

Annual Report for the Parish of Gislingham 2025

January 2025

Concerns were raised at an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council on 8th January into a planning application for a barn conversion at the 16th Century listed Ivy Lodge Farm on Back Street. The plans involved extending the footprint of the listed building to accommodate a 5-bedroom dwelling.

A Winter Get Together, organised by the Parish Council in association with Gislingham WI was held for residents wishing to socialise over refreshments. Music was provided by members of Gislingham Variety Club (GVC), who sang songs from different decades and encouraged guests to sing along.

On 14th January, the Junior Road Safety Officers ran a “Be Bright, Be Seen” day at Gislingham CofE Primary School, covering all aspects of road safety and a competition for the best brightly dressed pupil in each class.

On 18th January, a quiz night was held at the village hall in memory of Jack Cook to raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust. More than £30,000 has been raised for TCT since Jack died ten years ago.

February 2025

A free, six-week, health and wellbeing group for the over 60s took place at Gislingham Village Hall. Pub nights also resumed at the hall on a twice monthly basis run by Barrel and Bridle. The Friends of St Mary’s Church, Gislingham resumed their monthly Saturday morning fundraising book sale and coffee mornings.

March 2025

A non-statutory consultation into a proposed 15,000-acre solar farm North of Gislingham was held by EcoPower Suffolk at the Village Hall on 15th March. Residents had previously raised concerns about the impact on wildlife, footpaths and farming land at the Parish Council meeting on 17th February.

A Spring Litter Pick on 16th March organised by Mendlesham Scout Troop attracted 50 residents of all ages.

A “Down Memory Lane” feature in the March edition of The Messenger (Gislingham and The Thornhams monthly magazine) focused on Gislingham’s High Street, with old photos of several listed buildings, former pubs, The Six Bells and Prince of Wales (now West View House), and the old Post Office and shop.

A new bus stop bench was installed by the Parish Council at the High Street bus stop. This was made possible by a 'Pride in Your Place' grant of £1164.15 from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council.

April 2025

A Spring Get Together for senior residents or anyone needing some company was held at the village hall on 12th April. Once again, music was provided by GVC members, but turnout was lower than in January. Gislingham's Women's Institute, which meets monthly in the Village Hall, hosted speaker Charles Garland on 16th April to talk about "Dad's Army – The nation's favourite comedy".

On Saturday, 26th April, St Mary's Church, Gislingham welcomed a band of ringers from the Suffolk Guild of Ringers to ring a peal. Led by former chair of the guild, Rowan Wilson, the peal lasted about 3 hours.

May 2025

An event to mark the 80th Anniversary of the end of the war in Europe was held at Gislingham Village Hall on Sunday, 11th May. After the Last Post, played by Gislingham Silver Band, ex-serviceman David Braybrooke raised the VE Day Commemoration flag. Gislingham Variety Club entertained the crowd with renditions of wartime favourites. Refreshments by Harris's Hog Roast, Barrel and Bridle bar, a barbecue and Ice Cream Van, Whip it like Webber, were enjoyed by more than 100 people. Proceeds from tea and coffee sales were donated to the Royal British Legion.

The Annual Village Meeting was held on 19th May, following the usual Parish Council Meeting. At the latter, Martyn Bryant presented his annual footpath report which noted new surfaces laid to FP35 next to the school, FP36 (Bowling Alley) and FP32 (Coldham Lane to the Lovells Estate). These had become very overgrown and muddy in wet weather. A new bridge has been erected to cross the ditch on FP25 giving safer access towards the railway line and back to Morley's Lane. Chair of the GPC, Cllr Tranter, noted the challenges to the village of the Norwich to Tilbury Pylon Scheme and the EcoPower Solar Farm proposal, together with forthcoming devolution which may change the role of the Parish Council.

The Friends of St Mary's held their AGM on Friday 23rd at St Mary's Church. The AGM was followed by a presentation by local artist and historian Timothy Easton, renowned for his landscape and garden paintings.

June 2025

Pub nights at the Village Hall, run by The Barrel and Bridle, were reduced to one night per month due to low turnout.



Gisfest took place on Saturday 14th June. Organised for the past ten years by Chris Saunders, this featured a farewell concert at the village hall by the Zillionaires. Also performing were his new band FOG & guests, Reg Siger and Leanne Faulkner, Alex Mackenzie, Black Shuck, Dan & Matt Rowland. The Gislettes and GVC gave outdoor performances to the throng of residents enjoying the sunshine, barbecue and bar on the village green. The event raised almost £950 for the village hall.



