

# CHURCH *of* BURES

THE FIRST 100 YEARS

JOHN INESON

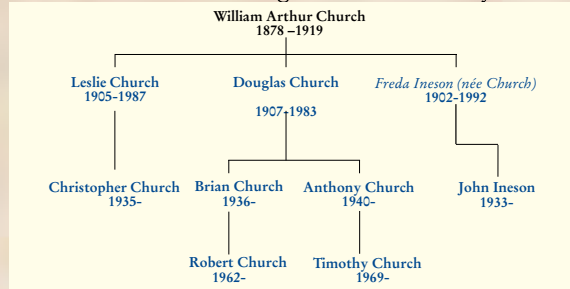
William Arthur Church, the eldest son of the late Arthur Church, was born on September 5th 1878 at Birch near Colchester. The family had been farming and seed growing in the area for some generations and William, with his father moved in 1890 from Little Badcocks Farm to Hellens Farm, Birch. William grew up within the farming community, and helped with his six brothers on the family farm.



William Church 1912

With the advent of the Boer War, William aged 21 volunteered to serve for the duration of the campaign with the 43rd Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa. Signing up and taking the Oath of Allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria at Norwich on 3rd January 1900, he spent the next year and a half of his life in South Africa. After being demobbed on 16th June 1901 he returned to the family farm at Birch where he met and married Annice Maude Norfolk, a farmer's daughter, from the same parish.

In 1902 William, now aged 23, decided to farm on



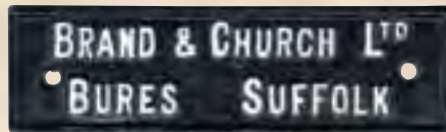
his own account and moved to Specks Farm, Lamarsh (some 2 miles from Bures) where he started farming and after producing a surplus of his own seed, decided to sell this to neighbouring farmers. This was the beginning of the seed company that still bears his name. One of these farmers was John Stuck from the nearby village of Alphamstone who was one of his first customers. He remembered William well and reminisced about this at his 100th birthday party during May 1974. He was probably the oldest active farmer in the country at the time and still managed his 144 acres and attended market days at Sudbury and Halstead .

The business flourished, with the seed cleaning taking place in the barn and to make room for his paper work, William moved his office from the house to a shepherd's hut standing close by. In April 1913 with a mortgage of £400, he purchased the old tannery in the High Street from Col. Probert for £500, and then moved the seed cleaning part of the business to this building in Bures. Subsequently he then acquired a large house in the village, Bures House, which has since been made into flats. In this house William and Annice brought up their three children, Freda born in 1902, Leslie in 1905 and Douglas in 1907. The boys were later to become fully involved with the running of the company.

Sometime during the early 1910's William Church



*invested in the agricultural machinery business of William Brand of Bures. Douglas Church recalled that this business had fallen on hard times, and the injection of capital kept the business of a new company Brand and Church Ltd going until December 1921. William had 1000 shares in this business, and received a salary of £225 per annum at the time of his death in 1919. His wife Mrs*



*Name Plate used by Brand & Church*

*Annice Church then became a Director until the business was dissolved in 1921 and William Brand once again became the sole owner continuing to sell Agricultural Machinery until the 1950's.*



*John Stuck in his crop of Essex Red Clover 1969*

*Both the farm and seed business continued to flourish until 1918 when William became ill with Pernicious Anaemia, a disease that usually affects adults over the age of 35, but at that time was incurable. Arthur Stebbing one of our employees who worked at Bures House (and continued to be employed by the company for over 60 years) at the time remembered placing straw on the road outside the house to*



*Drilling Beans at East Bergholt 1950's*

*deaden the noise of horse and carts passing by. The disease, which caused tiredness, weakness and fainting attacks, gradually took its toll, and finally on*

*12th March 1919 William passed away at a Nursing Home in Coggeshall at the early age of 40.*

*Very little is known about William Church, and the only person alive who would have known him is Mrs Mary Joy (now aged 96), wife of the late Reg Joy of Old House Farm, Beaumont. She was brought up in the next parish of Lamarsh and lived only a short distance away from Specks Farm. She says he was a kind man and always*



