolt at the Nurseries way back in 1962. On November 24th 1962 Mr. Sorensen, the Manager, announced to my father, who had been a foreman for a considerable length of time, that my father's block of six greenhouses was to be put over from tomatoes to cucumbers the following year. Mr. Sorensen said that he would take over the block in my father's place. My father assured him that he had the knowledge and experience to cope with cucumber growing but Mr. Sorensen appeared to overlook my father's statement.

On his arrival home we learnt from my shocked father that he was 'a foreman without any men' and that he had 'as good as got the sack'. We, his family, were, of course, stunned, especially when he started talking of going for the Head Gardener's job at Bishop's Stortford College. On the following day, a Sunday, he went to talk to the previous Manager, Mr. Fred Silvester, and sought his advice. The advice was that he should try for the College job.

Early the next day my father went to the Office to ask Mr. Cawkell's clerk, Mr. Meredith, if he could be allowed a few hours off work. He explained the reason why. Mr. Meredith then asked my father to return to the Office immediately after breakfast and when he did so he was assured by Mr. Meredith that all was going to be well for him, that he would be staying in his block and would be growing cucumbers. Mr. Meredith added something, however, that made my father realise that the firm was not in a very good position at all to face the future. He said that Mr. Cawkell was going on with the firm 'for the sake of his older men'.

The sequel of this crisis in my father's working life was that he did not grow cucumbers after all. Two weeks later Mr. Cawkell spoke with him. He told him that he grew very good tomatoes and that he was going to be put on the big tomato block. My father was greatly pleased with this outcome and we, his family, settled down once more hearing very little of what went on at the Nurseries.

The actual demise of the Nurseries took place towards the end of 1970. Mrs. Rose Trundle's second letter was dated October 28th 1970 and explained how the business could no longer continue despite all efforts to keep it afloat. A copy of this appears on the following page.

EDMUND ROCHFORD LIMITED

STANSTED, Essex.

28th October 1970

Mrs R Trundle,

Dear Mrs Trundle,

For more than a year I have been trying to sell our Stansted Nurseries as a going concern and so safeguard the livelihood, of our employees. My aim has been to look for a good progressive Grower who by the injection of new ideas and the erection of a Modern type of Glasshouse would again make these Nurseries into a profitable business and provide a good living for all employees.

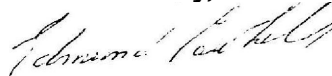
For some time now it has looked as if I was going to be successful but, as you know, the whole industry is passing through a tough period and this together with ever rising operational costs have made the raising of new Capital extremely difficult.

I am sorry to report that all my efforts have proved unsuccessful and that consequently this will be our last Trading season. We therefore regret that we have now to give you four week's formal notice to terminate your employment - this will expire on Friday November the 27th. We are taking up the matter of Redundancy payments and hope to have everything settled within the notice period. If you are able to find employment before this date it will not affect your Redundancy payment. We shall always be pleased to give you any help that you may need in finding new employment.

And now we would like to THANK YOU for your loyal service over many years. It is sad for us all to see the break up of the Nursery Family and we trust that things will work out well for you and your families.

Dark clouds do often have silver linings.

Yours sincerely,



CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Tomato growing, at which my father gained expertise, became very dominant at the Nurseries from the time of the Second World War, and most people in Stansted associate tomatoes first and foremost with the Nurseries. However, an article written for the 'Monthly Pictorial' of February 1927 entitled 'Nursery Gardening' by E.T. Dalgleish makes a point of mentioning Rochford's Nurseries and gives us a picture of the Nurseries at this phase in its history. It states that the Nurseries consisted of twenty-two acres under glass and continues.

"Besides Alicante and Muscat grapes, which account for an area of 7 acres, there are 13 acres allotted to tomatoes. Other nursery produce which finds a place includes cucumbers and a very large quantity of chrysanthemums in pots, for cut blooms. The delicate freshness of these flowers in autumn and winter is delicious to sight and smell".

A very early photo taken in 1915, and provided by Mrs. Ivy Livings, shows a trolley on 'tram-lines' crammed with pots of healthy looking chrysanthemums and in the background many more fill a long bench. There are a huge number of stacked pots on the right of the photo. The foreman, Mr. Smith, father of Mr. Roy Smith, stands on the left and Mrs. Livings' mother-in-law and sister-in-law are also there.



Another photo shows Mr. Smith with his workers, again with chrysanthemums, inside one of the greenhouses. My father Ernest Silvester is the small boy sitting in the front on the left and so the date must have been 1915 also. The nine people immediately to the left of Mr. Smith are from the left - Harry Gilbey, Jack Dale, Alice Childs, Mr. Shepherd, Annie Wickens, Miss Snow, Edith Livings, Violet Livings and Miss Snow. The young man standing on the extreme left of the photo is Bob Harrington.



A later photo, again with chrysanthemums and with my father looking somewhat older must have been taken around 1930. There is a group of eighteen men, no women this time, with Mr. Smith again in charge. The men in the back from left to right are Bill Sandford, Fred Newell, Mr. Gilbey, Percy Smith and Bill Roberts. Unknown to me is the man standing beside him. In the middle row are Ed Roberts, an unknown, Ernest Silvester, Ted Livings and Bert Peachey. In the front row are 'Bunny' Ingold, Charles (Wag) Jordan, Bill Patmore, Mr. Hudgell, Mr. Patmore and an unknown.