On 25th June, Harry Wallis of South View, Finningham Road, died aged 98. He was born in 1927 to Albert and Laura Wallis (nee Carter) on the family farm. When they bought Rush Green Farm, Back Street, he and his sister, Margery, were given some land to build their own homes on. He married Gertrude (Gertie) Webb from Mellis in 1952. They lived in a caravan, where their son Terry was born, until they completed their bungalow which was much admired by passers-by for the 3 circular flower beds in the front garden. Harry worked on the farm with his stepbrother, Cecil, and witnessed the changes from horse to tractor, binder to combine. The family lived off the land, producing their own milk, eggs and meat.

Harry was involved in building the village hall and was known for his garden produce and his two tortoises, one a gift from his mother when he was a child. On his retirement, Rush Green Farm was sold, and he devoted his time to his garden and his wife, Gertie, who passed away 7 years ago. Both tortoises are still alive. A more detailed tribute by his son, Terry, and a poem by his great-grandson, are attached in the appendix.

July 2025

On 11th July, Gislingham School's Junior Road Safety Officers went to Endeavour House in Ipswich to share good practice with other schools. They received a Gold award for their road safety activities which include competitions, training and traffic observations. A report on their work was published in the Diss Express.

Gislingham Summer Fair, where the Village Hall, School, Friends of St Mary's Church, Playgroup, 1st Mendlesham Scout Group and WI come together to host a fun filled afternoon, took place on 12th July in the school grounds. There was a superhero themed fancy dress competition, stalls, music and games such as "Splat the Rat" and a parade of 17 vintage tractors. Unfortunately, the fun dog show had to be cancelled due to the extreme heat, but the Scouts barbecued hot dogs and burgers despite the weather and the WI tent proved irresistible to many. Blue Wolves Cheer Group put on an energetic display of gymnastics and dance, and Kenninghall Morris Dancers even managed to entice members of the public to participate. Gislingham Variety Club sang a medley of songs, including some that featured in their country music inspired show, Hillbilly Hoedown, last November. From the funds raised, £500 was given to each of the six village organisations who helped to run the event.

At the Parish Council meeting on 21st July, the issue of two purchase orders on footpaths in Mill Street and Coldham Lane was raised, together with concerns about the fate of ancient trees and increased risk of flooding due to National Grid's Great Grid Upgrade proposals, which would see the village surrounded by 9-10 50-metre-high pylons. The county councillor, Richard Rout, is working on this and parish councillors agreed to investigate further.

The council announced Mr Chris Pitt as winner of the Watson Bowl for 2024, for his service to the Friends of St Mary's Church, the Six Bells Community Group, The Messenger Magazine and St Mary's Church Bell Ringers. Volunteer of the Year was awarded to the Gislingham Flower Ladies.

August 2025

Gislingham Gardening, Art & Produce Show was held on Saturday 9th August. With more than 170 entries, the village hall was full of home-grown flowers, delicious looking bakes and preserves and interesting vegetables and arts and crafts. The Cottage Garden Trophy was reinstated this year and won by Jo Pitt. £528 was raised for local charities Street Forge Workshop and Beyond the Wall.



On 15th August, a Remembrance event to mark the 80th anniversary of VJ (Victory in Japan) Day was held at the village hall. Former Royal Navy officer David Braybrooke raised the commemorative flag, and a member of Gislingham Silver Band played the Last Post and Reveille. Corporal Herbert George Finbow, of Poplar Cottage, who is commemorated on the Gislingham War Memorial, served and died in the Far East campaign. Chris Pitt, ex-RAF, gave a reading and a two-minute silence was observed at 11.00am. On 17th August, a service of commemoration was held at St Mary's Church to mark the end of the Second World War (VJ Day, 15th August 1945). A book of remembrance, opened in 2018 to allow residents to enter their family members' contribution to the First World War, was opened throughout 2025 for contributions relating to the Second, whether military or civilian.



St Mary's Church hosted its annual flower festival over the Bank Holiday Weekend (23rd-25th August). The theme this year was "Family Games" which led to astonishing floral displays of traditional games such as Dominoes, Snakes and Ladders and Charades. Toys such as Mr Potato Head, Barbie and Peter Rabbit were also celebrated with flair and creativity. For 3 days, the Village Hall was fully stocked with refreshments for visitors to the show, who could also take away homemade goods, or play their own games in the churchyard marquee before and after visiting the church displays. £2230 was raised. (Photo: Pass the Parcel)

National Grid submitted its application to the Planning Inspectorate for the Norwich to Tilbury Pylon scheme on 29th August.