*Stooking S143 Cocksfoot at Alan Percival's Farm at Qt. Tey 1958*

*had time for children and remembers sitting on his lap as a young girl and going out with him in his governess cart.*

*It was decided by the executors that the farm business would no longer continue so Boardman and Oliver, Estate Agents of Sudbury were given instructions to auction the Dead and Farming Stock on September 29th 1919. The catalogue and prices realised are still held by the company and it is interesting to note that a McCormick 6ft binder made £28, a practically new 14 coulter Smythe's corn and seed drill with steerage fetched £40. A Cambridge rib roll made £10-10-0 (£10.50) while the Ransome's ploughs were sold for £7 each. The five mares and gelding horses made between £51 and £95. The grand total came to £936, a considerable amount of money at the time.*

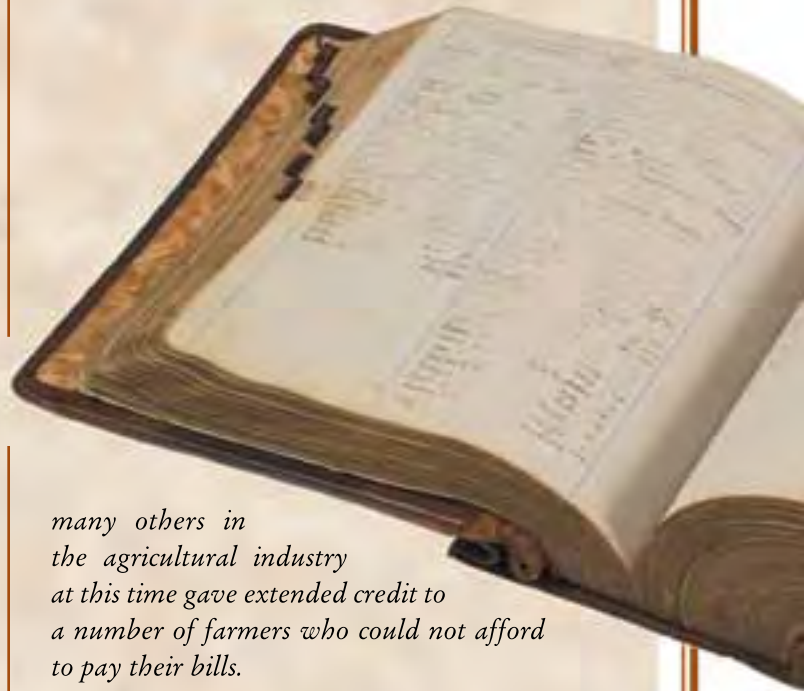
*The accounts for the financial year ending 30th June 1919 showed a turnover of £17,242 with a gross profit of £1,815 (Net £534). Ten years later in June 1929 the turnover had increased to £23,015 with a gross profit of £3,216 (net £782). By the time the depression of the 1930's had set in, trading had become very difficult and the gross profit in 1935 was £2,628 with a net profit of only £1-2-0 (£1.10), but this had improved in 1938 to £11-9-10 (£11.49). Many farmers at this time*

*were in a continual loss situation; with much land left to fallow and this became overgrown, which of course affected the business. The company and*

*many others in the agricultural industry at this time gave extended credit to a number of farmers who could not afford to pay their bills.*

*It was not until 1945 that the turnover reached over £100,000. In 1973 this increased from £359,839 to £614,517 (the first time over £500,000) with a gross profit of £191,767 (net £95,713). By the following year the turnover reached £1,006,226 the first time over a million pounds.*

*Deliveries were made by horse and cart to farms in the neighbouring villages, and an amount for*

