

In the time of Noel and Kitty Smith, tenants and occupiers.

1984 - 1995

Grimston Hall: Part 2



Grimston Hall, c 1990 (Courtesy: Kitty Smith)

After I visited Grimston Hall in August, I spent some time sharing photographs of the house with Rosemary, speculating with her about the age of the buildings and the features surrounding the property. It was she who reminded me that about twenty or thirty years ago the house had been occupied by Noel and Kitty Smith. "Where are they living now?" we both wondered. Rosemary of course, was completely on the ball and made light work of finding their current address and then it was up to me to contact these two former occupiers of the Hall. When I did, they both gave their time and information with kindness and generosity, helping to fill in some of the pieces of the sizeable jigsaw which is the history of Grimston Hall.

Neither Noel or Kitty were born in Trimley St. Martin. Noel was born in Assington and then moved to Bradfield in Essex, a village close to River Stour, where he lived for the next seventeen years. Kitty is from the East End but met Noel when she visited Bradfield. It was Noel's father Dennis Smith who formed the Trimley connection and it was he who was the tenant of Grimston Hall immediately before Noel. He took it over at Michaelmas 1962 and lived and farmed there until his death in July 1983. It was during this period the chimney above the Dining Room fell down onto the flat roof; the long stack is now firmly attached to the roof above the kitchen.



The view of the tall chimney above the flat roofed Dining Room extension, which fell down and was re-built.

The metal strap at the top of the photo and to the left of the chimney holds it to the adjacent roof.

Following the death of his father, the tenancy was then taken over by Noel and Kitty in 1984 and they remained there until the mid-1990s. They both brought energy and spirit to their new home and revitalised it inside and out. I empathised with Kitty's excitement when she said to me,

"I loved the Hall from the minute I walked through the door. I could imagine all the people from before walking about, from women in crinolines to Thomas Cavendish, the sailor. There was such a sense of history."

The Smiths hadn't been in residence for very long when they, like the rest of southern and eastern England were hit by the Great Storm on the night of the 15th/16th October 1987. Noel related how the greenhouse belonging to Frank Smith at Flory's Farm was blown across the field until it was almost beyond Grimston Hall. The farm buildings at the Hall didn't escape. The old Barn stood firm but the buildings behind it, adjacent to the cattle yard, boasted corrugated iron roofs. It was an idle boast for these simply *"folded over like books..."*. Having observed the fragility of the barn, I was surprised it had not been damaged but Noel said, no, the beams in the roof weren't nailed but fixed with wooden pegs and could stand any amount of wind battering. An impressive piece of carpentry from earlier centuries which outlasted its' younger neighbours. Despite its seeming frailty, this barn received considerable use during the Smith's time, serving the purpose to which it had been put for a least two hundred years and who knows how long before then.

"The upstairs part of the barn housed about 200 chickens," Noel said, "and the downstairs was filled to the brim with fertiliser sacks."



The under part of the barn where Noel Smith stored his fertiliser sacks.

In addition to all the farming duties that were a necessity, they had to give time to the essential needs of their family. They demonstrated their commitment to the building by turning it into a comfortable home. Kitty, the family archivist, showed me the improvements they made by opening her sizeable "Grimston Hall" photograph album. It was as tidy a piece of house history as you might ever wish to

see for the period of their occupation. Before and after photos carefully documented the changes they made to their home. They tackled the interior by decorating the house as well as adding a new bathroom and washroom. Noel planted a hedge around the house and added another septic tank to the premises. (In my experience the latter can never be too many or too capacious.) Kitty worked on the garden. They painted inside and out, including The Barn, adding a Box to assist the Owls. I showed Noel a photo of the exterior of the Barn today and his comment was,

"That Ivy will cause a lot of trouble!"



View of The Barn with the Owl box near the apex of the roof and with ivy climbing up the left hand side. To the side you can see the farm buildings whose roofs, "Folded like books."

The amount of work they generated seemed quite breath-taking to me but to some extent this was almost insignificant to the major piece of landscaping Noel undertook and which he described to me in some detail following my mention of the ponds.

When I had been shown round Grimston Hall by Tim Collins, I noted the rushy and extensive ponds with interest. There are three of them, in a line, falling down to the footpath at the end of the final pond. Noel explained to me he had put in this path, which passes the pond and goes up to Brick Kiln Reservoir. (I later discovered this area was called Bottom Park in c.1823 or Bottoms for short.) He also described the springs feeding the ponds. The pond has three little springs which give it life: two at the top and one at the lower end. He said one of these was a very powerful spring and easily sufficient to source the ponds. The lowest pond which is visible from the footpath is now graced with a sizeable willow tree. This was planted by Noel and provides a beautiful, calm and verdant view for any walkers. Not only had he done this, he was responsible for the creation of the two lower ponds. I was confounded. He was quite clear there was only one pond when he started clearing and re-stocking

what is now the top pond next to the house. But I knew I had seen two ponds drawn on the 1807 Enclosure map and mentioned this to him in somewhat perplexed accents. There is a small bridge between the top two ponds and Noel had put a metal pipe across this to help feed the middle pond. You can see a clear satellite image of the site if you view this link:

<https://www.google.com/maps/@51.9804259,1.304402,591m/data=!3m1!1e3>

My mention of the two ponds slightly surprised Noel who remarked that when he had dug out the middle pond there had been a drop of about fifteen or so feet. (Dug it out, mark you!) and this made perfect sense if an earlier pond had either dried up or been emptied. I made a mental note to investigate the 1881 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey map covering Grimston Hall and other later O.S. maps when I returned home. Not to mention an imminent return to the Enclosure and Tithe maps.



