



AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY

**JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER**

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Front cover: Aylsham Old Hall from a copy by Elizabeth Tower of a contemporary painting on the first floor.

Back cover: South front of East Barsham Manor House from *Country Life*, courtesy IPC Media Ltd..

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**Visit to Kirstead Hall**, a fine Elizabethan Manor House and gardens, is arranged for the afternoon of 15th September 2011, 2 pm, courtesy of Dermot and Judy Murphy. Please book with Ann Dyball 01263 732637.

**Lecture programme** for the season has been arranged as follows.

Thursday 6 October. AGM followed by contributions from members, Geoff Gale and Sheila Merriman.

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> October. *'The Role of Women in the Middle Ages'* by Dr Carole Hill.

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November. *'Wildlife in Archaeology'* by Julie Curl

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2012. *'Round Tower Churches'* by Dick Barham

Thursday 23<sup>th</sup> February. *'James Edward Smith: Botanist Extraordinary'* by Barbara Miller

Thursday 22<sup>th</sup> March. *'The Norwich to Cromer Turnpike'* by Adrian Vaughan

**Autumn Course** will be on *'East Anglia in the Eighteenth Century'*, presented by the School of History, UEA. Elements covered will include Developments in Agriculture, the East Anglian Country House and its Landscape, the Landed Estate, Towns and Cities, Trade and Industry, and East Anglia at War,. Ten sessions beginning Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2 pm, with a half-term break on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2011 at the Friends' Meeting House, Pegg's Yard. To book a place (on a first-come-first-served basis up to a limit of 40) or obtain further information please contact Jim Pannell on 01263 731087 from September 1<sup>st</sup>.

## 2. The Building of Aylsham Old Hall

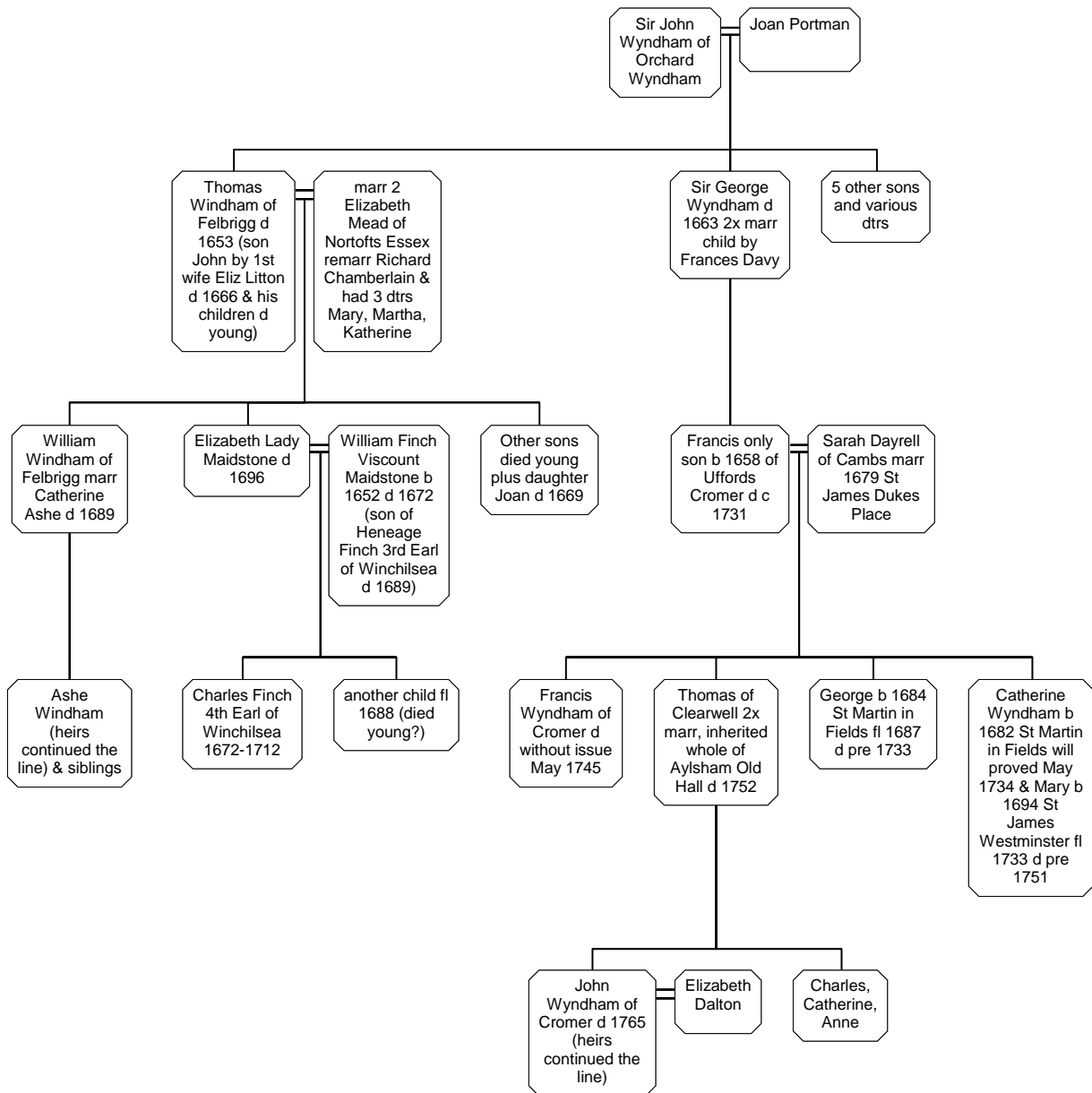
### Maggie and William Vaughan-Lewis

*In this second article we look at the building of the present Hall. Our particular thanks are due to the current owners and the National Trust. We have also been enthused and helped by conversations with Jacinth and Michael Rogers and Helen Corbin. Michael, and Helen's late husband Nicolas, worked for the Trust for many years and between them lived in Aylsham Old Hall for a total of 38 years.*

#### The Windham family

Captain Robert Doughty and his wife Katherine, the daughter of Clippesby Guybon of Oby, appear to have lived quite comfortably as the owners of the Old Market house and estate until Robert's father Major Doughty died in 1679.<sup>1</sup> As the eldest son, the Captain became embroiled in trying to clear the large debts his father had left. For the first time he needed to raise a mortgage on his house and the Windham family became part of the solution. Earlier suggestions that the Windhams built the Hall are now known to be wrong and indeed none of them ever took up residence there. However its history cannot be understood without knowing the involvement first of the Felbrigg line and then of the Cromer branch of the family. The Windhams of Felbrigg knew the area well holding manors in Tuttington and Banningham and lands in Burgh-next-Aylsham and Aylsham itself since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> This explains the small poor rate paid by 'Mr Wyndham' in the 1670s and onwards.<sup>3</sup>

In March 1683 Elizabeth, Lady Maidstone, was admitted tenant to Captain Doughty's Aylsham Lancaster lands following a mortgage loan of £1,000, arranged by her attorney Edmund Themilthorpe of Norwich.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Windham of Felbrigg had been married at 17 to William Finch, the even younger son and heir of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Winchelsea, who bore the title Viscount Maidstone while his father was alive.<sup>5</sup> The 'shiftless young couple' moved in to live off her mother and stepfather in Norwich, helped by her generous brother William Windham who paid her £1,500 dowry.