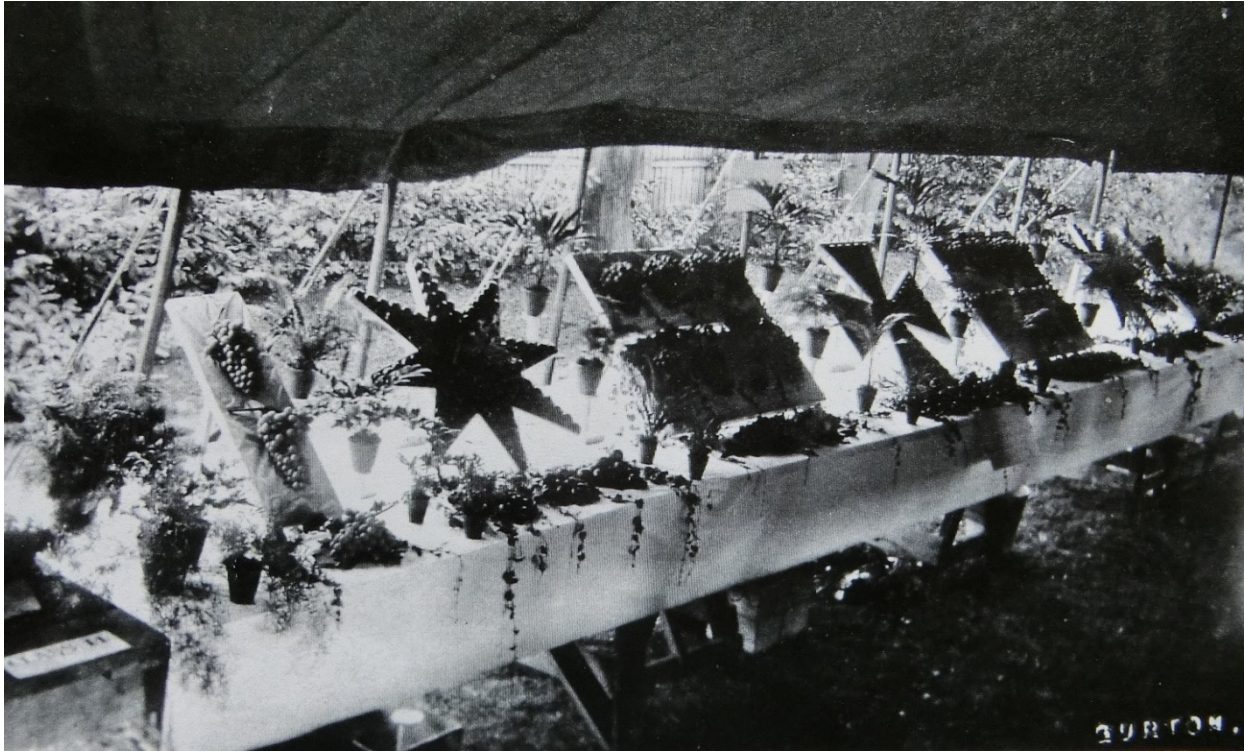


Several people in Stansted have spoken to me quite nostalgically about the chrysanthemums grown at the Nurseries. Mrs. Sheila Talbot (née Felton) said that she and her sisters always bought their mother a bunch of beautiful white chrysanthemums which she called Mopheads from there at the end of September each year. This was when the Nurseries had its Open Day and when flowers and fruit could be purchased at a reasonable price.

Mr. Ted Peachey described two chrysanthemums to me. One, 'Tuxedo', was tall with a golden head and another 'Winter Cheer' was mauvy in colour 'and very beautiful'. Ted told me how the chrysanthemums were sent up to Covent Garden, two to a box and long stalked, Tommy Gill would drive the lorry from the Nurseries to Covent Garden and arrive there at 10p.m. On occasions one of the men would accompany him to enjoy the ride. They would not get home until 2a.m.

GRAPES

An Open Day photograph, included here, and kindly lent by Mrs. Ivy Livings, shows a wonderful display of grapes and tomatoes arranged by Mr. Sammy Gooders, one of the foremen at the Nurseries.



Grape growing, as E.T. Dalgleish explained in his article, accounted in 1927 for an area of 7 acres. The grapes, the Muscat and Alicante, at one time supplied the Cunard liners and it is impressive to think of Stansted's home-grown grapes travelling the high seas. They had, of course, to retain their beauty throughout their long journey, their bloom still intact until they were fingered by the eater. Those who worked with them must have been extremely dexterous.

Mr. Ted Peachey explained to me that more black grapes were grown at the Nurseries than white and I have been told that they were grown on the north side. My grandfather's time at the Nurseries - from 1902 until the early 1930's, was spent mainly with grape-growing and my father also had experience in it. He has sometimes spoken of the nourishment given to the vines, a nourishment that made him feel somewhat squeamish. It was composed of sheep's heads and animal carcasses all brought up from the local butchers'.

Mr. Peachey remembers that as many as 24 green-houses were used for grape-growing.

CUCUMBERS

E. T. Dalglish in his article mentions cucumbers when he refers to other nursery produce and a photo is here included of one of the houses where cucumbers have reached their peak. Working amongst them are, from front to rear of the picture - Mr. Ted Peachey, Mr. Len Jordan, Mr. Erwin Dockerill and Mr. Ernie Harbridge.



The cucumbers are, I gather of the Nex variety.

Mr. Peter Brown, in his article in 'The Link' March 1992 stated that 7,500 cucumbers were grown over a 5 month period. It has been stated elsewhere that cucumbers were grown on the south side of the Nursery.

TOMATOES

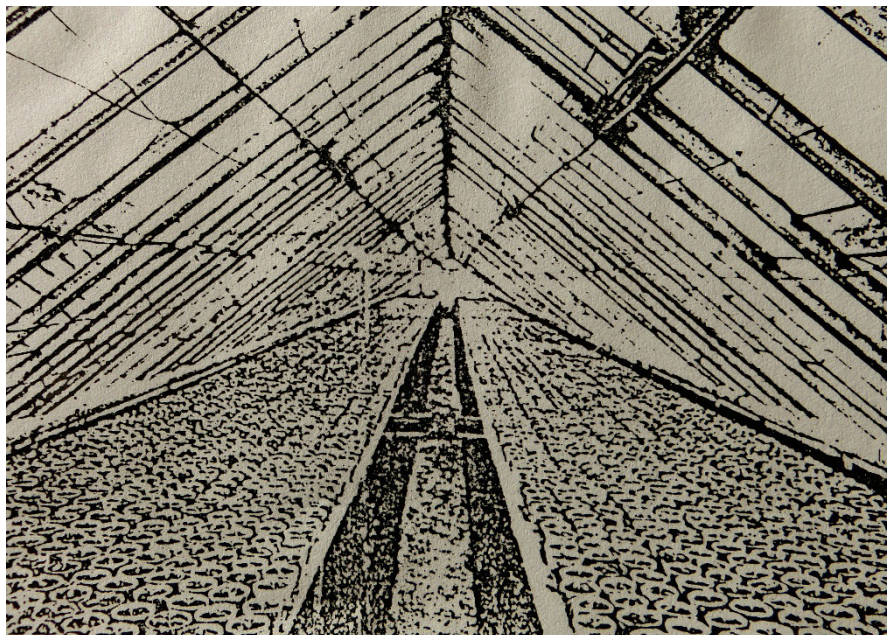
Tomato growing became increasingly the main industry at the Nurseries and with the onset of the Second World War gained importance. It has had its tricky times, it seems, when not a lot of profit was gained from growing them. In his article of 1927 Mr. Dalglish stated that a recent coal strike had had 'a definite effect upon the nursery industry'.

I quote 'It is a fact that the colliery districts are very large consumers of tomatoes and cucumbers. These are taken down the mines by the men, mainly on account of their thirst-quenching properties and, when money was scarce in the mining districts and no work being carried on underground, there was a consequent reduction in the demand for these two articles of food. Last year, indeed, was altogether a bad season for the nursery industry. 'The coal dispute affected it both directly and indirectly. Indirectly through the general tightness of money and directly through the difficulty in obtaining fuel. Coal is an important item in the growing of glasshouse produce and its high price has done much to prevent a successful season'.

It could be this period of time that approximates with a memory of Mrs. Mail- Muir. She remembered that Mrs. Winifred Cawkell, Mr. Edmund Cawkell's wife, had suggested to her husband's first wife that tomato growing could well be more of a profit-making business if tomato chutney were made on a commercial basis and that it was something they might initiate together. Nothing came of this suggestion and one gathers that things looked up for the industry soon afterwards. Certainly with the onset of the Second World War home-produced food became highly important and workers at Rochford's Nurseries must have been very aware of the value of their contribution, however indirect, to the war effort.

Women employees became very involved in the cultivation of tomatoes and both Mrs. Ethel Jolly and Mrs. Ena Goodes have told me of the work.