Lower Pond at Grimston Hall, August 2018

Before I left, Kitty generously offered to lend me her photograph album and I took it away to copy the photos. As my self-appointed task to visit Suffolk Record Office had become a priority course of action, I quickly took myself off there to find out more.

The result was to provide some clues and inevitably posed yet more questions. I started with the 1807 Enclosure Map. And yes, I was correct, two ponds were recorded. I then called up a bundle of maps and the field book of George Nassau. Another small surprise emerged. On this map, which was

drawn c.1823 when a Mr. Samuel Ralph was the tenant, three ponds were recorded, one of which was close to the road, now known as Grimston Lane. Next I moved on to the 1839 Tithe Map for Trimley St. Martin. And there we were, back to two ponds. Finally, I turned to the 1881 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey Map, arguably the most beautiful map of the four I viewed. By this time, only one pond was recorded and this continued to be the case on the 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey Maps I subsequently viewed: the revised 1902, the revised 1924 and also the 1938. One item I noted on the c.1823 map of Grimston Hall was a large area of land which was designated "Grimston Park". When had this been established, I asked myself? Another line of investigation to pursue.

It is a truism but the more we discover, the more there is awaiting unearthing. As I reflected on what now know, I considered the role Noel and Kitty had played as custodians to Grimston Hall. The legacy of three ponds and the sustenance of the building is testament to their responsible commitment to the land in their charge. They were almost the last tenants to occupy the farm and of course, who knows what will happen to Grimston Hall in the future. Eleven years occupying a building represents perhaps a quarter of a person's working life but is just a drop in time in the long history of Grimston Hall. Kitty and Noel are now part of all the people who occupied the building. Their dust motes join the women in Crinolines, bold Tom Cavendish, Mr. Samuel Ralph and of course, George Nassau to mention but a few of the known and unknown who lived part of their lives in the Hall. The history of the building and the lives of the occupiers requires the researcher to hop backwards and forwards in time. There are no straight lines or shortcuts and certainly no easy answers. The jigsaw puzzle which is Grimston Hall is a 5,000 piece number lacking edges or boundaries. How far back I can go and how long it will take continues to be an unknown quantity. There is much yet to discover.

.....

My gratitude goes to both of the Smiths for their time, help and assistance in furthering the piecing together the story of this house.



Noel Smith in 2018



Kitty Smith in 2018



Pond clearance of Grimston Hall, c. 1984. Courtesy Kitty Smith



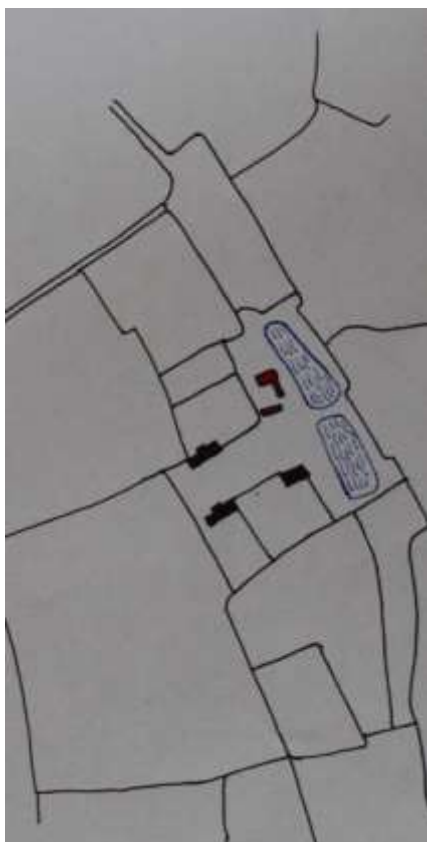
The top pond outside the kitchen of Grimston Hall in August 2018



