Cyril Southgate's
early Goldhanger memories

I was born in the village of Ashbocking, Suffolk on the 3rd February 1928, my parents were George Rands Southgate, a young man of Suffolk, and my mother was Edith Jane Southgate - nee White of Goldhanger. I was the fourth son of a family of five boys, my younger brother being born in November 1930 shortly before my father's untimely death in January 1931 as the result of a bad leg injury at his place of work, followed by a severe attack of pneumonia, etc. The family were at this time residing in Ipswich. Shortly after my father's death my widowed mother and four young sons returned to her mothers home in Fish Street Goldhanger, her mother, my maternal grandmother had been widowed for many years. This move was soon after my third birthday.

My eldest brother had enlisted in 1929 in HMS Ganges, the training school of the Royal Navy at Shotley Point opposite Harwich Harbour. HMS Ganges, a shore establishment, was the home of the famous mast rigged as Square Riggers and sailing ships of the past. Cadets scaled this mast to win various competitions. Usually the smallest cadet had the pleasure of being the "button Boy" who had to climb to the top and stand unsupported on the very top on what was known as the button. All cadets had to learn to swim fully clothed. This they had to do to win their overcoat, so it was No Swim, No Top Coat. Hard time and hard training.

Although I was only about three and a half years old at the time I can remember the last part of our journey to Goldhanger. The little train of the then Tollesbury light railway (the "Crab and Winkle line) started at Witham and went via Kelvedon and Tiptree. One coach and a couple of trucks and a brake van. Two long seats the length of the coach. No small compartments. We were met at Tolleshunt D'Arcy station by Ernest Barbrook, a single man, who owned a Bean car. Virtually the village taxi of 1931, a big open car with a folding hood for bad weather.

Ernie Barbrook with his taxi and a young Denis Chaplin

Eventually reaching Goldhanger and Grandma's cottage, which was one of four in a row, built right on the edge of the road, opposite the houses now named "The Bird in the Hand", "Chiplea", "Walnut Tree Cottage" and "Stonicroft".

Retracing in time a little, my father, as a young single man had arrived in Goldhanger about 1910-1911, he was a millwright by trade, and stone dresser (a person who kept millstones in good order). He was employed by the then owners of Goldhanger mill. He took lodgings with the Mann family who lived at “Sunnyside”, now known as “The Pumphouse” in The Square. My parents married in Goldhanger Church in 1914 and moved away to Suffolk, as his father owned windmills in Suffolk which were still in working order. They went to live in several places including: Friston, Mellis, Eye and finally Ipswich, where the unfortunate accident occurred. My father’s name appears several times in the bellringing records 1910-1914, as he had learned to ring as a boy in Suffolk. We still have these records in Goldhanger.

1931 - a lovely single lady, Miss Lily Clark lived next door in Fish Street. She acted as an auxiliary teacher at the local school. I remember she suffered badly from what I can only now presume to be arthritis, because at my early age of 3½ years I would remember her badly disabled fingers. About this time she took me to school, daily walking up Fish Street. I understand they took me in early at school to give my mother some relief as my brother was still under 6 months old. The head teacher at this time was Miss Ault who lived with a companion a Miss Allen, at the house we now know as “Tayspills”, Church Street, the home of the late Miss Moira Benham.

The local garage as we know it today 2002, was then owned by George Stokes. It was the place to take your wet acid accumulators to be recharged for a few pence. These along with a big dry battery kept our “steam” radios going in those days. John D Buckingham, bellringer, lived in Rectory Cottage and never used anything more than a crystal set right up until his death during WWII. As a boy I had the privilege of listening in on the earphones. I must be getting old.

George Stokes at the garage in the 1930-1940 period also ran an old Essex car as a hire

car. This I remember had wooden spoke wheels and pneumatic tyres. In later years he had a number of Austin Big Six cars up to and after WWII. He also built many farm trailers for local farmers on old lorry chassis, as by this time, during and after WWII, farmers were getting mechanised with an assortment of tractors, etc. The old Essex car finished its days as a henhouse in the garden of the Old Mill House in Fish Street.

School days in the 1930s were happy days and we always looked forward to holidays, especially pea picking holidays in June. We picked peas by the sackful for the Bunting Brothers of Highams and Joyces Farms. At the end of the day the sacks were taken to either Maldon or D'Arcy stations and sent to Robert E Lee at Covent Garden Market. His name was printed on every 40lb sack. I remember that I was able to purchase my first Rayleigh cycle at the age of 14 from savings from pea and fruit picking in the holidays, for the princely sum of £8-19-6d. This gave me sterling service until well after WWII.