The seeds had to be sown at the start of the year when the men were largely responsible. 200 seeds were sown to the box and took place in what was termed the New House. The women had a great deal to do at the later stage of growth when the seedlings had to be pricked out into pots. A photo is included here showing a house crammed neatly on two sides with newly-potted tomato seedlings.



This photo was one that went alongside E.T. Dalglish's 'Nursery Gardening' article. There was also the job of moving the pots about the benches for optimum growth and then, when the plant was big enough, planting it out in the greenhouse using a dibber with a pot shape end to it.

Tying the plant as it grew, sometimes having to turn it round the wire, was an important job, and on this subject I noted in my diary of May 1964 a remark my father made about how he had been timed, in the presence of Mr. Sorensen, the Manager, and Pamela, Mr. Cawkell's daughter, while he tied up tomato plants. He said that he had managed 42 tyings-up in the 5 minutes he had been given. The exercise was connected with the ability of the management to appraise piece-work.

Working at close proximity with the tomato plants was a dirty job and both men and women had to wear clothes that were of little value to them. Tomato stain is so easily obtained but extremely difficult to remove. Clothes had to be boiled at home to get out the worst of the stains. Light clothing was very necessary because of the high temperatures in the tomato houses. My father must have been one of many who drank pints of water to keep him going. A job that was in the hands of the man and which was of great importance was the watering of the plants. A crop could be ruined if it was not done correctly and it was up to the foremen to keep a very sharp eye on the state of the plants. The photo included here shows a bumper crop of tomatoes and was taken by Mr. Edmund Cawkell. My father is the middle man in this picture and an Italian worker is in the foreground.



Tomato plants grew to the height of the greenhouse and were trained to go over to the opposite side.

Mr. Brown said in his "Link" article that 330,000 plants were used in one season.



A group of men outside the tomato houses. The man in the back row on the far left is Mr. Henry Peachey. This is an early photo and was in the possession of Mr. 'Ted' Peachey.

An extract from the Herts & Essex Observer dated November 25th 1933

Rochford's Nurseries Open to Public

400 people visited on Sunday afternoon. They saw chrysanthemums, grapes, tomatoes and were shown how produce is packed for market. Over £5 was raised for Birchanger Church Funds

THE NURSERIES AND HEATING

I have not been able to find an exact date for the conversion of the old stoke holes to oil-fired boilers but I do remember that the time of the conversion was an anxious one for my father. It was so different from the old system of heating the greenhouses - a leap into modern technology and I imagine that most of the foremen took some time to get used to it.

Mr. Ted Peachey, who worked at the Nurseries from 1925, knows for certain that the old stoke holes using coke and afterwards coal were still in existence in 1958. He also knows that Mr. Fred Silvester, the Manager who preceded Mr Sorensen, was anti-modernisation. Mr. Graham Hill-Smith, Mr. Cawkell's son-in-law, who had a managerial position, was very much in favour of it. He and Mr. Fred Silvester were unable to see eye to eye on this important matter.

It is evident from my diary that Mr. Sorensen was Manager in 1962 and that Mr. Silvester had by then retired. It is very possible that oil-boilers were installed between '58 and '62. It is known that Mr. Tommy Johnson of Stansted was responsible for the electrical work involved. Ted Peachey remembers the frightening noise made by the oil burners.

We can assume that for most of the working life of the Nurseries the old system heating the greenhouses by coal - prevailed.

There were at one time 293 greenhouses to heat. Mr. Peter Brown, in his piece about the Nurseries in "The Link" of March '92, describes how some greenhouses were 200ft. long and 18ft wide and that others measured 150ft long by 15ft wide. He reckons that 25 acres were eventually covered by glass.

He has some exact knowledge about the stoke holes. He says in his article that there were 30 stoke holes with 2 (6ft x 3ft) fire boxes in each to heat the boilers. These boilers circulated hot water round the glasshouses via 4 inch cast iron pipework. He adds, very interestingly, that if all of these 4 inch pipes were to be laid together in a straight line they would reach from the Nurseries to London.

The Nurseries stand on top of a hill. It was quite an engineering feat getting the coal up to it and round to the stoke holes.

The coal came into a siding down beside West Road and it was loaded into trolleys. These trolleys were connected, as stated by Mr. Brown in the "The Link", on to an engine-driven continuous steel hawser for their journey upward.

I can remember the trolleys going up and down but I never gave much consideration to that aspect of it all. Mrs. Ethel Jolly remembers the trolleys going up and down and of jumping into them on their way up and staying there for practically half their distance. The trolleys, on their way down, travelled too rapidly for a similar ride.

A team of 4 men called 'the Busters' had the job of unloading coal from the trucks in the siding and filling the trolleys with it.

A man located at the engine house had the job of 'sending up' the filled trolleys and another located at the top of the cutting, for 'sending down' the empty ones. These were on a brake until, near the bottom of the cutting, a device released the brake: it was not unknown for a trolley to gad down the whole way unbraked, a little mischief being performed by the man at the top to jolly up proceedings.

Getting the coal round to the stoke holes once it had reached the top was, in the very early days of the Nurseries, a job for the horse. A very early photo shows two men, the one by the horse is possibly a Mr. Stubbs, and the other is Mr. Albert Herrington with horse and trolley. One assumes that there is a track for the trolley although this is not clear on the photo.



Another early photo shows a man with a horse and this man is thought to be Mr. Bert Miller. The photo was provided by Mr. Ted Peachey and he said that the old packing shed stands in the background.



Later on, and I know of no exact date, the horse was replaced by a diesel engine. The man responsible for this was Mr. Bill Bartram.

The early '50's saw an end to the continuous steel hawser system and a tractor with trailer was used. Anthracite coal was taken round to the stoke holes in the trailer.

A very important item in the business of heating the glasshouses was, of course, the water. This was pumped up from the Stansted Brook, which ran near the railway siding at West Road, and stored in great tanks on top of the foremen's houses on the Nurseries site. I have been told that a limit was placed on the amount of water that was taken from the Brook but it seems that there was always sufficient of it.

When the tanks were empty they had to be cleaned and at these times men had to be inside them on top of the houses to do the job.

Accounting for the weight of the water that filled the tanks makes one realise how strong the houses had to be. They have undoubtedly been tried and tested and to this day are serving as comfortable homes.



A photo taken pre-1900 showing workers outside a foreman's house with the water tank on the roof.

A later photo, in 1995, shows the house and tank still intact.



MEN AND JOBS

Certain men can be associated with certain jobs. Mr. Freddy Carter worked in the Engine House and Mrs. Ethel Clark remembers 'the Busters' at one time included Mr. Harry Price, Mr. Cyril Haggerwood and Mr. George Bentley. She also remembers that at a certain stage her father, Mr. Charlie Mynott, had the job of sending the filled trolleys up to the top. Mr. Albert Herrington and Mr. Jim Carter were two of the men she could remember being stationed at the top. Mr. Jim Williams, who lived in Manuden until 1947 when a newly built house was available for him and his family at Church Hill Corner, was mechanic and plumber. Mr. Eddie Roberts and Mr. Ted Livings were, in my memory, the night-stokesmen but Mrs. Clark remembers her father had the job of a night-stokesman in the early '30's. Mr. Bill Francis was, in my memory, the bell-ringer. He took over from Percy Peachey from Tye Green. During the War years, however, the bell ceased to be rung.