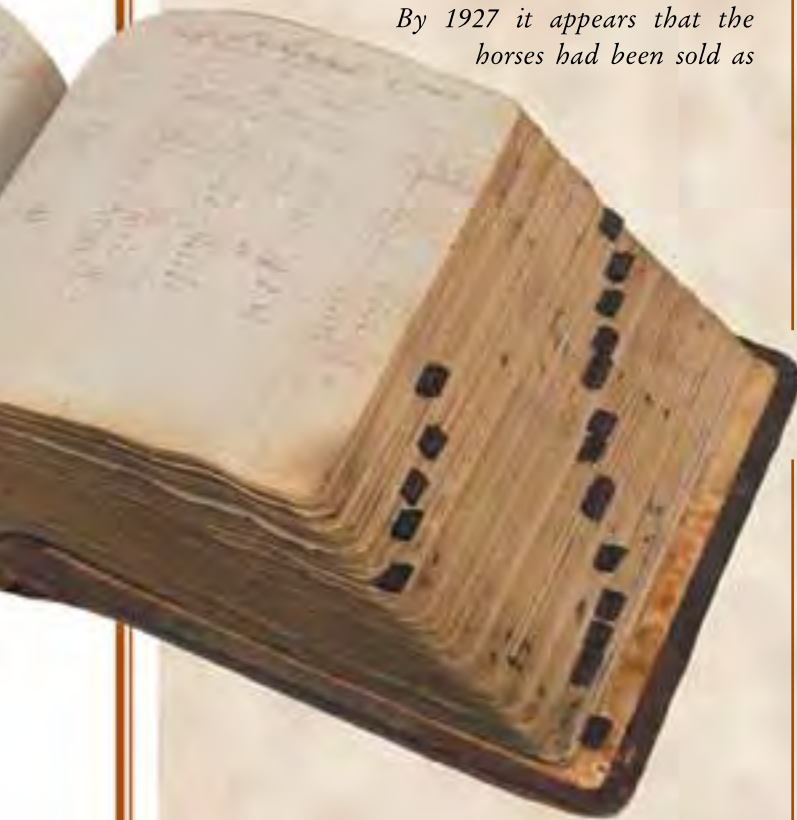


*The Farm Sale Catalogue 1919*



*"Horse Keep" appeared in the accounts each year. However by 1923 a motor vehicle had been purchased at a cost of £75 and an amount of £16 appeared in the Profit & Loss Account for "Motor Keep". This was no doubt a poor buy, as the following year a van was purchased for £162 to replace the car.*

*By 1927 it appears that the horses had been sold as*



*The actual ledger used  
until the 1960's*



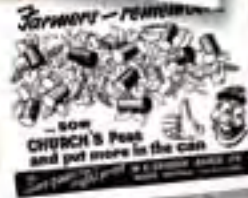
*Cutting S.143 Cocksfoot 1958*

*there is no reference to "Horse Keep" thereafter. In 1928 a Motor Car had also been purchased at a cost of £168. Two years later as the business had expanded, a Motor Cycle costing £40 (sold in 1933 for £3- what would it have been worth today?) had been added to the fleet.*

*It was decided the seed business would continue and the executors were two of William's farming brothers, Gardner Church from Hellens Farm, Birch and Tom Church from Wenham Hall, Gt. Wenham. Both had been producers of seed for many years and were more than capable of taking over this extra work. Leslie then aged 15 and Douglas 13 were both still at school at Framlingham College, where Leslie, the studious one gained the Goldsmith Prize for Maths. Douglas was keen on sport and in 1924 won the Victor Ludorum at the annual athletic sports. Gardner and Tom Church continued to keep the business running until the 1930's when it was formed into a Limited Company on 2nd July 1934. It was at this time that Douglas and Leslie took full control of the company.*

Many of the crops grown before the war, continued until the 1970's, but are no longer grown on contract by the company. These included Mangel, Swede, Trifolium, Late Flowering Single-cut Clover, Grasses, Canary Seed, Bitter Blue Lupins, Sainfoin, Red Suckling and Trefoil. The latter was a crop grown by most farmers in East Anglia, and the late Douglas Church on many occasions mentioned how he used to buy the stack as it stood on the farm. Sometimes he could estimate the amount of seed correctly, and others not so well. The seed was thrashed on the farm, and then brought to Bures to be hulled (removing the outer black coat) on a special plant.

With the changes to farming practices after the last world war, very little seed was cut and stacked to be thrashed during the winter months. The advent of the combine caused some problems and during the middle of the 1950's the company had considerable trouble with the germination of Vetches (Tares) and Clover seed. When seed was in a stack for a few months there was no problem, but what we did not know until that time was the cause of dormancy. Seed would be tested but did not germinate, and after a re-test, without any improvement we paid our farmers bird food price.