September 2025

New bus services to Diss and Stowmarket started.

The Lloyds Tour of Britain came through Gislingham on Wednesday 3rd September. The tour travelled from Stowmarket through the village via Thornham Road and Mill Street. Featuring the last professional appearance by former Tour de France winner and Olympian, Geraint Thomas, crowds lined the route to cheer the cyclists.

Local cyclists, riders and walkers took part in the annual Suffolk Historic Churches Ride and Stride event to raise funds for St Mary's and the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust on 13th September.

An update from the Six Bells Community Group in September's edition of The Messenger reported that the residents' appeal against a Planning Enforcement Notice issued by MSDC had been allowed. The Planning Inspectorate ruled that the ground

floor remains a pub and “there is no indication that the appellants have given up the possibility of using the ground floor as a PH”, even though the necessary equipment has been removed from the cellar. The group continue to promote the reopening of the pub “as it has been for about 200 years, a huge community asset.”

Gislingham Parish Council installed a new bench on Charity Meadow.



Sylvia Martin (nee Locke), of Hensyl House, Mill Street, passed away on 21st September aged 87. Born in High Street, Gislingham, she moved to Thornham Magna aged 2, after her mother died of leukaemia. Following school in Thorndon and Eye, Sylvia assembled parts at Stowmarket Iron Foundry. Sylvia met Henry Martin at a dance at Cotton village hall when she was 15. After the dance, Sylvia found a friend about to ride off on her bicycle. She was told that Henry was going to drive her home so they would take care of her bike!

The matchmaking worked and they married in 1961, moving in with her father, Stanley. Henry worked on his father Ernest’s farm, Street Farm so, when their twin daughters were 2 years old, his mother, Daisy, bought Orchard Cottage, Mill Street, across the road for Henry and Sylvia to live in. Sylvia continued to look after her father’s house in Thornham, cycling over from Gislingham with the twins on their tricycles, and brought him to live with them at Orchard Cottage when he became ill. He died, aged 59, in 1969. Sylvia also nursed her mother-in-law before she died in 1988. Henry and Sylvia put a lot of care into their garden with Sylvia particularly enjoying flowers, until “Hensyl” house (named after them) was built opposite by local builder, Peter Whatling, in 2009. Henry died in 2016, aged 89. Their twin daughters, Caroline and Julie, still live in the village.

October 2025

On 19th October, former parish clerk and long-term resident, Kathryn Wells, passed away aged 57. Kathryn, originally from Aberdeenshire, lived in Little Green Close with her husband Kit and their 3 children, Josie, Torie and John. She was involved in many village clubs and activities over the years: Chair of Gislingham Playgroup; Committee Member for Playbus; Sunday School Leader; Treasurer of Mellis & Yaxley Guides; member of Gislingham Wives and Gislingham Variety Club. Kathryn was passionate about reading, selling Usborne books for children and co-founding Gislingham Reading Group. She loved entertaining and walking her dogs, Milo and, more



recently, Barney. Involved in the Tinténiac Twinning Association, she once hosted a dinner for 64 people! Kathryn, a Chartered Surveyor and Land Agent, founded Little Green Consulting in 2008 with her husband, Kit: a family run business based in Gislingham that specialises in assisting organisations to meet their environmental and quality obligations. She continued her work and involvement in local activities despite being diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2019. Family and friends from Scotland and South Africa travelled to the service in celebration of her life at St Mary's Church on Friday 21st November. More than 300 people filled the church to hear the service, conducted by Reverend Tiffer Robinson. It was the first occasion to be live streamed to the village hall so that mourners there and around the world could participate.

On 31st October, St Mary's became a "House of Light", providing a dry, restful place for parents and carers and fun activities for children, including apple bobbing, a 'selfie' spot and mask making.

November 2025



The traditional remembrance service was held at the war memorial on Sunday 9th November, conducted by Jean Archdeacon. Wreaths were laid by Councillor Tranter on behalf of the Parish Council and Chris Pitt on behalf of the Parochial Church Council.

Jean Archdeacon, Reader at St Mary's and village recorder, held her last Worship for All service at the church on 16th November. The Parochial Church Council presented her with a gift and flowers and wished her well for her move to Dickleburgh.