The ringing of the bell was a well-known feature in connection with work at the Nurseries. Mrs. Audrey Rodgers remembers her mother, in extreme old age, re-living her very early days when she felt responsible for getting her brother, Harry Cannon, off to the Nurseries in time to beat the bell. If a man was 3 minutes late for work then he would lose a half-hour of his wages.

Jobs such as those I have mentioned seemed to be held for long periods. My father was interested in taking on the responsibilities associated with a foreman's job but a vacancy for him did not occur until Mr. Harry Herrington, one of the foremen, died. By that time my father had had nearly 40 years of experience of Nurseries work, particularly in the area of growing the Nurseries' products.

Names well known as foremen were Mr. Arthur 'Dewey' Smith, Mr. Sid Patmore, Mr. Fred Shaw, Mr. Frank Shaw, Mr. Albert Tyler, Mr. Harry Herrington, Mr. Ernest Silvester, Mr. Fred Palmer, Mr. Alf Shepherd, Mr. Sammy Goodes, Mr. Bert Wickens, Mr. 'Jeff' Goodes, Mr. Capon, Mr. Bob Hudgell and Mr. Albert Herrington.

Mr. C. 'Joe' Watson had charge of the stables and the cultivation of the fields owned by Mr. Cawkell. It was also his job to empty the soil bins of the inhabitants of Stoney Common once a week. Friday was the day chosen for this unsavoury but necessary job. Joe led horse and sewage-cart systematically down Stoney Common and most people kept out of the way while he went about his task. This Friday job was still continuing in 1947 when our family left Stoney Common to live further afield at Church Hill Corner, Forest Hall Road.

Mr. G. 'Jeff' Goodes and Mr. F. 'Son' Tyler were in charge of the Packing Shed. This large shed had a central escalator on which the ready-graded tomatoes in their boxes made their journey to the far end to be weighed. There were 3 grades A, B and C and boxes had to be packed accordingly. The boxes were 12 pounders and, once weighed and checked, their lids were secured. They were then loaded on to lorries to be taken to market.

Women were involved in much of this work but the men were responsible for the loading of the lorries. The packers were paid according to the number of boxes each packed, the packer's work-number having been attached to his/her box.

Before the Packing Shed was erected the packing of the tomatoes was designated to each 'block' and in the memory of Mr. Stan Clark, who started work as a Shed Boy at the Nurseries in 1933, the tomatoes were graded with a colour attached to that grade through its wrapping. He named the following - Specials (pink), Small Specials (pink and white), Smalls (white), Best (blue), Seconds (blue and white) and the Chats and Dry Cracks (white). The latter were sometimes collected by Greens Stores.

The Wet Cracks were usually sold to the workers at a penny a pound. The boxes had associated colour labels posted on them and this was a job for the Shed Boy. He also had the job of nailing down the boxes after they had been filled and a packing of paper and 'wood-wool' applied. The boxes were made on 2 machines on the site used for the erection of the Packing Shed and Mr. Clark remembers Mr. Reg Quick and Mr. Pat Gray detailed for that work. The boxes were then distributed to each block's shed where wicker baskets (strickers) of tomatoes awaited the packing into boxes.

It is interesting to note that when Mr. Mynott took on the job of night-stokesman he had employment at the Nurseries the whole year through. Previous to that he had, like many others, been 'laid off' when the winter came. My own grandfather, who started work at the Nurseries in 1902, had in his earlier years there to find another job to take him through the winters. Mrs. Godefroy, the Stansted organist, was helpful in this respect and through her husband, who worked in the office at Rowell's the Coal Merchant's, my grandfather was given a job with them.

Mr. Stan Clark reckons that labour at the Nurseries was reduced to 130 - 135 in the winter from just under 200 in the summer. After the Second World War no labour was 'stood off' and, as the '50's made headway, some good Nurseries labour was lost to Stansted Airport. Mr. Clark remembers how, in 1954, after working 21 years at the Nurseries, he went before Mr. Cawkell to explain the reasons why he wished to leave for another better paid job, in his case a Laundry.

Mr. Ted Peachey's first job when he joined the Nurseries in 1925 was as an errand boy, he had to see to the obtaining of lime and sand from Lime-kiln Lane and 'dung' from 'The Mount' and 'Sion House'. He also had to deliver milk to the Cawkells' home on Cambridge Road and see that the Nurseries' cats were given their quota of milk. Other errand boys include Mr. Les Peachey and Mr. Douglas 'Duke' Watson.

This photo shows three men engaged in maintenance work on the roof of one of the glasshouses.



A group by a railway truck on the Rochford sidings in West Road at a time when Goods Trains were used to take the tomatoes to London.

Mr. Albert Gray, the foreman, stands at the back at the left and Mr. 'Ted Peachey' is the boy at the front on the left.



THE STONEY COMMON COMMUNITY

It is interesting to read the following in Dalgleish's 1927 article:

'There is a small 'Port Sunlight' of some 60 cottages with recreation room and allotments etc. for the benefit of the employees at the nurseries'.

Against this statement there is a photo of some Stoney Common houses with the title 'Part of the model village' a copy of which is included here.



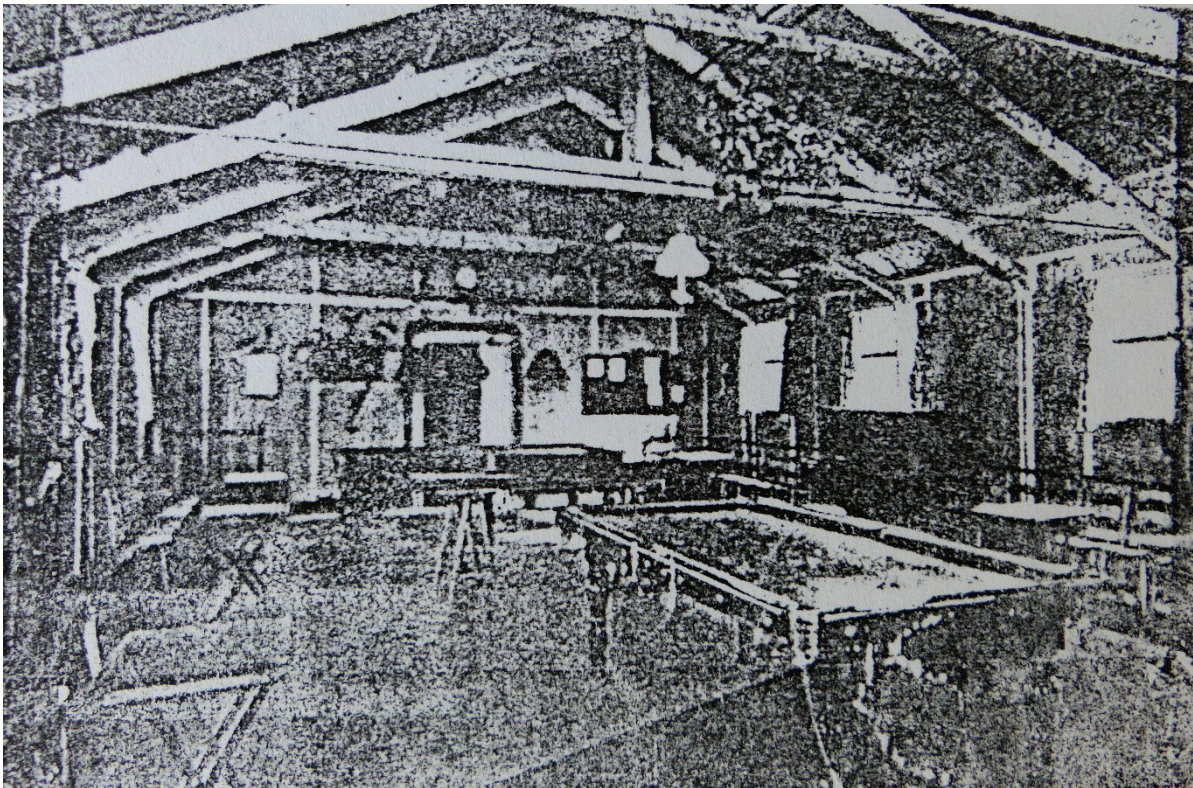
Part of the model village.