Summary Windham/Wyndham family tree

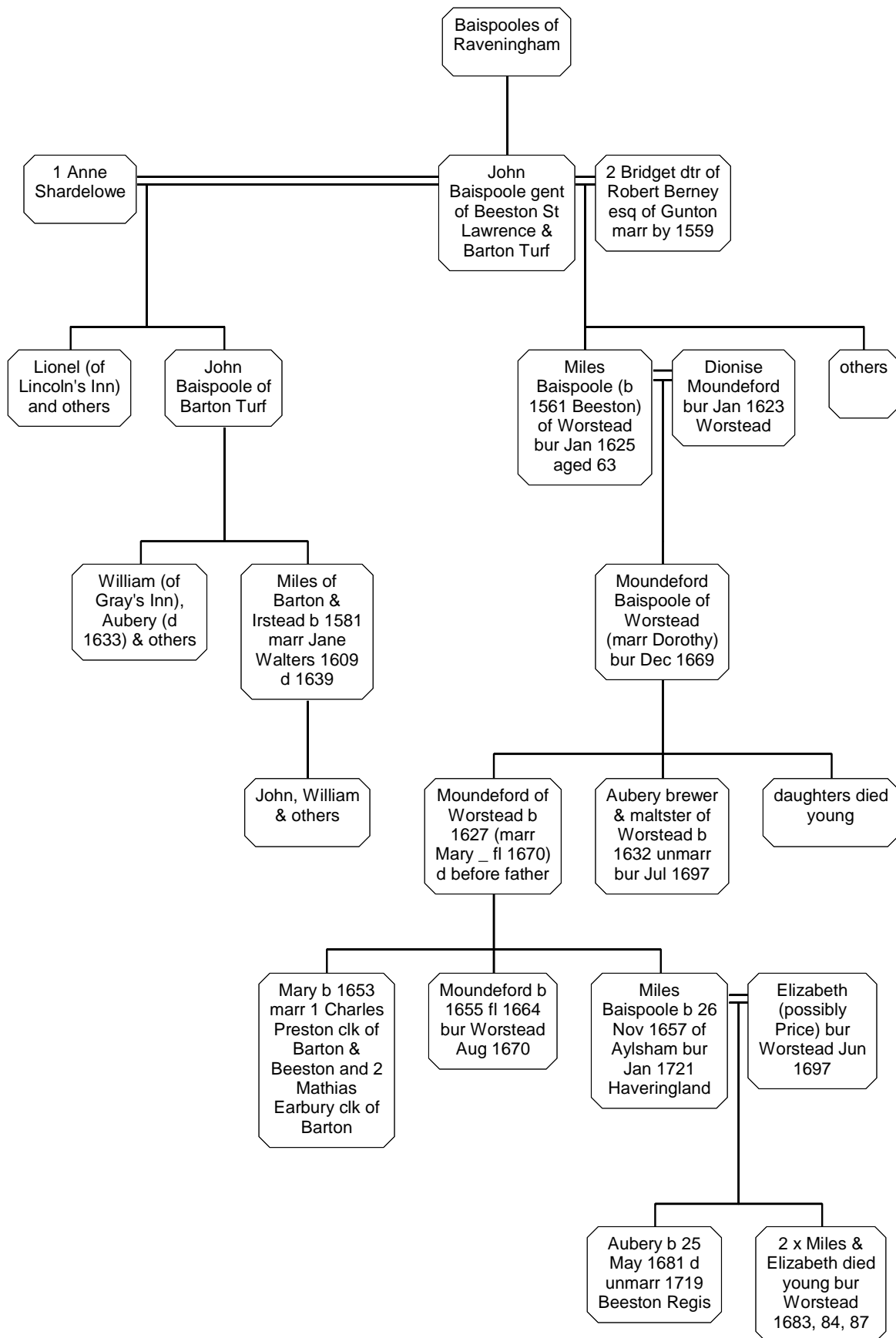
William Finch died at the battle of Sole Bay in 1672 leaving Elizabeth pregnant with her second child. The circumstances of her early marriage had effectively estranged her from the Earl of Winchilsea and she was forced to fend for herself. Despite having previously falsely claimed William had promised to pay Maidstone £5,000 on their marriage and threatened to take him to court, Elizabeth expected her brother to keep her. By 1680 their parents had died and she relied on William entirely. He paid her an annuity of £50 but drew the line at sharing his house. (It is said he lived in Twickenham to avoid her residing with him at Felbrigg and in 1688 Sir Roger Potts of Ellingham was teased publicly that the

unpopular Lady Maidstone was planning to descend on him to live in his house.)<sup>6</sup> William Windham died suddenly in June 1689, leaving Lady Maidstone with her two teenage children. Despite holding the mortgage there was no question of Lady Maidstone being interested in owning the Aylsham house; her son Charles became the Earl of Winchilsea the same year and she settled into his estate in Kent.