Anglia Television  
advertising campaign  
in the 1960's

However one stock of Vetches, which we had not sold was tested for germination the next summer and found to be growing over 90%. By this time dormancy had passed, so we were able to give the farmer an extras bonus. Since that time we have been able to break dormancy in the laboratory by planting the seed in damp sand and placing in the refrigerator for a few days.

Red Clover, in particular Essex Broad Leaf, is a crop that the company had specialised in for a considerable length of time. Large quantities were produced in Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk in the 1950's and hundreds of tonnes were sold to Germany and Canada. One per cent of the seed sent to Canada had to be stained to comply with their import regulations, which caused extra work mixing the seed after it had been machined. In 1955 the company sold over 300 tonnes of Red Clover to Canada, as well as a quantity to Germany. One of the problem weeds to clean out of Red Clover was Ribgrass (*Plantago lanceolata*), but Brooks of Mistley helped many in the trade by placing the seed over their machinery. The seed was very lightly sprayed with a mixture of iron filings and water, and as the ribgrass was sticky, it stuck to the seed, after which a machine with magnets could remove the ribgrass.



Kersey White Clover has also been one of the company's specialities since 1953. It was in 1929 that Mr E Partridge of Kersey found a single plant in a field of Canadian

Lucerne, and from this one plant it was propagated for the next few years to produce commercial quantities. It was then gradually developed and grown on a commercial basis from 1944. Since 1951 this large leaved strain was covered by the certification scheme, and by 1954 some 850 acres were grown for seed in Essex and Suffolk. In 1956 a quantity was placed in cold storage at NIAB so that it could be kept true to type. Over the years this was gradually used for further reproduction, and was later replaced as the stocks became low. This variety is still being produced for the company in the UK.

Although the company has been a family business for a hundred years, it has been approached on two occasions to sell. First in 1948, by David Bell Ltd of Leith and then in 1988 by a company, that is now trading under another name. On both occasions the Directors decided that they did not wish to lose their independence. Ian Bell in his letter of 20th July 1948 states "We do very pleasantly here-David and I run the show and do what we think right - since 1934 we haven't had



S.26 Cocksfoot ready for shipment to New Zealand 1958



Malcolm Cook checking quality of Grass Seed 1961

too bad a time, but before 1934 we had 10 years of no profit. I expect most of the trade were the same". Douglas Church replied, "First and foremost is the loss of freedom. I have always been my own master and have frequently preached that a little business done well is better than a large concern. As I have previously

told you, I do not work very hard, shoot quite a lot in the winter and Leslie and I do very well financially, and therefore it is difficult to visualise that we shall be any better off".



our fleet 1959

*five staff were called up for war service, Leslie Cook and Edgar Warden from the seed cleaning warehouse entered the Navy and Kenneth Gentry from the office joined the 8th Army and fought as a 'Desert Rat' in North Africa.*

*employed to work in the warehouse, and this they did ably and continued to work for the company until they retired in the 1960's.*

**SPECIAL OFFER**  
**AGRICULTURAL SEEDS**  
**W. A. CHURCH, Seed Grower, BUREAU.**

[illegible]

One of William Church's earliest Seed Lists from the 1910's



vest keeps for a few years if the conditions of harvest are good and storage conditions are at the correct temperature.

We have had a long working relationship with Barclays Bank and have a passbook dated 1913 in our archives. It would appear most likely that we have been dealing with them for a hundred years, and they have been most helpful with their support in the company's success. We used to have the personal attention of the Manager at Colchester, but of course times have changed and now we have an Agricultural Business Manager. In this passbook there are a number of familiar names, both trading and farming.