This photo is instantly recognisable except that the little front gardens that went with every cottage are missing. They must have been created at a date which was slightly later than 1927 when the article was published. I remember my grandmother, Mrs. Florence Silvester, taking great pride in their little front garden. She did her best to make it neat and colourful.

This 'Port. Sunlight' or model village to which Dalgleish refers was certainly a thriving, self-contained little community. Mostly every head of household, at least, worked at the Nurseries and everyone knew one another. My aunt, Mrs. Ena Goodes, has been able to list the names of all the families who lived in those 60 cottages. At 86 years of age, she has had no difficulty in remembering them or the number in the household. This list is included on another page.

The Recreation Room played a considerable part in the lives of Stoney Common's inhabitants. It was called 'the Club', it having been built as a Working Men's Club by Mr. Cawkell in 1926 or 27, and my father and his friends, particularly in their bachelor days, spent many happy hours there playing billiards, table-tennis and darts. They competed at these games with other groups and won medals when they were good enough. My father was proud of those that he won.

A photo here, also from Dagleish's article, shows the Recreation room with its billiard table in place.



The women were not excluded from the Club's activities by any means. There were Women's Nights which were held once a month on the first Thursday. Mrs. Cawkell chaired the Committee that ran these nights and they met, in my mother's memory, at the home of Mrs. Nell Blake who lived along the West Road area of the Common.

On Women's Nights the women entertained each other. They produced plays and concerts and organised a variety of games. Talents that would otherwise have lain undiscovered or unused were given rein. My mother remembers being got to sing popular songs of the time. One of the old favourites was 'Who is Sylvia?'.

Twice a year, nearing Christmas, there were Mixed Nights when the men and the women took it in turn to invite the other and to host the evening.

Mrs. Ethel Clark remembers, as a girl, longing for the time when she would be 14 years old and able to join the Women's Group. A peep or two through the Club windows on activity nights had convinced her of lively times to come.

In the summer of each year, one of the women's Club meetings would be held at Bentfield Hall, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Cawkell. The photo below, which was probably taken in the late '20's, shows a very handsome turn-out of women. Mrs. Cawkell is very likely the lady seated in the front row, 7th from the right. My aunt, Ena Silvester, later to be Mrs. Goodes, is also on the front row, 2nd from the left, and her mother, Mrs. Florence Silvester, my grandmother, is 2nd from the right in the middle row.



On one or two occasions, however, well under-age, Ethel Clarke experienced the joy of taking part in plays produced by a certain Mrs. Johnson who was then Secretary of the Women's Group. She was 6 or 7 years old when she acted in 'Princess Jonquilla's Necklace' and the photograph below shows her on the extreme left of the front row. Mrs. Johnson, the producer, is the king and is standing fourth from the right in the back row.

The group is standing in front of the Recreation Room where 'Princess Jonquilla's Necklace' was performed. The date would, most likely, be 1927.



Parties for the children were often organised. A lot of the presents given to the children were made by the adults and I have still in my possession a wooden dresser complete with tiny cups, saucers and plates. It was given to me when I was four years old. On another occasion my sister and I were given dolls which were beautifully kitted out in woollen clothing knitted by Mrs. Sally Prior who lived in The Thatch. This house is shown on the left of the 'model village' photo. The Recreation Room is not on the photo as it was further down the road opposite the West Road junction.

Receptions were held in the Club and two wedding receptions in my own family took place there. This photo shows some of the group that gathered at the wedding of my father's older sister in May 1928. They are placed outside the Engine House opposite the Recreation Room. This was the first of the Wedding Receptions to take place there.



The next family wedding took place in May 1940 and this was of my father's youngest sister, Ena, when she married Mr. 'Jeff' Goodes. This group, which includes myself as a bridesmaid, is placed outside the Recreation Room.



I remember our family going as guests a year or so later to the wedding receptions of Mr. and Mrs. Stan Clark and of Mr. and Mrs. 'Son' Tyler those, too, being held in the Club.

The Club (or Recreation Room) was used during the 2nd World War for Home Guard meetings and duties and also for the Fire Watchers. It was also used by the women for knitting groups organised by Mrs. Cawkell. This was to help the War Effort and my mother remembers knitting sea-boot socks as one of the required items.

Before the Recreation Room was removed to Water Lane in the early '60's to become the Scout Hut it was used as a school room by the Stansted Church School.

THE ANNUAL SHOWS

Through the 20's and 30's an annual show was arranged for the display of vegetables, fruit, flowers, domestic contributions (cakes, jam, wine etc.), floral art and Children's creative work. Much excitement was generated by these shows due to the element of competition involved and to this day people can remember the prizes they won. Mrs. Ethel Clark remembers her mother being much surprised when in 1933 she won First Prize for her cake as on the occasion of its cooking she was concerned with helping my mother who hadn't long given birth to my sister, Ena. My mother also remembers winning First Prize for her cake, although she cannot pin-point the year, and of Mr. Cawkeli remarking favourably of its taste.

My father enjoyed the competition aspect of the shows and I remember him setting out to win as many Firsts as he could with his vegetables.

The shows usually took place in late July or early August and were held at 'The Mount', home of the Misses Spencer.

THE BATH HOUSE

The Bath House was in place during the '30's erected by Mr. Cawkell for the benefit of Rochfords Nurseries employees. It was situated close to the 'clocking-in' shed on the Nurseries site and I remember it being tastefully designed with a large wall painting in the entrance area. This had been executed by a female artist, and subject-wise, incorporated items such as grapes and other Nursery produce.

Many of the employees made good use of the Bath House since the cottages on Stoney Common were without bathrooms. Miss Betty Turner remembers that her brother, Mr. 'Sharman' Turner, was very thankful for the bath facility as he was forced to reduce his clothing to underwear when under-taking the job of sterilising in the glasshouses and the heat in them was immense.

THE SWIMMING POOL

The Swimming Pool was built soon after the War, close by the cutting and midway between Stoney Common and the Nurseries. It was built to serve two purposes - that of a swimming pool but also for the storage of water. It was built by Mr. Bob Snow and as a swimming pool was used by Mr. Cawkell's family as well as by some employees for some years. However, this was brought to an end when a leak occurred and the pool was then used for wood storage.