### **Robert Doughty sells up**

Clearly the £1,000 made little inroad on the Doughty debts as within six months Captain Robert sold all his Aylsham interests to Miles Baispoole, an attorney, with agreements to sell signed in September 1683 and completed by April 1684. That month, the Aylsham Lancaster Old Hall properties were noted as having been transferred from Doughty to Baispoole.<sup>7</sup> The main Old Market site was simply described as a messuage and 51 ½ acres; the consolidation of land and removal of old dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the house seems already to have happened. Doughty's sale to Baispoole of his Aylsham Vicarage manor lands was entered in the court book in October 1684: a messuage and three roods called Foster's and just over an acre of land.<sup>8</sup>

Robert and Katherine left Aylsham in 1684 and moved initially to London. In March 1688 he joined with his brother Thomas, a Covent Garden mercer, to buy from John Harbord esquire of Gunton and Clippesby Guybon esquire the heavily mortgaged manor of Oby.<sup>9</sup> Thomas was probably helping his brother deal with their father's debts. Intriguingly these papers show that Miles Baispoole was also indebted to Harbord and in some way involved in the complicated interlocking finances of the Guybons and Doughtys. Oby of course was Katherine's father's manor and the Doughtys subsequently lived there for at least ten years (although owned by Thomas not Robert). Thomas made his nephew Guybon Doughty his main heir and Robert Doughty and John Warkhouse were his principal trustees.<sup>10</sup> However, after Thomas's death in 1694 the manor was to be sold by his executors if necessary to pay his many generous legacies. This seems to be eventually what happened as Oby was bought by Humphrey Prideaux in 1708. The Doughtys moved to Norwich, perhaps around this time, where Robert died intestate in 1716.<sup>11</sup>



Summary Baispoole family tree

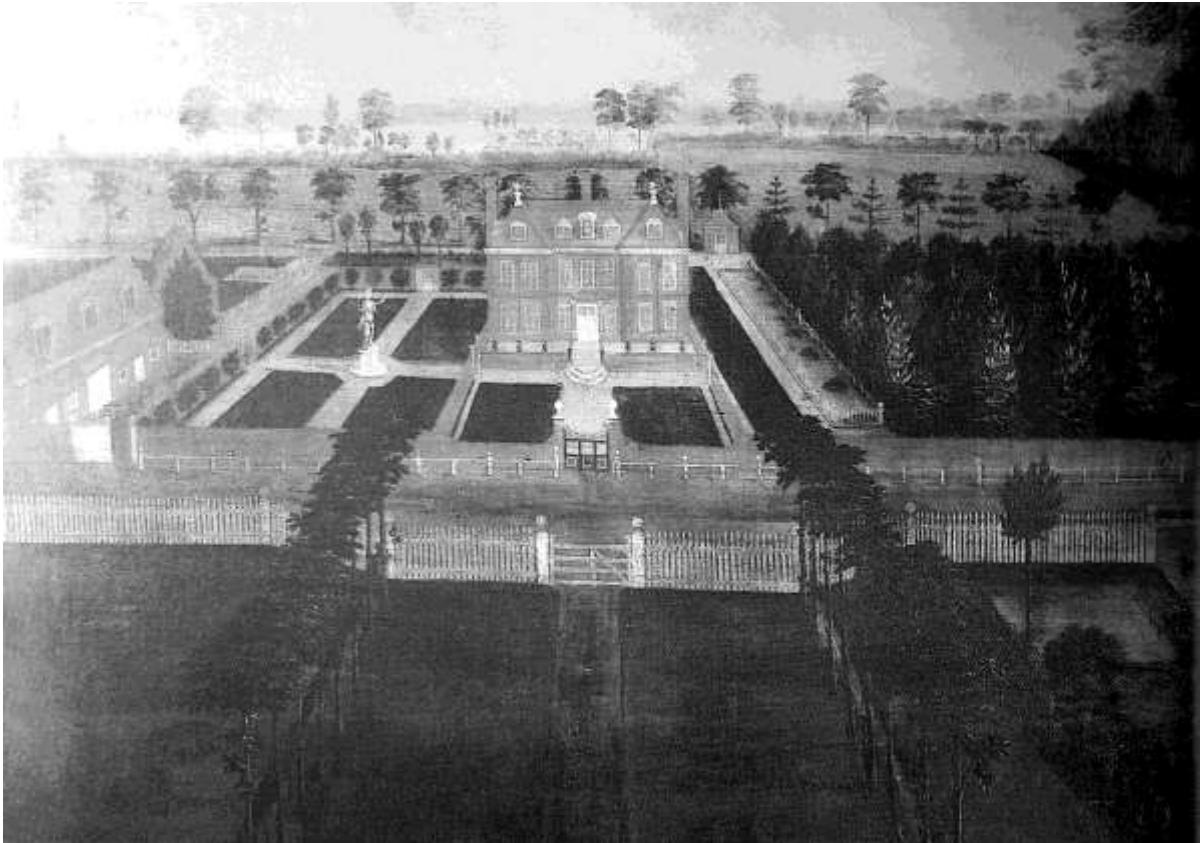
## **The Baispoole family**

Miles Baispoole was of a modest Worstead family, the minor line of the Baispooles originally of Raveningham and of Barton Turf by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The family tree summarises the main lines of the family.<sup>12</sup>

Little is known about Miles Baispoole, yet as builder of the Hall he is crucial to this story. Baispoole first became a poor rate payer in Aylsham in 1681, paying a modest sum probably just for a house in the town.<sup>13</sup> He was a man on the up and seized the chance to buy out Doughty's houses, lands, mills and sub-lease of the rectorial tithe for the substantial total of £3,750.<sup>14</sup> Miles was clearly determined to be seen as a significant Norfolk gentleman. He inherited some property from his father in and around Worstead but his main push for status was based on his Aylsham acquisition.<sup>15</sup> This gave him a house, albeit old, with an estate around it and income from land, mill rents and exploitation of the tithe. There is no sign that he was a successful lawyer, the only confirmation of his occupation being in a 1690s chancery deposition. In the second half of the 1680s he served as Under-Sheriff to four Norfolk sheriffs.<sup>16</sup> This would have given him good contacts and brought in legal work but it would also have been a drain on his resources; active roles in county administration and the assizes required considerable personal expenditure on the trappings of status at the major social gatherings.

## **Miles Baispoole builder of the new house and gardens**

In 1686, to reflect his social aspirations, Miles commissioned the building of the fine red brick Hall on the Blickling Road at the Old Market estate. From chancery papers it is now known that Doughty Pindar (or Pinder) was the 'bricklayer and principal stonemason' of the Old Hall which comprised two storeys plus attic and basement. Very little is known about this talented bricklayer and mason; his first name suggests Aylsham or Hanworth connections but the surname is found more widely in West Norfolk in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>



The contemporary painting of the Old Hall hanging in the upstairs saloon

A modern description of Aylsham Old Hall surveyed for the National Trust describes the Grade 1 listed house:

Though small in scale the Old Hall has many architectural pretensions of a much grander house, and a charming birdseye view painted in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century as the overmantle of the Saloon on the first floor shows the hall and its setting as they appeared or were conceived at that time. The house occupies the centre of the picture, to the right is a plantation of small trees, to the left the ornate range of contemporary farm buildings which we see today, and in the foreground the avenue with its paling fence dividing it from the Blickling road. The outline of the garden shown in the painting is still clear today. The formal canal on the south side survives, but there was a handsome brick belvedere to the east of it and on the north side lay a formal garden with four lawns divided by axial paths converging on a statue.