Gislingham Christmas Fayre was held in the school hall on Saturday 22nd November. Activities included a chance to meet Father Christmas and a children's craft workshop.

Gislingham Variety Club brought a Murder Mystery (with 3 course meal included) to the Village Hall on 28th and 29th November. Written by Leah Durrant and Michelle Norris, "Sun, Sand and Sin!" featured a 20 strong cast. Guests were transported to the Last Resort Hotel on a Mediterranean island for a fast-paced, offbeat comedy with some strange twists, cheesy jokes and even a Mariachi band. Tone's Tunes Disco rounded off the evening's entertainment (see appendix). Throughout the year, GVC performed at events in the local area linked to the 80th anniversary of the World War Two.

December 2025

Gislingham Playgroup held a Christmas Sing-along on 2nd December in the school hall, which included a visit from Pixie the Elf.

The Friends of St Mary’s held a special Christmas book sale at the Village Hall with free mulled wine, a raffle and Christmas refreshments, alongside the extensive selection of pre-loved books.

A Christmas themed Quiz Night was held at the Village Hall on Saturday 13th December.

St Mary’s Church hosted a carol service on Thursday 18th December and a Crib Service on Christmas Eve.

Apart from those already mentioned, such as GVC and the WI, the Village Hall hosted a wide range of clubs and activities throughout the year: Pilates, Fitness and Yoga Classes; Quiz Nights; Bingo; Carpet Bowls. A new Chat & Craft Club started in the Autumn, run by Elspeth Tranter (Flower Festival organiser).

Appendix

Gislingham Variety Club Programme

The classically elegant Last Resort Hotel

One of our beautiful suites

Menu du Jour
 - Melon -
 - Charcuterie/Cheese Platter -
 - Brownie & Squirry Cream -

SUN, SAND & SIN!
 A MURDER MYSTERY
 Followed by a disco!
 Fri 28th & Sat 29th
 November 2025
 Gislingham Village Hall
 Written by Leah Durrant & Michelle Norris

Welcome to The Last Resort...where your comfort is our first priority

THE LAST RESORT

Enjoy the show...pay attention, you never know what could happen...we might be asking questions later

The Cast

A word from our directors

Welcome to this mini holiday – an island of sunshine in the dark of winter. Several new faces join us for this production – and some have never even been on stage before! The whole cast and crew have worked hard on this fast-paced, offbeat comedy, with some strange twists! It is Leah’s first time writing and directing and she has been surprised...at what a sick sense of humour she has!! We both love coming up with bonkers ideas and making them real: giggling at deciding all the embarrassing things we will make the actors do...and working the cheesiest of jokes into the script. We have thoroughly enjoyed breaking out the summer clothing, cocktails and suncream for this Mediterranean Murder Mystery, and we hope you have fun watching and taking part in guessing...whodunnit?

Hasta luego amigos!

Michelle & Leah

Gary – Kevin Chamber
Yvonne – Eira
Mia – Foe Shippers
Mahuel – Richard Pursehouse

HOTEL MARIACHI BAND
John-Paul – Norman Herbert
Georgio – Bob Warras
Gringo – Sally Jarvis

Carrie – Aislinn
Elmer – Jasmine
Sally – Ruby Weekes

Raven de Vere – Suzanne Wills
Agnie – Patsy Siggers
Ursula – Cassie Hatch
Dul – Oli Erich

Muin/Trace – Gail Wells
Auntie Shir – Kerben
Chenails – Hannah Wells
Briensy – Raf Bolam
Destiny – Leah Durrant
Grin – Michelle Norris

Appendix

25th June 2025
Age 78

Harry Wallis was Born 1927 and he lived on the family farm in back ~~road~~ ^{street}. With his Mum, dad, 2 brothers + 2 sisters. Cicel, ~~Al~~ Irene, Margery + Sid. However, Irene died when she was a child. Harry went to school in Gillingham and when he left I worked on his fathers farm. ~~They~~ They then brought Rush Green farm at the bottom of Back Street. Harry and Margery were each given a piece of the farm land where they built their bungalows. The 2 as you go out of Gillingham ^{towards Farningham} on the right.

Harry met Gertie Webb from Mellis, daughter of a farmer and they married in 1952. They lived in a caravan for several years while Harry and 2 people he knew built the bungalow as he saved up and paid for the materials. They had one son, Terry who was born while they still lived in caravan, ~~Terry was~~

Harry worked on the farm with his brother Cicel. They started when horses were used, before tractors came onto the farm. They had livestock + arable they lived off the land, milk straight from cow, home made cheese, meat from slaughtered cattle, beet, pork - lamb. Eggs from chickens.