Attending Corn Exchanges was one of the main activities of the Company each week. This started with Mark Lane in London on Monday morning, and then the afternoons at Ipswich on Tuesday, Bury St Edmunds and Braintree on Wednesday, Sudbury on Thursday, Chelmsford on Friday and finally Colchester on Saturday. It was essential to attend these markets with Mark Lane for selling seed and the country towns for buying. Until the 1960's the Corn Exchanges were always crowded with farmers, whose wives came to town to do their weekly shopping. This was where the farm-

ers could do all their business with Malsters, Corn and Seed Merchants, representatives of petrol and oil companies, sellers of sack, rope and tarpaulins, hay and straw merchants, potatoes merchants, as well as Insurance Brokers. All were in attendance each week until the majority closed in the 1960's. Bury St Edmunds was the exception and this continued until the early 1990's.



Sudbury Corn Exchange 1964

Throughout this period the company continued to expand, with the old tannery in the High Street at Bures, which was the main production, storage and office area. In 1947 Douglas and Leslie Church purchased a large malting warehouse from the Garrad family for £1,379-11-3. This had a large house attached, which had been used as a workshop, and after considerable restoration was converted into an office in 1957, the same time that a seed-testing laboratory was established, and licensed by the Ministry of Agriculture. The property included two kilns, which are still in use today for drying small seeds. This was followed by the purchase in 1949 of some maltings and a cottage further up the High Street. The cottage was restored and is still occupied by a member of staff. Two grass cleaning plants were in operation at this warehouse for many



Picture of our refurbished office September 1957

years, to clean the large acreage of seed grown under contract. In 1956 we purchased from the Melford Malt Company a building on the Essex side of the village at a cost of £1,500, and after much renovation, this was used for processing small seeds and peas but has since been sold for housing. Our other property purchase at this time included three houses behind our High Street Malting.

With a change from sack to bulk handling, it became essential by the late 1960's that we should progress with new premises suitable to take seed in bulk. We first looked at the old Flax factory at Glemsford, which had been empty for some time, but it was considered too far from Bures, where it was the intention to keep the main part of the company. In 1969, a local indoor riding school and bungalow with some four acres of land came up for sale at Arger Fen situated a short distance from Bures and was purchased for £12,000. This was most suitable for our purposes, although it had poor access. However planning permission was granted for change of use, and then over the next twenty years considerable expansion took place with a further four warehouses and a workshop being built. The site also has a bungalow where a member of staff still lives. A weigh-bridge was also added at this time, with the

remaining land of the site being used as trial grounds.



Brian Church, John Ineson, Chris Church, Edgar Warden and Anthony Church 1989

The business continued to grow quickly and during the period 1950's to early 1960's the sons and nephews of Douglas and Leslie joined the company. Christopher, Brian and Anthony Church and John Ineson, who gradually became more involved with the day to day running of the business. In 1937 Kenneth Gentry joined the firm, followed in March 1940 by Leslie Cook and Edgar Warden.

The three of them all served the company for more than 40 years and in 1977 Edgar Warden was elected to the board of Directors. In later years three more members of the staff, John Cowlin, David Rutt and Leslie (Sammy) Saer also gave 40 years service to Church of Bures, with the latter two still being employed during our centenary year. During this period more modern machinery was installed including Sortex electronic pea



Our first fork lift 1969



colour sorting machines. This was a considerable step forward as in the early part of the last century, Arthur Stebbing who joined the company as boot boy at Bures House in 1916 later delivered sacks of peas by horse and cart to many Bures cottages for the inhabitants to sort the good from the bad. This was in the days before television and no doubt the cottagers were pleased with the extra money.

We have in our archives a "Special Offer" price list produced by William Church in the 1910's selling only root seeds, Rape and Mustard etc. The oldest price list we have is dated 1937 and this offers Grass Mixtures (with some Permanent Pastures consisting of 17 varieties of seeds costing £1.50 per acre), Lucerne, Sainfoin, Mangels, Swedes, Turnips, Kales, Rape, Cabbages, Mustard, Tares, Linseed and Peas. The Pea varieties were only for picking, and although we offered twelve varieties, only Onward is still sold by the company today. Also included are Maple and Dun Field Peas. In 1943 the catalogue contained three seed mixtures recommended by the War Agricultural Executive Committee, consisting mainly of Perennial Ryegrass.