THE SHOPS

Stoney Common boasted two much frequented shops. The main one was on the corner of the Common and West Road and the other was situated along West Road. In my young days the former was run by Mrs. Reeves the aunt of Mrs. Nancy Poole, one of our local historians. Her husband worked full-time at the Nurseries, Nancy and her sister often visited their aunt and they were sometimes drawn into activities at the Club.

The shop provided tobacco and cigarettes and some groceries and it was well stocked with sweets to suit the needs of the children. Paraffin for home heating devices could also be had there. The shop was often open during hours when other shops were closed and was very useful for all those items frequently 'run out' of by Stoney Common housewives.

Mrs. Reeves lost both husband and son in 1943, the latter on Active Service, and during the rest of the '40's Mrs. Reeves ran the shop unsupported. She had taken over the shop when Mrs. Stan Wilkins had, with her husband, left the area in the early '30's. Mr. Stan Wilkins had been a full-time employee at the Nurseries and when he was 'laid off' for the winter he decided to leave. He had attempted earlier that year to gather support in forming a Union but this had failed.

My parents, at this juncture, were offered the job of running the shop but this was not taken up by them. My father would have been required to continue his full-time work at the Nurseries and my mother could not contemplate the job as an extra to her other duties.

Mr. and Mrs. Owen Dockerill took on the shop for a few years after Mrs. Reeves' departure and then their place was taken by Mr. and Mrs. Sid Felstead. By 1958 Mr. and Mrs. Walter (Wally) Wickens had taken on the shop and, with Mr. Wickens working full-time at the Nurseries, it became very much Mrs. Wickens' shop, known eventually and affectionately as 'Ruth's Stores'. Ruth ran the shop for 23 years and she provided not only her shop goods but those from her own house store if a customer was in need and the shop was without the necessary item. The shop during Ruth's day was a lively meeting-place with Ruth always providing good cheer and conversation.

When Ruth retired from her store in 1981 it was, sadly for the Stoney Common residents, the end of their corner shop.

The West Road Shop was run in the '20's and '30's by Mrs. Downham and it, too, provided sweets for the children. This shop had been built alongside the house formerly used as a shop and was larger than the latter. The 'old' shop was then used as a home by Mr. and Mrs. L. Ridgewell. It continued to be used as a home and the 'new' shop as a shop, run by Mrs. Downham until she retired. She, too, lost her son during the 2nd World War.

THE MISSION ROOM

The Mission Room built in 1910 was situated at the top end of Stoney Common. It was where Sunday Services took place for the benefit of the residents of the Common and these were led by the Vicar from Birchanger. These Services were well attended, particularly so on the occasion of Church festivals. Mr. Cawkell would send Nursery produce, particularly grapes, to decorate the room at Harvest Festival time. My mother was churched there following my birth.

During my childhood in the '30's and '40's there was a flourishing Sunday School which my sister and I attended regularly every Sunday afternoon when a Service for the residents was not taking place. The Sunday School was run by Mrs, Mildred Chester of Broome End, Miss Ethel Church and her sister, Mrs. Edith Harris. Mrs. Harris played the harmonium for every occasion. We were given homework to do and I remember taking this very seriously.

Mrs. Chester would often, call at my house leaving a message about my homework or sometimes I would be invited. to Broome End to discuss it.

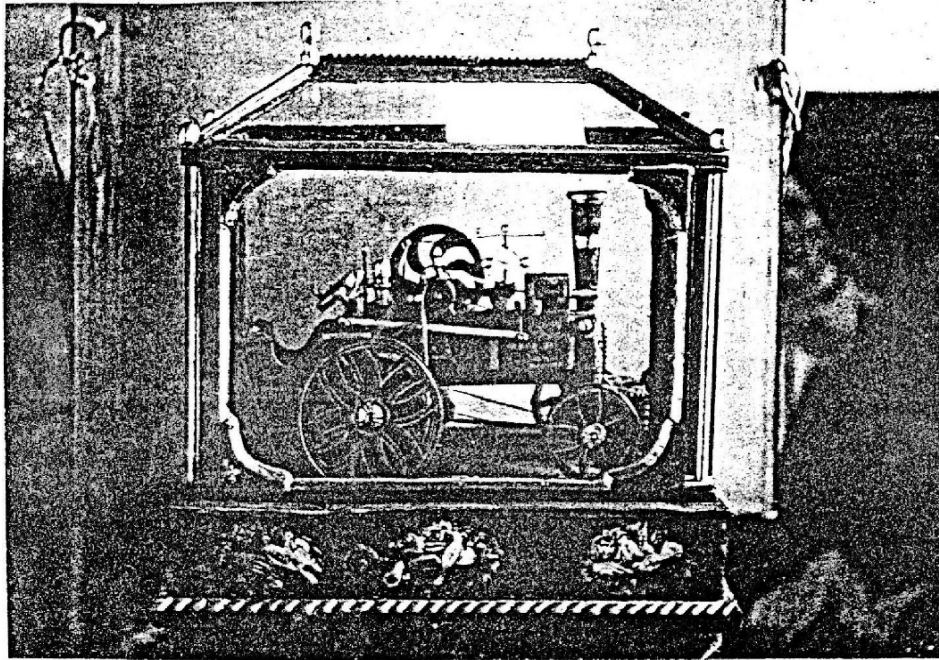
In earlier days, during my parents' youth, the Mission Room was in the hands of Church Army officials whose task it was to look after the spiritual needs of the Stoney Common residents. My mother remembers that 'Captain' Smith took over the work from 'Captain' Stevens and she remembers 'Captain' Smith living in a cottage at the far end of West Road which was one of the Foresters' houses. She remembers not only the weekly Services then held at the Mission Room but also the lantern slide shows given during the week by 'Captain' Smith. I remember my father mentioning that at an earlier date how 'Captain' Stevens sometimes had to deal with very mischievous boys intent on not behaving as required. My father spoke from first-hand experience.



Mrs. Jean McBride has contributed this early picture of the interior of the Mission Room.

The photo was taken in 1911 or thereabouts and shows the room being used for exhibition purposes.

Mrs. McBride's grandfather, Mr. Edward Cawte, is seated at the music-stand with his violin and is surrounded by other musicians. To his right is his working model of 'the Rocket' and a close up of this is shown in the photo below.



Captain Stevens is the man in the centre of the seated row of men gathered outside the Mission Room in this accompanying picture. It was no doubt taken at the same time as the exhibition photo and shows Mr. Cawte on the extreme left of the front row with his violin in his hands.



An early family photograph shows that at the end of the 1st World War the Mission Room was the venue for a Fancy Dress Party. For this my father was dressed as a maid and his sister Ena is wearing a Flanders poppy rig-out. One lady, Mrs. Phoebe Green, appears to be dressed as Queen Victoria. The Room has a very festive appearance.



The Mission Room continued, until into the '80's, to be used for Church Services once a month and these were conducted by the Birchanger parson. But, from the late '60's onwards the Room or Hall, as it was then called, was also being used for the meetings and activities of the Stoney Common Residents Association. Much fund-raising took place there and the barbecues were very popular with the children.