The local school children also enjoyed a summer tea party at Joyces Farm in the same era 1930-1940. Mrs George Bunting (Edith) and Mrs Mabel Speakrman were school governors for many years. We were transported in wagons along the lower fields to joyces farm, where we always enjoyed a lovely tea, usually on the tennis court This was followed by a treasure hunt and various activities. All these thing fell apart as war loomed in later years.

A word or two about the Rector of the years running up to the 1930s, the Revd. Frederick Thomas Gardner. During the 1930s period he was confined to a wheel chair, but took services and gave his address from his chair. He was Rector for some 40+ years. Having come to the village as a newly married man, his in-laws purchased the living for him. Their family grave "Pococks" can easily be found in the churchyard. As a young man the Revd. Gardner accompanied the well known Dr. Salter of Tolleshunt D'Arcy on some of his expeditions to Spitzbergen.

The Revd. Gardner's wife, Ethel Mary, was a very small and petite lady who, when seen out walking, always seemed to wear pale lilac or wine coloured suits with always a short cape over her shoulder of a matching colour, with which she was able to conceal the loss of an arm. I was always told that this was due to an accident with the gas engine which provided the power for the electric lighting in Goldhanger House, which was the Rectory at that time. During his encumbancy the Revd. Gardner owned the first motor car in the village and employed a young man, Sammy Crowlin, as driver. In his later life he owned an Armstrong Siddley saloon, one of the earliest automatic cars, which also had a driver.

The Revd. Gardner always employed a curate to help him in his work in the two parishes of Little Totham and Goldhanger. The curate lived in later years at “The Parsonage House”, Head Street. I can remember the Revd. “Micky” Randall and the Revd. Hudson running up to WWII. After the Revd. Gardner’s death came the Revd. Roe followed by the Revd. Berry, who served as a forces chaplain. The Church in Goldhanger was looked after by the Revd. Folkard, a priest in charge throughout the war years.

Charles Jacob Page (Paddy), Old Rectory Farm, was buried in May 1940. His grave, I remember, was lined with apple blossom from the orchards which he planted in this younger days and farmed all his life.

Goldhanger School in the late 1930s - The school looked after the education of the children up to the age of 14. Until I think, 1937-1938 when pupils of 11years old were bussed to Maldon Secondary Schools (separate boys and girls). I was 11 years old in February 1939 and went to Maldon in September just as war was declared. During the period of the “phoney war” some pupils already at Maldon decided to stay in Goldhanger for school, but after a month or two things got back to normal schooling in Maldon. But I have progressed too fast….

The Village Blacksmiths

The smithy stood under a large Walnut tree back off the road to leave a forecourt. It was approximately in front of Cresta House garage, almost opposite the Cricketers public house. The blacksmiths house was to the North side of the forge, its garden running up behind the red brick wall as far as Tayspills. Opposite the smithy was a black boarded barn with a thatched roof. It was used as a woodwork shop by the smithy. The site is now occupied by the house named Barnhall. Outside the smithy was a multitude of odds and ends of iron and the remains of the base plate that was used when fitting and shrinking the iron tyres to cartwheels. Heavy farm horses and ponies of all descriptions were shod with local hand made shoes by the smith.

The smithy was then, and had been for many years owned by the Emeny family. I can remember Jack, Harold and his son George, who carried on the business until he wound it up and retired. Whilst George was in charge he modernised the business as much as possible. He acquired a power hammer, mechanical hacksaws and screw cutting machinery, which with his forge he was able to make many replacement fittings for some of the Thames barges when they were refitted at the Maldon boatyards. He also turned his hands to some fancy black iron work, examples of which can be seen in St. Peter’s

Church in the shape of flower troughs and tall flower stands. The decorative work for the weather cock on the tower was his work, which he and his assistant fitted in place. Harrows and scores of harrow teeth for the farmers also flowed out of the smithy in the 1950-1960s.

The Walnut Tree

I remember as a lad of about 9 years old being sent to ask Mr Emeny if my grandmother could purchase some green walnuts (about the end of June) as she wanted to pickle some for later use. I went back home eventually with about 100. Grandmother pricked them all over, covered them with salt and left them for a number of days, after they were put into a large stone jar and covered with spicy vinegar. They were covered over and stored away, emerging many months later, when they were enjoyed one or two at a time , along with cold beef or pork, all black and beautiful. Almost as good as the mushroom ketchup she use to make to top the suet pudding and gravy, or steak and kidney pudding, a favourite for Saturday lunch. All the meat in those days came from the local butcher.