Harrison Glory Peas entered our catalogue for the first time in 1951, and this variety continued to be the main type of Canning Pea well into the 1960's. Big Ben and Maro followed this; the latter variety is still the mainstay of the canning trade today, and a considerable amount have been



Perennial Ryegrass for export to the USA 1962



Red clover exported to Germany 1963

exported to Japan since 1972. Fodder Beet was sold for the first time in 1952, and by 1955 we were agents for Fisons Agricultural Fertilizers, followed by Lawes Fertilizers in 1962, but this never became a very large part of the business. By 1958 we had started to take part in the Toronto Winter Fair and submitted various samples of seeds and won many prizes for our growers over the next ten years.

In the 1950's we offered Bitter Blue Lupins for ploughing in as green manure. By 1966 Lovászpatonai Rye from Hungary for cattle grazing had become popular. Stubble Turnips were sold from 1973 with Debra and Vobra being our first varieties. Other than Rye, we have never been involved with cereal seeds unless specifically asked.

In the forward of the 1983 catalogue we stated, "Due to the rapid spread of Oil Seed Rape being grown in the UK the company was being forced to grow much of our Kale seed production on the west coast of America and a large percentage of our Vining Peas in Hungary. We do not like to move out of our traditional growing areas, but isolation, disease and available break-crop acre-

ages has made this necessary". With the declining acreage of Oil Seed Rape during the last few years, most of our seed is now produced in the UK, although occasional production does take place in New Zealand.



Exporting Peas to  
New Zealand 2002

There have been considerable changes in agriculture over the last one hundred years so that today farmers are encouraged to set aside land and plant new hedges for wild life. The company has been involved with

the Suffolk Wildlife Advisory Group for many years and since 1993 have offered their recommended mixtures both for Heavy and Light land.

Game cover crops have become an important part of the business, and in 1968 we introduced Jerusalem Artichokes, which were quickly followed by Game Cover Mixtures, Fodder Radish, Maize, Kales, Rape, Canary Seed, Canary Grass, Mustard, and later Phacelia, Quinoa and Texsel Greens.

In March 1977 we joined the Directors of J K King & Co, Coggeshall Peas Ltd, and two Dutch companies to form Pulse and Commodity Traders (PACT). There had always been a problem with dirty Marrowfat peas for the canning trade and after a very wet season with muddy peas, it was

decided to form this joint venture to decorticate (removing the skins) from the peas. Once through this procedure they were then suitable for processing as mushy peas. Unfortunately not long after PACT was formed, the EC brought in a guaranteed subsidy on feed peas, so where we used to make a good profit by buying dirty peas, we now had to pay a much higher price, which did not make the new company viable. Therefore a few years later we sold our shares in the business.

During 1981 we joined forces with Asmer, Hurst, Sharpes and Johnson to form the company Unikale to market the National Seed Development Organisation Kale varieties of Bittern, Maris Kestrel and Condor. This proved to be very successful for many years, until finally in June 2001 Unikale ceased trading due to the varieties being sold by the Plant Breeding Institute to another company outside the group.

In 1985 we started growing two new oil seed crops, Borage and Evening Primrose for the pharmaceutical industry. Both seeds are fairly rich in oil and contain gamma linolenic acid, a substance that is vital for the body to function properly. Borage, said to have been introduced into Britain by the Romans, is a very fast growing annual plant. Evening Primrose is often grown as a biennial on medium to heavy soil.



Tilney Mustard grown  
in Hungary stored at  
our High Fen Seed  
Store 2001





*Our winning trade stand at Essex Young Farmer's Show 1998*

In

1990

*we purchased a small grinding mill, which has been installed, at our High Fen Seed Store. We do contract work for a number of customers by grinding Spices and Herbs such as Coriander, Cumin, Cloves, Celery, Fennel, Fenugreek and Pepper. This has proved to be a most successful venture, which has led into drying and cleaning such items.*

*During July 2001, there was much excitement at our High Fen Seed Store when one of our employees found 16 x 2 kilo packs of cannabis in a container of Sesame seed from Nigeria. These were packed inside the 50 kilo bags, and found when the seed was tipped into the intake bin. For whom this was destined we will never know, but the Police Drugs Squad informed us it had a street value of some £90,000.*