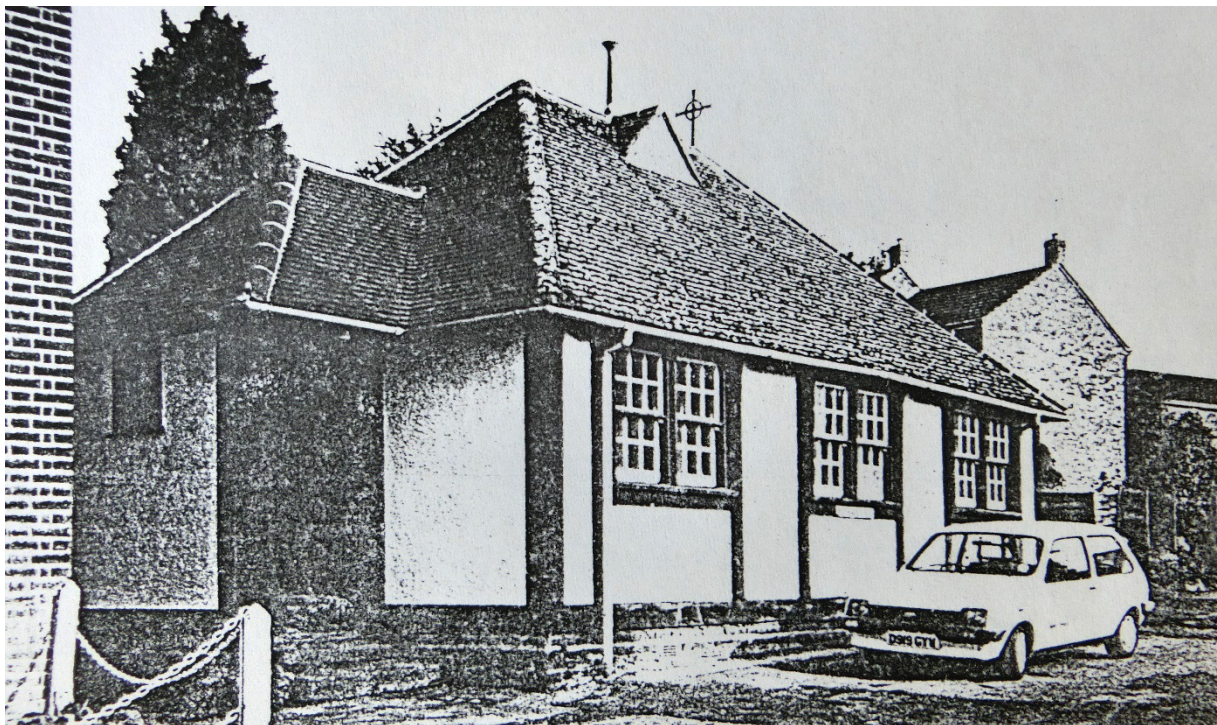


Photo of the Mission Room (or Mission Hall, as it is sometimes called) taken in 1994 and looking much the same as it did in its early days.

At the time of the Queen's Silver Jubilee Mrs. Ruth Wickens organised a Street Party for the enjoyment of the residents. The Mission Room was very useful for this and for so many other purposes and continues to be so into the present day, although it is now in the ownership of Mrs. Shrimpton, who runs a ballet and dance school. She purchased the Mission Room from Birchanger Church.

It was Ruth Wickens who ran the corner shop on the Common and who initiated the Stoney Common Residents Association. A huge amount was done to bring the facilities of Stoney Common into the 20th Century. It was known as 'Little Russia' for the lack of these and the Association saw to it being connected to main sewerage and to the telephone.

The text of a formal notice in 1936 from Saffron Walden Rural District Council is given below:

PUBLIC HEALTH ACT, 1936, s 15.

Notice of Intended Sewers or Water Mains Through Private Lands.

***To Mrs. E. L. Goodes,
53, Rochford Cottages, Birchanger, BISHOP'S STORTFORD, Herts.***

Whereas you are the Occupier of certain Lands called 53, Rochford Cottages situate at Stoney Common in the Parish of Birchanger in the County of Essex

AND WHEREAS for purposes of drainage the Saffron Walden Rural District Council propose that certain Sewers should be constructed in the private road to which the property has a frontage

NOW, therefore, the Saffron Walden Rural District Council HEREBY GIVE YOU NOTICE, that on the 1st day of January One thousand nine hundred and sixty-eight or as near this date being a reasonable time after this Notice, they will construct such Sewers as aforesaid in the said road as shown on the accompanying plan.

DATED this 15th day of December 1967

(SIGNED)

***Clerk of the Council
Council Offices, Debden
Road, Saffron Walden,
Essex.***

Street lighting was introduced and what had been a very stony road was transformed into a smooth road.

THE BOWLS CLUB

There was a superb bowling green in place during the '30's and '40's for the use of those who were linked with the Nurseries. It was situated at the top of Stoney Common opposite the Mission Room and was enclosed on all sides by a tall, thick hedge. The Bowling Club players had all the privacy they required for giving the game their best concentrated efforts.

Serious use of the bowling green petered out during the War years.

'ROCHFORD SPORTS'

In 1947 Mr. Stan Clark and Mr. Arthur (Choker) Hudgell approached Mr. Cawkell with their idea of forming a Rochfords football team. Mr. Cawkell was agreeable to this and was willing to be the President of what was to be called 'Rochfords Sports'. Mr. Stan Clark was to be its Chairman. Mr. Cawkell provided all the necessaries for this venture - the goal posts, nets and so on - and made the field beside the stables available to act as the pitch.

An enthusiastic team of footballers was soon formed and they were able to join with the Stansted and Stortford District League. They played against teams at Farnham, Much Hadham, White Roding, Burnt Mill and the Buttersfield Nursery, Hallingbury. These games were played on a Saturday afternoon after work had finished for the week at 12 midday.

The team's outfits were washed by Mrs. Ethel Clark, Mrs. Lucy Hudgell (wife of Arthur) and Mrs. Win Herrington (wife of Bob).

Names associated with the football team are Ted Hayden, Maurice Ingold, Les Peachey, John Blake, Bill Blake, Jim Carter, Peter Reed, Arthur (Nobby) Blake, Joe Childs, 'Dinky' Curtis, Harry Ward and Jim Tucker. The life of 'Rochfords Sports' was about five years. Mr. Cawkell was, it seems, a football enthusiast. The photo displayed here shows him with the Stansted team of 1921-22. He is seated beside Mr. W. Fuller Maitland.





Mr. Edmund Cawkell at work in his office on the Nurseries site.