The principal facade is of seven bays with recessed central section. The angles are enriched by rusticated quoins of moulded brick. Strong horizontals are provided by the heavy brick stringcourse and the white painted timber modillion cornice beneath the eaves.

The door with its handsome segmental pediment and ionic pilasters makes a dignified centrepiece. Its arched head is a product of the early nineteenth century alterations which lowered the pitch of the roof and substituted almost square sash windows for the tall narrow mullioned and transomed casements shown in the birdseye view. Two surviving windows of this late seventeenth century type can be seen on the North and East elevations. Originally lead downpipes with large rectangular hoppers placed between the windows of the projecting bays added to the verticality of the design, as did a steeply pitched roof with whitened finials and a miscellany of large and small dormers.

The generously planned entrance hall has handsome doorcases with curved pediments that lead into the principal rooms and its focus is the large contemporary fireplace surrounded like so many in the house by the thick bolection moulding of the period. Much of the door furniture is contemporary and repays close inspection. Several of the rooms are panelled. The Dining room to the left is one of the best examples, but the richest is the little room at the foot of the stairs which has an ornate carved cornice and overmantle and may have been used as a study. At this period it was common to cover panelling with simulated marbling, an example of this treatment, more decorative than illusionistic, survives in a part of the saloon that was partitioned off at an early date. The Saloon, (now a bedroom), was the main reception room of the seventeenth century house and the staircase that leads to it is therefore an imposing one. Lit by one of the few surviving late seventeenth century mullioned and transomed windows, it rises in two flights with a heavy moulded rail supported on turned and twisted balusters.<sup>18</sup>

Experts agree that the design of the west facade, especially the quoins, stringcourse and the pediment of the central door with its pulvinated frieze, closely resembles the 1675 designs of the gentleman architect William Samwell for the west wing of Felbrigg Hall. However, Samwell



The central old mullioned window on the east facade

died in June 1676 and the work was slow to begin. It is quite possible that Pindar supervised both building jobs, Aylsham in 1686 and Felbrigg which was not finished until 1687. Other houses in the area are of similar style. The Limes in Coltishall, built in 1692, could not have been built by Doughty Pindar who died in Aylsham in May 1687.<sup>19</sup> However the ground and first floors are clearly a direct copy of Aylsham Old Hall, albeit on a smaller scale. The Limes was built for Thomas Bell an affluent merchant who was a cousin of the Bells of Oulton and son of Richard Bell, grocer of Itteringham. Thomas would have known Aylsham well and presumably admired Baispoole's house. Others have commented that the former Aylsham Vicarage, built a few years later by Jonathan Wrench, although not quite of the same scale or design, shared some features in common with the Old Hall.



The genuine Dutch gable on the barn

The painting, according to the Norfolk Historic Gardens survey team, portrays a sophisticated garden:

Grass plats predominated, but there is no trace of flowers or trees. There were three main walled gardens, all connected by decorated gateways and internally symmetrical, but each very different in shape and size. The largest lay to the west, and consisted of grass plats with cross paths, with a statue at their intersection. The garden in front of the house, in contrast, contained only two large grass plats divided by a central gravel walk. The third garden, to the east of the house, was only walled on two sides, and contained a garden house with a view over a long narrow canal. Another area to the north of the house, contained trees, and was probably an orchard. <sup>20</sup>

The large west barn at Aylsham Old Hall was built at the same time as the house. With its genuine Dutch gable (one with a pedimented gable on a shaped gable) it was clearly reflective of the wings at Blickling Hall although at this time there was no link with that estate. <sup>21</sup>

One question remains unanswered. Was the earlier Bettes/Doughty house demolished or incorporated in the new build? Two features suggest the main hall remained. Only the wings of the house have basements which are not connected under the central ground floor hall. Secondly a massively thick wall is clearly visible inside at the central core of the house behind the fireplace of the hall. We believe Miles wrapped his new house around the old, extending back towards the water course at the rear.

Miles himself in a later lawsuit called it a ‘convenient and handsome seat for a gentleman to live in’. He and others recalled how he built not only the house but also the courts in the front, the stables, the coach house, garden walls, garden houses and orchard walls. He undertook the planting of fruit trees, other plantations, the creation of two fish ponds and a water course – the latter presumably the canal visible in the painting running along the rear of the gardens. The ponds shown in the painting are later the site of the canal on the south side and the pond in the farmyard. All the building had been done in a short period of time – the house and main outbuildings in 1686 and the other works shortly afterwards. Witnesses questioned at the Maid’s Head in Aylsham commented that the work included planting the avenue of young oak trees in front of the house. The avenue walk is three furlongs long and cleverly stretches to the horizon at the top of the slope, creating an illusion that it continued yet further and that all the land one could see from the imposing upstairs saloon belonged to Miles.<sup>22</sup>

### **Miles Baispoole’s money and legal problems**

As becomes clear from the sequence of chancery lawsuits in the 1690s, this major enterprise bankrupted Baispoole.<sup>23</sup> To raise the £3,750 for the whole estate and the additional sum of £2,500 spent on the new house, buildings and garden features, Baispoole had had to borrow massively. The sale of the lease of the great tithe to Francis Wyndham for £1,200 only reduced his indebtedness slightly.

Miles argued that he had improved the value of the estate by bringing into arable cultivation certain lands that had been pasture but were now ‘sown to halves with corn’. This is a relatively rare documented example of the widespread practice of sharecropping on newly ploughed long



The avenue walk seen from the first floor saloon

term pasture. The logic was that productivity could not be known and so initially the tenant undertook the farming for nil rent but paid half his crop to the landlord. Edward Underwood and Robert Vout an Aylsham cordwainer had done the farming for this venture for about three years. They had taken on 55 acres and in one year managed to get 22 acres into corn production. These acreages imply that a large area around the house had previously been given over to animal pasture, effectively creating a park around the mansion. All the evidence shows that Baispoole had paid a huge amount for the estate in the first place, that he had over-spent on the house and that the rental value of the whole was only improved by a very small amount. If he tried to sell at the standard multiple of 20 times the rent this would only pay back less than half his outlay – negative equity on a grand scale. Baispoole could not generate sufficient income from his law practice and he had become increasingly devious in his attempts to remain in control of his finances.