*The types of seed that we now trade have changed very little over the last one hundred years. Today we specialise mostly in Peas and Beans, which are used for the vining industry, human consumption, garden and pigeon trade. We are the sole main-*

*tainer of English Early Common Vetch (Tares), Marrow Stem Kale, Thousand Headed Kale, Broad Leaf Essex Rape, English Giant Rape, Broad Leaf Essex Red Clover and Kersey White Cover as well as agent for Tilney Mustard which is used for game cover, green manure and the condiment trade. These are all listed in our annual agricultural seed catalogue. During 1999 we became the sole maintainer of Minerva Maple Peas and Maris Bead Beans both of which are sold throughout the UK as Pigeon food.*



*Roguing English Giant Rape 1992*

*Essex and Suffolk have been at the heart of the seed trade for generations, but we have seen many changes during the last half century with the following companies whom we traded with having closed down or purchased by multi-nationals.*

- Ashdown of Sudbury
- Brooks of Mistley
- Bye, George of Lavenham
- Byfords of Clare
- Clovers of Dedham
- Coggeshall Peas of Coggeshall
- Cooper Taber of Witham
- Cullen, Thomas of Witham
- Cundy of Sudbury
- Deal, William of Kelvedon
- Folkard, Frank of Marks Tey
- Goldsmith Bros of Bury St Edmunds
- Greens of Ipswich
- Hasler of Dunmow
- Hitchcock of Bures
- Hurst of Witham
- King, J K of Coggeshall
- Ladbrookes of Elmsett
- Martin, Frank of Colne Engaine
- Melton Corn & Coal of Woodbridge
- Nunns Corn & Coal of Woodbridge
- Pauls of Ipswich
- Pertwee, Frank of Colchester
- Quintons of Needham Market
- Richardson & Preece of Hadleigh
- Sadd, Harold of Ipswich
- Smith Bros & Frost of Halstead
- Squirrell, C K of Bildeston
- Suffolk Seed Stores of Woodbridge
- Wilsons of Hadleigh

*(to name but a few)*

*The Seed Trade is now in the hands of a few multi-national companies, many of which are owned by other European Countries. The number of companies nationally that we have dealt with*

*over the last fifty years that have been swallowed up or ceased trading is considerable.*

*In September 1998, Geoff Lakin joined Church of Bures having worked for 42 years for the well-known family seed firm WW Johnson of Boston. Unfortunately the company, which had been trading for over 140 years, went into liquidation. Having spent so many years in the Vegetable seed trade, he brings new ideas, expertise and worldwide customers. Since joining the company, Geoff has introduced a host of new customers bringing in a lot of new business. A key area of expansion has been in cress seed sales, where he has increased the contract acreage from 25 to 250 acres a year.*



*Robert Church and Tim Church  
2002*

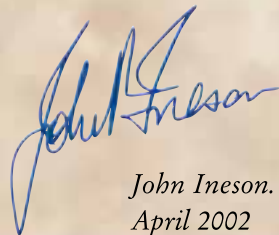
*During 1998 we became the UK agent for Pure Line Seeds, a company from the USA who specialise in vining pea seed. This fitted in well with the business, as with the decrease of the protein pea market, we were able to concentrate on garden and vining peas, which has since formed a significant proportion of our business. We currently grow a number of Pure Line varieties in the UK under a private royalty arrangement.*



*With the recent increase in organic food, it became necessary to register with the Soil Association for seed production of mustard, cress, salad rape and tares. This also resulted in the company's expansion into cleaning of these crops as well as utilising the spice mill, which enabled us to take advantage of this growing sector of the market.*

*Although we do not have records regarding our customers from 1902, we do know that there are a number of farming families who have been dealing with the company for over 80 years, and many more for 70 years.*

*How well William Church succeeded in laying the foundations and meeting the needs of local agriculture may be judged by the progress and standard of the firm today. Robert Church joined the company in January 1979 followed by Timothy Church in September 1987, who has since awarded an MBA (Master of Business Administration). They are both great-grandsons of the founder and sit on the board of directors. Our centenary has arrived with the fourth generation of the Church family actively involved in the business, and we look forward to the years ahead with confidence.*

  
John Ineson.  
April 2002





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