Mr. Arthur Emberson, Butcher, Head Street

The shop stood just about where Mr Gordon Wright's bungalow is today. It had the normal butchers block, various benches under which stood the brine tubs always full of beef or pork joints. The usual rail for hanging long links of home-made sausages and lots of other joints and not forgetting the pork brawn. Pigs were slaughtered in the black boarded buildings out back. Hot scrubbed with boiling water, scraped to remove the bristles, and everything used except the tail and the squeal. Beef was brought to the local shop from Alexander's shop in Heybridge, which in those days was close to the Anchor public house, there being facilities there to deal with cattle.

Also at the rear of the shop was the Ice Box room, used as a walk-in Ice Box for the sides of beef and pork, etc. (the days before modern refrigerators). I do not know exactly where the ice was made in Maldon but it used to come once or twice a week on an early motor lorry, covered by sacks, especially in the summer. We would watch the driver on our way home from school spike the large 3-4ft long blocks, some 12-14 inches square and break off a large portion which he would carry to the ice room (circa 1937). I think electricity came to the village and still does over land lines around 1937.

By this time we had moved into houses in Blind lane and our route to school took us under the giant Elm trees that lined both sides of Head Street in those days from Maldon

Road to the site of the village Hall, which as kids we watched grow brick by brick. Two of the Elms had to be removed to enable this to happen. All the others were gradually cut down as a huge amount of Elm was used for temporary construction and shoring up of bombed building during the war, as very little foreign timber was available, or was difficult to obtain.

The Bakery

The bakery was owned and run by Mr. Miller (Bert) and later, until its demise, by Mr. Fred Norton. You could at one time, early morning especially, enjoy the aroma of freshly baked bead, lovely and crusty, wafting across The Square as perhaps you filled a bucket, or butt on wheels, under the pump. The bakehouse, and shop for flour, bread and some groceries, at the top of Fish Street, is now the home Anthony and Elaine Clark. The bread was taken around the village by pont and cart and later by van. The oven was a monster, all brick built, which seemed to us kids like a huge cave. The wood fire was fed through a door at the side of the main oven door, on the floor of the oven towards the front. The oven never really went cold from day to day. The baker could see what was happening by the rosy glow of the embers. The bread dough in the tins was pushed into the oven with a "peel", a flat board on a long handle that was black from many years of use. The baked bread was also retrieved in the same manner.

The dough for the morning bake was knocked up the afternoon before, placed in big wooden troughs and covered with warm flour sacks and left to prove. Next morning it would be cut and weighed out, knocked up and put in the tins and into the ovens. The baker, like his dough, was an early riser.

The Post Office and Village Shop

Mr & Mrs Edwin Rowley kept the village shop and ran the post office in one room which is now Mr & Mrs Bailey's lounge. From my earliest memories they managed to distribute all groceries and rationed goods that were available all through the WWII period. This was no mean feat because they had to deal with all the paper work and coupons, etc. etc.

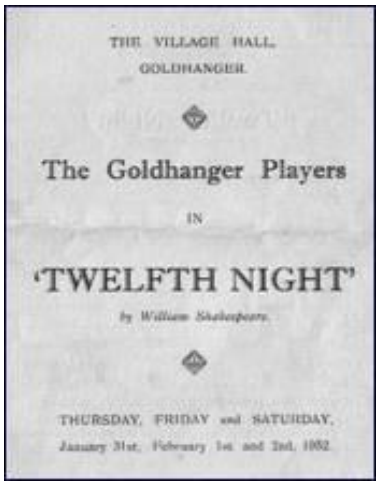
In the days around 1937-1938 they had a machine outside which dispensed five Woodbine cigarettes for 2½d (old money). All manner of sweets, especially "Chappels Fruit Lollies", about the size of a match box, on stick, OK if you sucked them but if you bit them your teeth got stuck. Sherbet-dabs and Gob-stoppers, aniseed balls,you name it; all for ½d or 1d per go. Happy days. In summer, home made ice-cream (say no more). I

cannot recall exactly, maybe there are others who can remember when Mr & Mrs Willingale opened their first little sweet shop-cum-store by their front gate, which grew and expanded into the bungalow that we now know today as Betty's Shop.

The Goldhanger Players

The Goldhanger Players were formed in the years before (or after possibly) WWII, many local people were involved over the ensuing years. Mrs Maude McMullen was president/director/producer on many of the productions. She was a grand lady who loved the village and its activities. When I first remembered her, she and her husband lived in "Follyfaunts" and then moved to "Rockleys", Church Rd, Tolleshunt Major a few years before WWII. There they converted the barn (with Bernard Mann's help) into a wonderful party and cum dance hall and built an outdoor pool.