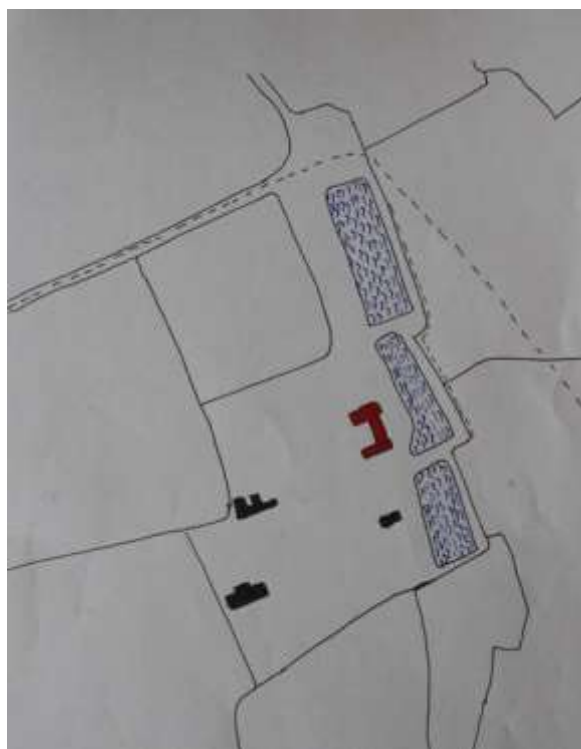
The view towards the Orwell from the lowest pond, August 2018

Below are trace copies of the maps I consulted. If you would like the references for those in Suffolk Record Office, please contact me. The Ordnance Survey maps are viewable online. Copyright issues preclude me from reproducing the originals, hence the use of trace copies.

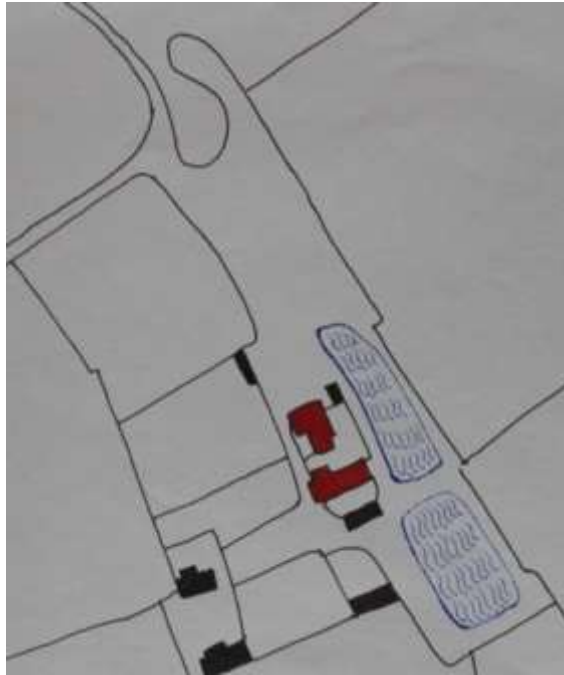
The Hall and Barn are coloured red and the ponds distinguished in blue, for ease of identification. This is not the case on the original maps.



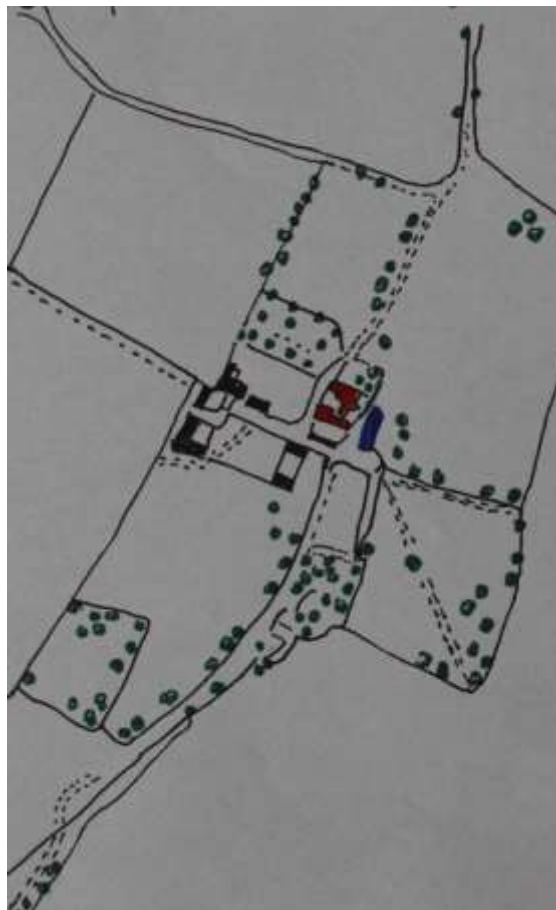
Extract from a trace copy of the 1807 Enclosure map for Trimley St. Martin, focusing on Grimston Hall.



Extract from a trace copy of the 1823 estate map made during the occupation of Samuel Ralph.



Extract from a trace copy of the 1839 Tithe Map for Trimley St. Martin focusing on Grimston Hall.



Extract from a trace copy of the 6" to the mile 1881 Ordnance Survey map of Trimley St. Martin, focusing on Grimston Hall.

If you have any comments or would like to be part of this Trimley St. Martin project, please contact me at:

trimleystmartinrecorder@gmail.com