A List of Families Living on Stoney Common in the '20's and '30's including the Number of the House and in Brackets the Number of Children Brought up there.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Peachey (3) | 26. King (12) |
| 2. Bushell (2) | 27. Silvester (6) |
| 3. Carter (1) | 28. Dellow (8) |
| 4. Griggs (5) | 29. Medcalf (5) |
| 5. Bentley (2) | 30. Wickens (3) |
| 6. Peachey (2) | 31. Livings (6) |
| 7. Bentley (2) | 32. Watson (1) |
| 8. Dellow (-) | 33. Bush (2) |
| 9. Newell (2) | 34. Brown (2) |
| 10. SHOP Reeves (1) | 35. Danzy (5) |
| 11. Harvey (4) | 36. Carter (3) |
| 12. Ingold (1) | 37. Harman (4) |
| 13. Clark (2) | 38. Roberts (3) |
| 14. Danzy (2) | 39. Wright (6) |
| 15. Herrington (6) | 40. Osborne (6) |
| 16. Reed (-) | 41. Livings (2) |
| 17. Wickens (2) | 42. Hudgell (6) |
| 18. Sheppard (4) | 43. Camp (7) |
| 19. Tucker (5) | 44. Peachey (1) |
| 20. Price (3) | 45. Curtis (-) |
| 21. Roberts (3) | 46. Childs (6) |
| 22. Hutley (6) | 47. Dockerill (2) |
| 23. Johnston (2) | 48. Halsey (1) |
| 24. Pratt (4) | 49. Ingold (1) |
| 25. Clark (3) | 50. Newell (1) |

Post script:

Malcolm Treacher has kindly offered his memories of his time working at Rochford's Nurseries between 1953 and 1967 and his comments are thus of much value to this booklet.

First, a little about Malcolm himself.

Malcolm's uncle was the Major Treacher who ran the Stansted Post Office and Malcolm came to live with him in 1941 when he was eleven years old and had just lost his mother.

Malcolm won a scholarship to Cambridge College of Technology and Arts and his first job was as an architectural draughtsman, during which time he repaired war damage to churches, one of which was St. Michael's in Bishop's Stortford.

Still very young, his interests soon took him on to another job. This was an awesome one. He became the Assistant Warden at the Docklands Settlement in East London. It was a job that involved the down-and-outs, mother and child clinics, old people and youth work. It meant rising at 6am and retiring at midnight.

Two years in that job and Malcolm, though much enlightened, was a wreck. He was given strict instructions from Dr. Platts, the Stansted G.P. to give up work.

It was after his recuperation that Malcolm came to work at Rochford's Nurseries. It was 1953 and he was twenty three years old.

Malcolm led a very active life in Stansted and was involved particularly with Boy Scout work. When he left Rochford's Nurseries, after working there for fourteen years, he went to live in Chelmsford. He became a full time County Scout Organising Commissioner. In 1991, as a result of lots of hard work, he received his M.B.E. from the Queen.

After retirement, Malcolm continued to live in Chelmsford but maintained links with Stansted where many of his friends continued to live.

Along with his comments, Malcolm included photos taken when he worked at the Nurseries.

In this picture, taken outside the packing shed, Malcolm is on the back of Robert Palmer's motorbike.



2023 COMMENTS FROM MALCOLM TREACHER.

Malcolm Treacher, employed at Rochford nurseries 1953-1967 (14 years).

I had of course known Edmund Cawkell prior, through Scouting (he had been District Commissioner earlier) and after I returned to Stansted from the East End of London, having worked at the Dockland Settlement in Youth Work, he offered me a post as an assistant to Mr. Meredith in the office and to Geoff Goodes in the Packing Department.

I finished up being responsible for this Department and fruit dispatch. Also I had the role of "in charge of Stores", looking after and issuing stock and materials.

My main job in the office was to assist with weekly wages, doing the tax and packeting up the cash. Also for a time (when Mr. Meredith suffered from poor walking) collecting the rents from cottages on the Common.

I also had the winter job of supervising the plastic insulation inside the greenhouses, tacking miles and miles of the stuff along the roof struts.

This photo shows me working on this job.

Mentioning plastic sheeting - I was also one of the team who worked on the structures built over the large roof-top water tanks on the



houses. Your pictures on p.13 just show on the 1900 shot the tank when still open at the top; the one on the right, 1995 still has part of the angle roof made of timber and covered by heavy black plastic to keep out the muck and prevent algae forming on the water - this was done in the late 50s.

Your section on "Heating"- the dating is about right. I would have said the change to oil - 60-61ish. I was involved in the process and had the task of supervising (and doing) the asbestos lagging to the boilers and external pipes down the stoke holes. This being a process of binding insulation panels round the outside, wiring them in with chicken wire, then covering them all over with a thick asbestos paste that set hard like a shell, finally painting with preserver. It was an unpleasant task, it having to be done once the heating was on (to help set the paste) so one was down the holes in excessive temperatures, smothered in wet asbestos paste - made up from a powder mixture and water - how we didn't all die of asbestos poisoning I shall never know!

The "Men and Jobs"- Many of the names you mention I recall well, particularly the late fifties and sixties. Alf Shepherd I remember was also responsible for the "Weather Records" charting daily the amount of sun, rain and temperature. I helped a bit with this from time to time.

You detail the packing of tomatoes with their gradings; cucumbers were also packed in grades, mainly by length in inches, 12", 14", 18" etc, in flat wooden boxes in the early days, then later in hard cardboard cases. Usually in two layers interspersed with blue paper and straw. I also took this over in the 60s. We first used the old wooden shed down towards the end of Forest Hall Road, then later on the long shed over by the fields to the north looking out towards the Common.

The fruit, by the way, mostly went to Manchester Market, latterly by road transport, as you say.

I had my fair share of "box making" for packing, both the nailing together of the wooden boxes in the small machine room on the corner of the Packing Shed, as per Reg Quick and Pat Gray, and the rapid hand making of the cardboard containers, both being stacked all around the sides of the Packing Shed.

The collecting in of the fruit (and delivering out of empty containers) was latterly done on open back lorries, pretty grim vehicles at that, often breaking down and with brakes that rarely worked! Also we had a low bed "Lister" truck, petrol driven, that pulled trailers along. These vehicles were the responsibility of the "Garage Department", looked after during my time by Tommy Gill.

Just to mention two other points - the Hut down the Common, I certainly remember this, and in fact used it for at least two "Scout Shows" in the forties (before I was working at Rochford's) and of course was involved in the removing of the building from the Common to Water Lane for the Scout Headquarters.

A comment one may not want to know about! – the toilets! From the early days the Nursery had little sanitation to speak of (I think the houses had septic tank systems) but the workers used a few little timber huts with "earth closets", just holes in the ground under a seat which dear old Joe Watson used to dig out from time to time. A proper flush system was built in later years at the "cross roads" near the centre of the Nurseries. One delightful memory is of one occasion when a young man using one of the old type was on a seat that gave way and he fell backwards down the hole into it's contents! - fortunately recently emptied so not too deep! But enough to make a right mess of his clothes – I recall we took him into a green house and hosed him down and found him some overalls to go home in! No names but he came from Elsenham.

I hope these notes are of interest to you, Margaret, you may like to rewrite some of this into a page of "comments" to include at the back.

Footnote.

I thought of another point that could be mentioned: Seeding.

All our annual seeding was done from our own varieties of crop; therefore a regular job towards the end of a season was the selection (by Foremen usually) of the best produce of a variety, these were kept to over ripen, then the mucky process took place of cutting open each fruit and scooping out the contents "mush" and seeds, then separating, usually by a series of washing till the seeds were left. These seeds were dried by spreading out on paper in the sunlight, being turned from time to time, then sieved and graded, bagged up and stored for future use. This was done with both tomatoes and cucumbers.