They also built a lovely little tree house in one of the large oak trees nearby. They used to entertain many guests, amongst their numbers Sir Michael Redgrave and his wife, Racheal Kempson(Mrs McMullen's sister). Vannessa Redgrave and her other relatives also used to stay for holidays etc. Mr & Mrs Kempson lived in "Corner Cottage", Church Rd during the wartime. A large grey haired gentleman who always wore a monocle and cycled around the village, attending church regularly and often reading the lesson.


THE VILLAGE HALL,
GOLDHANGER.

The Goldhanger Players

IN

'TWELFTH NIGHT'

by William Shakespeare.

THURSDAY, FRIDAY and SATURDAY,
January 31st, February 1st and 2nd, 1952.

Many plays were performed in the Village Hall including several from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and The Merchant of Venice. Mrs Mac, as she was affectionately known to

all, loved costume plays, and obtained beautiful costumes from London theatrical agencies through her family contacts. The late Bernard Mann and myself created many stage scenes and were stage shifters over the years. My wife has many memories of parts she played in the '50s. The performances always ran for two or three evenings, usually including a Saturday, when all the cast and helpers enjoyed a social evening in the Barn at "Rockleys".

During the winter months the barn would be brightly lit, there would be a great roaring fire with logs two feet long, much party fare all provided by the wonderful Mrs Mac and her husband. He loved to wear evening dress for these occasions and played a beautiful grand piano, which was on a raised dais at one end of the barn. Memories, memories. Mulled wine and heaps of goodies.

Mr & Mrs Mac were both keen on Scottish Dancing and would soon get the party under way with the Sir Roger de Coverly and so forth. Mr Mac had the reputation of holding the girls tightly when dancing and always enjoyed the parties. He visited friends in the USA several times after the War although approaching 75 years or so of age, always travelling in the liners as he enjoyed the night life. Whereas Mrs Mac preferred the new BOAC aeroplanes to the USA when their service resumed.

The Players continued after Mrs Mac's death. The late Ted Bragg, who lived and was employed by Wilkin & Sons at Bounds Farm, Fish Street. He was the farm foreman for a number of years and took up the challenge as producer, etc. of the Players and had many successes. He gained his experience of amateur acting and producing plays when he and many others were POWs in Germany during the War, and so the Players went on for many more years. Then, like most good things, it died with the advent of TV and home entertainment. But I have gone on too quickly …

World War Two memories

The weekend that war was declared saw the arrival of a searchlight unit in the village, situated on what is now the playing field off Fish Street. After several moves around the village, it took up residence in what was the village cricket square at the side/rear of Goldhanger House, which at that time was empty. The unit became larger and had three lights, the largest, some 6ft across, was mounted on wheeled chassis. They had what was probably early Radar scanners, a gun pit with a Lewis gun for aerial defence and spotter chairs in the adjoining fields, all linked by field telephones.

When the lights were on and the electricity jumped between the carbon rods in the lamps they would throw a brilliant blue/white light onto and through the clouds, keeping enemy aircraft high and blinding the crews so they could not see rivers and landmarks. It was possible to read a newspaper anywhere in the village when these were in action even on the darkest nights. These units were in most villages and all came under a central control at Gibcracks Farm between Danbury and Bicknacre/Hanningfield area. They provided their own power from diesel generators, which could be towed by trucks. The men were housed in huts at the back of Goldhanger House.

The Early Days of the Battle of Britain

1. On a Saturday afternoon I was helping an old village worthy, grey hair and long white beard, Mr. Prentice Jordan to pick apples in the old garden field, now Thistley Close and part of the adjacent woodland. I was 12 years old at the time. Over the Blackwater

Estuary proceeding towards London was a large formation of German bombers and fighters, stacked up at all heights. I gave up counting at 300 and the old man was getting a bit hot under the collar and said to me, as I stood wondering what was going to happen “never mind they old b***s boy, lets get the apples picked. He was not going to lose his apples to the enemy. Happy Days.

2. The first German aircraft crash that I witnessed was at Ravens Farm, Heybridge, on the road to Wickham Bishops from Holloway Road, Heybridge. The only survivor was a 20 year old gunner, who landed by parachute near the Heybridge Swifts football club. He was wounded in the arm and smashed his teeth on landing. The whole story of the event is written by Stephen P Nunn and Allen Wyatt in a booklet entitled “Heinkels over Heybridge” published in 1987, ISBN: 0951242202 and ISBN: 095124230x. A copy of this I have in my possession (and can be borrowed).