Among his increasing debt was the former Aylsham mortgage which was still in force when he bought the property from the Doughtys. The death of Lady Maidstone's brother William in 1689 ended the annuity he had been paying her. Concerned now to receive the arrears of interest of 5% due from Miles Baispoole, Lady Maidstone pursued him in court to try to get her money back. Her campaign ebbed and flowed through the county courts and chancery in London. In 1690 Edmund Themilthorpe tried to ensure that her title via the unpaid mortgage was properly recorded in the Aylsham manorial books. He was readily able to do so in Aylsham Lancaster where she was formally admitted to the main estate in 1690 but struggled through into 1691 in Aylsham Wood manor. Here the lord of the manor Thomas Wood had appointed Miles Baispoole as his steward, giving him complete control of the court books!

Baispoole now pressed Francis Wyndham (head of the Cromer line) from whom he had already borrowed £500 in July 1689, for a further loan before he would agree to make all the appropriate entries in the court books. This was particularly trying for Wyndham as during 1689 and 1690 he made a complex agreement with Baispoole under which Francis would combine his own loans and that of Lady Maidstone so that Miles had just one continuing secured loan repayable to Francis. By now Miles owed about £1,700 or more to the Wyndham faction and had three £500 loans from uncle Aubery Baispoole, John Mann of Norwich and his own son's guardian Philip Price, a Southwark feltmaker.

Subsequently Lady Maidstone claimed she had not agreed to this consolidation agreement. Whether or not that was the case, it transpired that Miles was not the only one slow to pay. Francis was more or less immediately in arrears of the interest payments which he now had to make to Lady Maidstone. Baispoole of course jumped on this tension amongst the Wyndhams and repeated that it had never been his intention to make either of them lose by his actions. This was particularly important for him to stress since Lady Maidstone had just won a court order to eject him from his house and lands. He argued that it was for Wyndham, not himself, to pay Lady Maidstone and that her ejection order was invalid. Lady Maidstone just wanted her £250 of interest, whether paid by Miles or Francis. Francis argued that his agreement to consolidate the loan was contingent on the renewal of Lady Maidstone's admission to both manors and that since Miles had blocked one of these,

the interest on the Lady Maidstone loan was not yet his obligation. So he counter-claimed requiring Baispoole to pay him the £700 owed and Lady Maidstone her £1,000 plus interest.

Between February and December 1694 witnesses were called in for Francis Wyndham's case against Miles, his wife Elizabeth, uncle Aubery Baispoole and son Aubery through Philip Price.<sup>24</sup> The case went back over the old ground of whether Miles had enabled the secondary admissions for Lady Maidstone and the surrenders to her and Francis Wyndham. Witnesses recited their knowledge of the loans to Doughty and Baispoole by Lady Maidstone and Francis Wyndham, and Baispoole's subsequent resistance to making the admission to Aylsham Wood. Estimates of the total acreage and rental value before improvement varied. Robert Doughty a 56 year-old Aylsham yeoman (probably Robert's cousin from one of his grandfather's brothers) seemed quite accurate with 134 acres and £80 rent before improvement and perhaps £120 afterwards. Others such as Robert Ryall, another Aylsham yeoman, also thought the new rent would be about £120.

Miles was also pursued by his other creditors Aubery Baispoole, John Mann and Philip Price, at various times from about 1689 into the late 1690s. All argued that Baispoole had deceived them by offering securities on properties already encumbered with loans. These included the King's Head as well as the Old Hall. Miles always countered that he intended to pay both principal and interest but just needed a little more time. Lady Maidstone, with the biggest loan, was the most impatient since whenever Baispoole paid some interest he was in no time at all back in arrears.<sup>25</sup>

The actions by Philip Price in the 1690s add a little further information. Baispoole had borrowed £500 from Philip Price against his Aylsham Wood property. Unaware the lands had been used as security on the Lady Maidstone loan, Price spent the whole of the 1690s trying to get his money back. The property he thought he had as security included many small pieces of land among which were two pightles next to the path leading from Old Market to 'Salesmore' (Sares Moor, the pond area below Burebank house on the Ingworth Road). These small fields were next to the common pasture of the Old Market. It seems likely that the damp meadow land across the Blickling Road and that stretching away northwards from the Old Hall's barns had once all been common grazing.



The fine staircase up to the saloon

We will see that as late as 1817 a small area to the west of the Blickling Road which had not fallen into the clutches of the Doughty family remained common land. As late as 1698 Baispoole was still protesting his innocence and intention to pay off all his debts, but of course he still needed just a little more time!

During the 1690s Baispoole let some of his lands to Simon Ollyett junior whose father was owner of other Aylsham property including The Black Boy Inn. <sup>26</sup> In 1698 Simon said he paid the £45 rent straight to Francis Wyndham as part payment of interest due. More was paid in corn to the value of £100. <sup>27</sup> In 1703 Simon Ollyett sued Baispoole in chancery over dealings between them which he argued had left Miles owing him £50. <sup>28</sup> While Baispoole robustly rejected the claim, he was merciless in arguing he should retain money and mortgage documents from Ollyett; the latter was in a debtor's prison trying to sort out his father's debts and Baispoole was worried he might not repay him – the



pot calling the kettle black. These actions indicate that Baispoole was still technically in possession of his own estate and living in the Old Hall.

Miles Baispoole was never out of court. Caught up in disputes over tithes payable from the mills that he owned and over payments due to Aylsham's school, Miles was constantly accused of failing to meet his obligations. These also saw Francis Wyndham avoiding church repairs apparently due under his lease of the great tithes that he had held from 1695.<sup>29</sup> In 1701 Miles and his son were also sued over loans on their property in Sloley and Worstead, which Miles's uncle Aubery had used for his business as a brewer and maltster.<sup>30</sup> All of them were accused of conniving to keep Aubery in the premises and avoid paying interest on their loans. Indeed Miles was accused of trying to borrow the huge sum of £6,500 from Sir John Foche of London, presumably to try to pay off all his other borrowings. But luckily Sir John discovered the Baispoole property was already encumbered and called off the deal. Miles was an over-indebted man using his legal skills to set up layer upon layer of debt that he could not possibly repay.