In Harry's spare time he worked on his own garden, flowers + shrubs at the front and vegetables + fruit out the back. He would maintain

the 3 circles of flowers on the lawn in front of the bungalow often admired by all who come through the village.

He was called up for WW2 and went to do his training in Norwich. However, he never served, he would say, 'Hitler surrendered when they knew he was coming'. He never spoke about the war.

He helped a group of people build Gillingham Village Hall, when it was first put up.

When he was a young boy his mother brought him a tortoise, which ~~he~~ is still alive today, it was joined by another tortoise about 30 years ago given to him by Reg Siger. The 2 tortoises are still alive up the bungalow and one could be near 100yr old.

Dr Yagar from Bolestale Health Centre wrote about Harry - his tortoise in his memories as Harry would always show them to him.

Harry worked the farm, seeing horses changed for tractors, 1st tractor was a Fordson, from a binder to a combine. He retired and the farm had to be sold as it needed to be decided by ~~it~~ ~~and~~

spent his retirement in his garden and looking after Gertie his wife after she became wheelchair bound. Eventually Gertie had to go in a home and he would visit every day taking his veg to the home. Had his 90th birthday, organised by Gertie and Mellis in his care home - in the limes. Gertie died a year later. Last 7 years he was on his own digging his own garden & planting flowers until he was ~~97~~ as his mobility deteriorated. He fell and broke his hip and gradually needed more care and the last 6 months he was in Yaxley house care home and he was 98 when he died.

Terry Wallis's tribute to his father, Harry (Page 2)

Transcript of Tribute to Harry Wallis by his son Terry Wallis:

28th of June 2025 age 98

Harry Wallis was born 1927 and lived on the family farm with his mum dad two brothers and two sisters Cecil, Irene, Margery and Sid. However, Irene died when she was a child. Harry went to school in Gislingham and when he left, worked on his father's farm. They then bought Rush Green Farm at the bottom of Back Street. Harry and Margery were each given A piece of the farmland where they built their bungalows. The two as you go out of Gislingham towards Finningham on the right.

Harry met Gertie Webb from Mellis, daughter of a farmer, and they married in 1952. They lived in a caravan for several years while Harry and two people he knew built the bungalow as he saved up and paid for the materials. They had one son, Terry, who was born while they still lived in the caravan.

Harry worked on the farm with his brother Cecil - they started when horses were used, before tractors came onto the farm. They had livestock and arable, they lived off the land: Milk straight from the cow; homemade cheese; meat from slaughtered cattle, beef, pork and lamb; eggs from chickens. In his spare time, Harry worked on his own garden, flowers and shrubs at the front, vegetables and fruit out the back. He would maintain the three circles of flowers on the lawn in front of the bungalow, often admired by all who came through the village.