3. The third incident which is still clear in my mind is the crash of an ME109 fighter one hundred yards west of Charity Farm cottages, on the Maldon Road just out of the village. A group of roaming ME109s at the latter end of 1940 were making their way homeward over Great Totham, heading out to sea, when they pounced on a flight of RAF Hurricanes on patrol. In the melee that followed further Hurricanes appeared and joined the fray. Several ME109s were shot down around the Essex area. The pilot of this particular aircraft parachuted out and landed at Sheepcotes Farm, Little Totham. He was badly burned and died in St Peter’s Hospital that night. He was initially buried in Maldon cemetery and later re-buried in the German war graves cemetery at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.

4. We also had many more hairy situations which could be described in detail, but other than the night bombing, when Goldhanger had its share in and around the village, which luckily escaped damage. The exception was the barn at Hall Farm that was struck with an oil incendiary bomb which caused a fire and gave the local AFS team some practice. They were near and handy, being based at the Old Rectory Farm. The main centre of control was the Wardens Post at the Chequers public house. The phones were housed in what is now the pub kitchen. I don’t know if this situation was unique to have an ARP post in the pub, but it worked quite well in Goldhanger.

The local fire watchers, whose duty it was to be ready to deal with incendiary bombs with a stirrup pump, water and sandbags, made their nightly rendezvous in the Parish Room, which stood on the site of “Wheelwrights” in Head Street. All were ordinary folk who had to take their turn of duty on a roster basis. The small incendiary bombs were sometimes dropped in hundreds, falling from a large container. They were not good things as I remember as they would get stuck in roofs and all sorts of odd places. They were made with magnesium, and once ignited burned very hot and soon started big fires. They were about 18 inches long, 2 inches round, with a tall fin. The main magnesium body being 12-inches long.

Not to be forgotten:-

The Wesleyan Chapel, Head Street

I do not know the origins of this building, perhaps the owners can enlighten us from the deeds. My memories are the late 1930s. Mr. Stanley Wilkin, Bounds Farm, was the main driving force at this time. There were Sunday services and a “Brotherhood” for the young men of the village. After his death the chapel went into decline.

The Bells in St. Peter's Church Goldhanger

My memories are that some of the bells in the tower are of a great age and some are quite young at 50 years old. The bell weights, casting dates and various inscriptions cast on them by the makers can be seen in the picture frame at the base of the tower in the ringing area. One of the great antiquities, the fifth bell in the octave, is still in its original form with the inscription:

"Miles Graye made me 1657"

Six bells were in the tower until after WWII, when the original wooden frame holding the bells, probably dating back to earlier than 1657, became unsafe and a decision was made to replace it. The new steel frame was made and erected by Gillet & Johnson, bellfounders of Croydon. They were assisted by our own tower captain at that time, the late Mr B C Mann and several ringing members of that period. The new frame, although designed for 8 bells, the existing 6 bells were returned, and as it was eventually discovered to be the middle 6 of an octave. The bell founders, thinking that a new Tenor was to be purchased, had made a mistake, so more money was raised and in 1951 the bell founders cast a new Tenor bell for about 50% of the price and the ring was now useable.

Mr B C Mann did a huge amount of work in the tower with wood and steel I recall, making new floors and rope guides, etc. The seven bells of Goldhanger were rededicated in December 1951 by the Archdeacon of Southend and were, for a few years, the only seven bell ring in the country. Within a year or two, due to the efforts of Mr B C Mann and his Father, Goldhanger was able to obtain another bell from a redundant church in Colchester weighing 2 cwt. A new Treble bell was cast from the metal of this bell by John Taylor & Co, of Loughborough. This bell weighed something over 2 cwt. The spare metal helped to offset the cost, leaving somewhere in the region of £100 to find, which was eventually donated by the ringers of the time. The new bell was suitably inscribed "1951". So we now have a full octave of 8 bells, some old and some new. The ringers at the time were:- Mr Charles Mann; Mr George Neville; Mr Bernard Mann; Mr Alfred Appleton; Mr Authur Appleton; Mr Harry Appleton; Mr John(Jack) White; Mr William White and Mr Ernest Johnson. All were Goldhanger men.

Cyril is third from the left

I have written down this history of St Peter's bells for the benefit of the younger generation, which I hope they will find of some interest. One could go on reminiscing, as so much happened in those days. I hope some of my memories bring Goldhanger past to life again. We have had many other celebrations over the past years: Coronation festivities; D-Day anniversaries; end of war anniversaries; etc., etc. and so we could go on never ending, as more happens in Goldhanger than meets the eye. So perhaps this is a good time to stop.

Cyril Southgate
18th November 2002
(Cyril died in September 2007)