### **Aylsham Old Hall in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

As we have seen, in the 1690s Simon Ollyett junior was lessee of the farmland and sometimes paid the poor rates (sometimes shown as 'for Mr Baispoole') but there is no indication he lived in the house. The Ollyetts had property elsewhere in Aylsham. During the early years of the new century it becomes clear from the poor rates that Miles's son Aubery, on reaching his majority in 1702, took on the estate and, in 1704, also took a sub-lease from Wyndham of the rectory and its great tithes. This attempt to recreate the family's glory days in Aylsham clearly failed. Francis Wyndham had already claimed the Baispoole's Foster's property for non-payment of the £318 loan secured on it in 1694. Lady Maidstone had died in 1696 and he at some point foreclosed on the main estate. Although it is not certain exactly when the Baispooles forfeited the Old Hall to Francis, they probably lived in the house at least until the end of 1706.<sup>31</sup> Certainly by 1707 Aubery was no longer the rate payer and it seems quite likely that this marks the Baispoole family departure from Aylsham. By 1708 new tenants paid the poor rates showing the Baispooles had vacated the Old Hall. Their 25 year run had

come to an end. When his son died in 1719 aged only 38, Miles was living in Haveringland where he himself was buried in January 1721. Wyndham retained the property and now put in reliable leasehold tenants from the local area. The Old Hall was never again to have an owner-occupier.

Initially Thomas Fiddy, as tenant, took over the Wyndham rate payments; both the tithe element and the Old Hall estate part were now referred to as Mr Wyndham's. Fiddy was probably the substantial farmer identifiable on the later Blickling estate map of 1729.<sup>32</sup> In 1712 Thomas Coulson (a prosperous carpenter of Aylsham) took over the rectory lease and Fiddy continued paying the 4s 6d per month for the Old Hall estate. The Old Hall was now becoming essentially a farmer's house. The same year Robert Thexton, who held the bowling green near the churchyard, took it over, paying 'for Wyndham'. From 1717–1724 the rate was paid by Benjamin Taylor, indicating a seven year lease of the estate. Peter Elwin esquire of Tuttington, who was Sheriff for the County in 1720, held it 1724-26, followed by Edmund Jewell 1727–1731. This looks like another seven year period split between two tenants. Edmund Jewell of course was Aylsham's well known and influential lawyer. William Michaels or Mitchell paid the rates in 1732–1734, of whom nothing is known.

Next came a lengthy stable period with a senior family living in the house and farming the land. From 1735 to his death in December 1740 Francis Scott esquire had the Old Hall. Francis's will, made in 1738, explicitly left his wife Catherine the lease of the farm and the house they lived in which he held from Francis Wyndham of Cromer. He also left her all his household goods and his coach and horses.<sup>33</sup> The widowed Catherine stayed on there until her death in October 1759.

Francis Wyndham's son Francis inherited but had no children and the Aylsham Old Hall property (and Erpingham manor) passed to his brother Thomas Wyndham of Cromer. Thomas married twice.<sup>34</sup> His first wife Jane was a distant cousin whose father of Clearwell Gloucestershire was also called Francis Wyndham. This Francis died in 1717 and his only son and heir John died aged 24 in 1725, making his brother-in-law Thomas Wyndham his heir. As a result Thomas came into the Clearwell estate and in 1727 built a new home there, designed as a gothic castle, initially known as Clearwell Court but now as Clearwell Castle. He seems to have lived there rather than moving back to Norfolk to his

Cromer seat. In October 1751 Thomas sold the Aylsham and Erpingham estates to Sir John Hobart of Blickling, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Buckinghamshire.<sup>35</sup> The sitting tenant Catherine Scott now had a new landlord. The Wyndham era in Aylsham was over.

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> and last article will look at the occupiers and their use of the Old Hall from the later 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

## Sources

Note: all January to March dates given in the text have been corrected to the modern calendar year.

1. NRO, NCC original will 8 made 31<sup>st</sup> March 1679 apparently proved 28<sup>th</sup> April. TNA Chancery actions (C9, C10) in the late 1670s and 1680s involving Doughty, Warkhouse, Elwyn and others have not been examined. They might shed further light on Major Doughty's affairs.
2. NRO, WKC 3/11, 399x4
3. Sources for the Windham /Wyndham family trees include Visitations, Ketton-Cremer, all family wills in Norfolk and PCC, parish registers. The Windham spelling differentiates the Felbrigg line from others.
4. NRO, NRS 16616, 36G
5. Winchelsea was abroad and knew nothing of the marriage. He claimed the boy was entrapped by 'the foulest piece of fraud and abuse'. RW Ketton-Cremer, *Felbrigg*, 1962
6. *See You in Court: The Potts Family of Mannington 1584-1737*, Vaughan-Lewis, 2009
7. NRO, NRS 16616, 36G
8. NRO, NRS 16627, 37G
9. NRO, GTN 1/1/36/1-5
10. TNA, PCC will 1694, PROB 11/422
11. NRO, ANW administration 1716, no 34 (his son Guybon was then of Hanworth); ANW will of Katherine Doughty (Robert's sister in Aylsham) 1709-10, fo 210; MJ Armstrong, *History and Antiquities of the County of Norfolk*, 1781
12. *The Visitations of Norfolk 1563, 1589 and 1613*; parish registers; IGI; Baispoole wills in NRO: Miles ANF 1624 original will 148, Moundeford senior NCC 1669 Proctor 17, Aubery ANF 1698-99 original will 102; Baispoole administrations in NRO: Aubery NCC 1718-19 no 132 (he was then of Beeston Regis), Miles NCC 1720-21 no 189 (Miles was of Haveringland, his sister Mary Earbury of Barton Turf had administration); Barton Turf History Project online transcript of Anthony Norris notes for a History of Tunstead Hundred in NRO, Rye mss volume 3. The spelling Aubery is taken from their own signatures.
13. Aylsham poor rate books survive in the Town Archive from 1674 in an almost unbroken sequence into the 1830s. This first Baispoole property in Aylsham has not been identified.