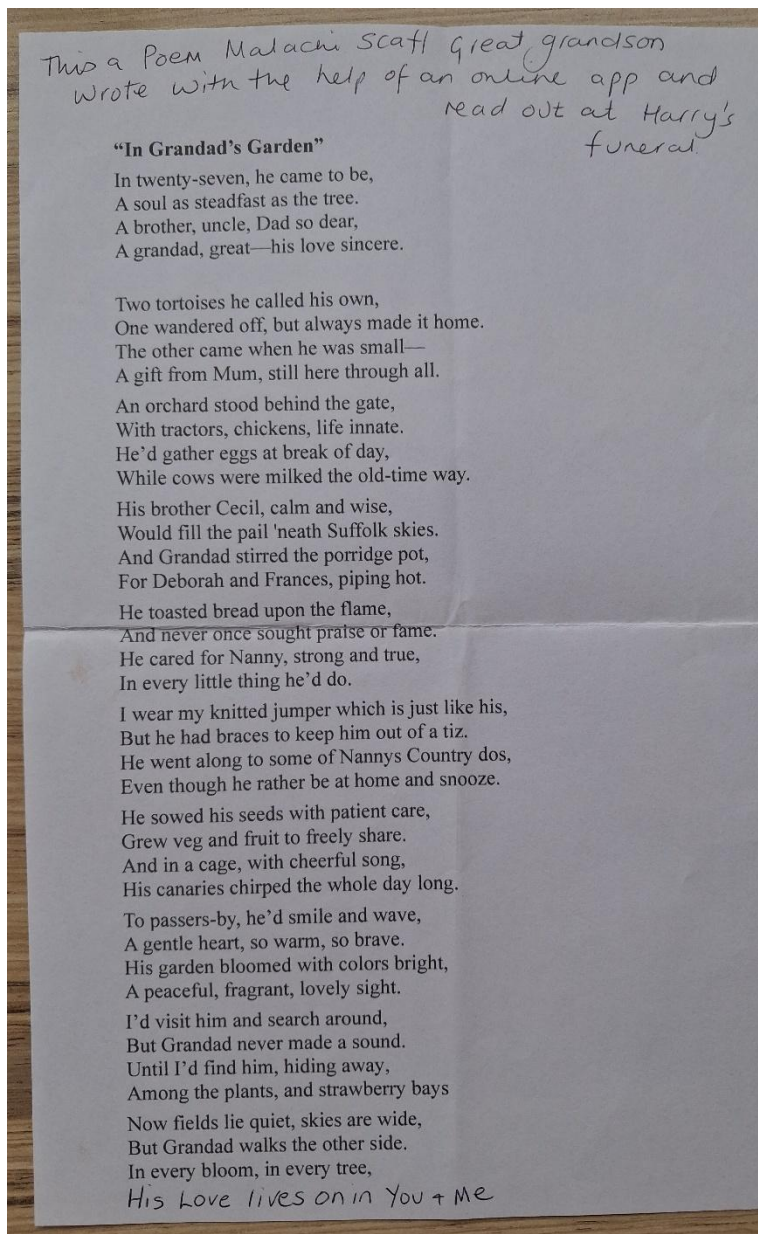
He was called up for World War 2 and went to do his training in Norwich. However, he never served, he would say "Hitler surrendered when they knew he was coming". He never spoke about the war.

He helped a group of people build Gislingham Village Hall, when it was first put up.

When he was a young boy his mother bought him a tortoise, which is still alive today. It was joined by another tortoise about 30 years ago, given to him by Reg Siger. The two tortoises are still alive up the bungalow and one could be near 100 years old. Dr Yager from Botesdale Health Centre Wrote about Harry and his tortoise in his memories as Harry would always show them to him.

Harry worked the farm, seeing horses change for tractors (first tractor was a Fordson), from a binder to a combine. He retired and the farm had to be sold as it needed to be divided by 4. He spent his retirement in his garden and looking after Gertie his wife after she became wheelchair bound. Eventually Gertie had to go in a home, and he would visit every day taking his veg to the home. Had his 90th birthday, organised by Gertie and Mellis Limes Care Home in The Limes. Gertie died a year later, last 7 years he was on his own digging his own garden and planting flowers until he was 97 as his mobility deteriorated. He fell and broke his hip and gradually needed more care and the last 6 months he was in Yaxley House care home, and he was 98 when he died.

Poem written by Harry Wallis's Great Grandson, Malachi, and read at his funeral:



“In Grandad’s Garden”

In twenty-seven, he came to be,
A soul as steadfast as a tree,
A brother, Uncle, Dad so dear,
A granddad, great – his love sincere.

Two tortoises he called his own,
One wandered off but always made it home.
The other came when he was small-
A gift from Mum, still here through all.

An orchard stood behind the gate,
With tractors, chickens, life innate.
He'd gather eggs at break of day,
While cows were milked the old-time way.

His brother Cecil, calm and wise,
Would fill the pail 'neath Suffolk skies.
And Grandad stirred the porridge pot,
For Deborah and Frances, piping hot.

He toasted bread upon the flame,
And never once sought praise or fame.
He cared for Nanny, strong and true,
In every little thing he'd do.

I wear my knitted jumper, which is just like his,
But he had braces to keep him out of a tiz.
He went along to some of Nanny's Country dos,
Even though he'd rather be at home and snooze.

He sowed his seeds with patient care,
Grew veg and fruit to freely share.
And in a cage, with cheerful song,
His canaries chirped the whole day long.

To passers-by he'd smile and wave,
A gentle heart, so warm, so brave.
His garden bloomed with colours bright,
A peaceful, fragrant, lovely sight.

I'd visit him and search around,
But Grandad never made a sound.
Until I'd find him, hiding away,
Among the plants, and strawberry bays.

Now fields lie quiet, skies are wide,
But Grandad walks the other side.
In every bloom, in every tree,
His love lives on in you and me.