14. By 1677 John Warkhouse had the head lease from the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral, but we know from chancery depositions that Miles bought the operation of the lease.
15. See NRO catalogue for various deeds in the Neville and Petrie collections.
16. *Calendar of Treasury Books, Volume 8, 1685-89*
17. NRO, ANW administration 1687, no 239 – administration granted to three creditors. A pinder was a man who operated an animal pound.
18. Extracts from a description of Aylsham Old Hall by The National Trust from notes in Aylsham Town Archive attributed to John Maddison
19. Thanks to Margaret Bird and Gill Riley for information on The Limes.
20. T Williamson & A Taigel eds, *Gardens in Norfolk, 1550-1900*, 1990
21. N Pevsner's *Buildings of England* 1962 edition gives the wrong date - 1689 - and Wilson's 2002 edition wrongly asserts it was built as a dower house for Blickling.
22. TNA, C22/878/1 and C22/878/22, 1694-95. In 1695 Thomas Allen yeoman of Aylsham noted that some of the oak avenue trees had now decayed and rotted. They may have been planted in poor or wet soil. It is possible that later one side of the avenue was completely replanted, which might explain why it is no longer precisely aligned with the centre line of the house as shown on the painting.
23. TNA, C 9/453/134; TNA, C 9/254/17
24. TNA, C 22/878/1 & 878/22. In this and at least one other case John Warkhouse the Aylsham attorney acted for Francis Wyndham.
25. TNA, C 9/452/72, June 1692; C 9/280/25, April 1695; C 9/453/134, July 1691; C 9/254/17, May 1691; C 10/341/11, February 1693; C 9/122/50, February 1692 and this continued in C 9/283/90, June 1698; the various manorial court entries cited are in NRO, NRS 12525-31, 27E1; NRS 16616-9, 36G
26. NRO, NCC will 1698, Jones 858; his wife Elizabeth's NCC will of 1700, Edwards 104
27. TNA, C 9/283/90
28. TNA, C 6/458/35 & 458/42
29. TNA, C 9/169/10, 1701; C 9/253/30, 1703; E 134/3Jas2/East32; E 134/10&11Wm3/Hil21; E 134/11Wm3/East25 (which shows Robert Doughty was still in Oby in 1699)
30. TNA, C 10/259/24, 1701
31. In 1706 Aubery was still active in the town as he witnessed Francis Wyndham surrender to Robert Thexton a little piece of copyhold land lying next to the west end of the parish churchyard. It contained 12 by 14 'virgas' and abutted the bowling green on its north side. NRO, NRS 16617, 36G. Virga, literally a rod, was also an old term for a yard in length. This locates the piece of land and bowling green as perhaps either side of the head of School Lane. Miles was still legally active in 1711 as Steward of Matlaske manor. NRO, MC3/57
32. Aylsham Town archive poor rate books. 1729 Blickling map copy in NRO, FX 257/1
33. TNA, PCC will 1741, PROB 11/707
34. Visitations; Burke's *Dormant Baronetcies*; Ketton-Cremer; FA Crisp, *Abstracts of Somersetshire wills*, 1851; TNA, PCC will of Francis Wyndham of Clearwell 1717, PROB 11/556
35. NRO, NRS 12535, 27E1

## Peter Elwin Wrench

by Ruth Bowes



Peter Elwin Wrench. Portrait courtesy David Wrench.

The first Wrench to live in Aylsham was Jonathan, the youngest son of John Wrench, a worsted weaver and one time mayor of Norwich, and grandfather of Peter Elwin Wrench. Jonathan came to Aylsham in 1700 when he was appointed vicar of St. Michael's Church. His son, another Jonathan, born in 1703, followed his father to Cambridge University and into the church.

Records show that Jonathan senior was vicar of Aylsham until 1731, after which his son took over, remaining as vicar until his death in 1765. However, it seems from the letters of the Rev. Patrick St. Clair<sup>1</sup> that arrangements were more informal than church records show, and that father and son interchanged between the parishes of Aylsham with

Burgh, Metton (where the son began his clerical life) and Aldborough, according to family circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan the younger married Mary Elwin in Thurning in 1724. She was the second daughter of Fountain Elwin of Thurning Hall; the marriage could be considered a step up the social ladder. At any rate Jonathan incorporated his father-in-law's Christian name and surname when naming two of his sons (Peter Elwin and Jonathan Fountain), and the elder children were christened, not by their grandfather in Aylsham as one might expect, but in Thurning or in Saxthorpe, both of which were Elwin territory.

Peter Elwin, the third child and second son, was born on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1727 and baptised in Saxthorpe on May 1<sup>st</sup>. By 1739 the family consisted of four sons and three daughters. Clergymen were not well paid at that time (St. Clair mentions financial anxieties) so the future of four sons must have been a worry. It is interesting to note family influences on the boys' careers. Benjamin, the eldest, followed his father into the church. He was curate at Edgefield for ten years before being appointed vicar of Oulton in 1762. He died the following year, two years before his father. The youngest son, Jonathan Fountain, became a surgeon and apothecary, though without going to university or apparently gaining any qualification (his great uncle, Jonathan Senior's elder brother, was Sir Benjamin Wrench, the eminent Norwich physician). Ellis, the third son and only one referred to as Gent in his mother's will, moved to London, where he had 'a lucrative position in the exchequer',<sup>3</sup> married several times and had two sons, one of whom became an actor, but about whose life little else is known.

Peter's future appears to have been decided in 1742 when an uncle by marriage became Governor of Bombay. Mary Wrench's sister, Elizabeth, had married William Wake, also from Thurning, who had made his money in the East Indies, at first as a private merchant trading along the Malabar Coast and after 1730 as an employee of the East India Company.

William Wake took up his appointment in Bombay in November 1742. In December Peter went down to London to be interviewed by the Court of Directors at the Company's Head Office in Leadenhall Street. Being interviewed by a committee of twenty must have been nerve-wracking for a fifteen-year-old from the country, whether or not the result was a foregone conclusion. On the 15<sup>th</sup> he was selected as a writer, or clerk, for

the Presidency of Bombay.<sup>4</sup> (Robert Clive was interviewed the same morning and appointed to the Presidency of Madras.)

The East India Company was a private company, trading between England, India and China. Founded in 1600, it was run by a Court of Directors from London, which kept a close watch on all its employees scattered over the three countries and on the high seas. There was a well defined career structure – an employee served as a writer for five years, followed by three years as factor. After another three years as junior merchant he became a senior merchant, the highest rank in the service.

Peter had to pay for his own voyage. He also had to provide security for good behaviour. The £500 required for this was put up by Thomas and Edmund Godfrey. There were a number of Godfreys at the London end of the East India Company, probably all related. A Peter Godfrey had been on the committee interviewing the young Peter; in 1751 Peter and Joseph Godfrey were executors of William Wake's will and in 1778 David and William Godfrey the English executors of Peter's will.

Peter sailed from Spithead in March 1743 on the East Indiaman *Warwick*<sup>5</sup> and arrived at Bombay, 5 months later. There were five other writers on board so he had companions of his own age, though the death of one of them four days out must have given the remainder some sober moments.

Journeys to and from India could be hazardous. Storms and shipwrecks were always possible on such a long voyage, as were navigational problems and errors. (The East Indiaman Robert Clive was on was blown off course almost on to the coast of Brazil, and took eighteen months to make the journey to Madras.) In addition there were pirates lurking along the Indian coast and danger from French ships during the years that England and France were at war. There was an alarm on the *Warwick* during Peter's voyage, when 'all hands were called to quarters and everything got ready to engage.' Shots were fired, but the feared French ship turned out to be an English one from the Caribbean.

Apart from this incident the voyage was trouble free. The *Warwick* sailed in convoy past Madeira, took on water at Teneriffe, rounded the Cape and then spent almost two weeks at Johanna (an island near Madagascar). The King of Johanna was paddled out in his canoe, given a 5 gun salute 'as usual', and stayed a night on board. The carpenter and his crew went ashore to chop wood, sails were mended, the ship's sides

tarred, and one evening was spent getting 27 bullocks on board, before the *Warwick* continued in 'fair weather and smooth water' to Bombay.

In the mid-seventeenth century Bombay was the least healthy of the Company's three Presidencies (the others were Madras and Calcutta). One reason was the marshes on the landward side of the island which were malarial swamps, as a result of which fevers and fluxes were endemic. The windless air did not help but inhabitants were reluctant to cut down the coconut trees, whose thickness shut out the sea breezes, because their shade would then be lost. The Europeans' life style made matters worse. They overindulged in both food and drink (including the local arrack and country spirits) as if still living in a temperate climate, and continued to wear close fitting Europeans clothes that were useless in the heat. In consequence, the life expectancy of a new arrival in Bombay was estimated to be 'two monsoons.'

Peter, however, survived. He lived with his uncle and aunt in the Governor's house while the Wakes remained in Bombay – though he might well have preferred to be sharing digs with his fellow writers. He later married, had two children by his wife, both of whom died young, and two natural children, whom he remembered generously in his will. He became governor of Anjengo, on India's west coast, and a member of Bombay Council. He returned to England after the death of his father, and on several other occasions, 'to recover his health,' or 'to arrange family affairs'. His wife Ann died at the end of 1773 aged 37 while they were living in Anjengo, and was buried there. Peter resigned from the Company in 1774 and returned to England the following year.

\* \* \*

It was possible to make a fortune in the East Indies – shaking the pagoda tree, as it came to be described. As one historian has written:

*'a man should if he survived (as many of course did not) make a considerable fortune in the Company's service, but only if he had worked his twelve or fifteen years through the ranks and given the Company the benefit of his industry and acquired experience ... He must not permit his private concerns to monopolize his attention to the detriment of his public duties.'*<sup>6</sup>

William Wake certainly made his fortune.<sup>7</sup> There are indications not only that Peter Wrench hoped to emulate his uncle's financial success, but also that he allowed 'his private concerns to monopolize his



attention...’ on a number of occasions, and was reprimanded for them, sometimes severely.

A letter from London to Bombay dated 14 March 1753 says, ‘We take notice that you permitted Peter Elwin Wrench, a junior merchant, to proceed to China on account of his health as is alleged, but that appears to us a mere pretence ... [that the] permission was intended for a lucrative benefit to him ... If Mr. Wrench has during the time he was so employed received any salary or allowance of any kind as a covenant servant you must take care that he refunds it to us.’<sup>8</sup>

On another occasion when the Commissioner of Accounts queried the high price of provisions to the fleet Peter pointed out ‘that tho’ the Provisions might be dear the Company was not to pay for them.’ This produced a stinging reply from London. ‘We hope this was no inducement to our Servants to take any undue advantage even of the Turks; which, if we were assured of, would be treated in the same manner as if taken from the Company.’<sup>9</sup>

After Peter’s death in 1777, irregularities in accounts came to light. London wrote to Bombay, ‘The circumstances attending the deficiency in the payments of Mr. Wrench cannot be settled here because Mr. Wrench is dead. We therefore direct that you investigate the subject ... and take care that the Company suffer no loss by so extraordinary a transaction.’<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

In July 1776 Peter married Elizabeth Burbank in Denham, Bucks. We don’t know how they met; according to the marriage register she came from Lincolnshire, he from Aylsham. The *Bath Chronicle* announced their arrival in Bath on September 4<sup>th</sup> 1776. In his will<sup>11</sup>, signed later that month, Peter described himself as ‘late of Bombay in the East Indies but now of the City of Bath in the County of Somerset,’ so it is surprising to find the couple travelling to Bombay on the East Indiaman *Hawke* the following March, despite Peter’s ill health. In May, ‘on the high seas,’ he was dictating a codicil to his will– ‘God knows whether I can live the Passage out’ – when his wife told him she was pregnant, whereupon he made radical changes to the codicil, reducing or cutting out bequests to his natural children and friends and relations, in favour of his wife.

It is hard not to surmise that Betsy married Peter for his money (she was twenty five years younger than he), persuaded him to return to India in the hope of more riches, then panicked when she realised he was dying.<sup>12</sup>

Was she pregnant, or was this a ploy to increase her inheritance? There is no record, or even mention, of a child, though that does not mean there wasn't a birth, or miscarriage.

What is more puzzling is that no record of Peter's death exists. There is no mention of it in the log of the *Hawke*<sup>13</sup>, despite Peter's name heading the list of passengers. (When William Wake died in 1750, also at Table Bay though in his case on the journey home, the *Boscawan's* log<sup>14</sup> described his death and burial on shore in great detail.) Even more puzzling, James Forbes, a close friend of Peter and a fellow passenger on the *Hawke*, later described the voyage in his *Oriental Memoirs* as 'four months to Bombay without bad weather, losing a man by sickness or meeting with accident or adventure'<sup>15</sup>. Yet we know Peter almost certainly died sometime between signing his codicil 'at sea' on May 12<sup>th</sup> and the *Hawke* sailing from False Bay on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Why, then, no mention of burial ashore or committal to the deep?

The *Gentleman's Magazine* announced Peter's death the following March<sup>16</sup> ('Peter Ellwin Wrench Esq; at the Cape of Good Hope, in (sic) his way to the East Indies'). Probate of the will and codicil of 'Peter Elwin otherwise Elvin Wrench formerly of the City of Bath but late of the Cape of Good Hope deceased' was granted on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1778. No date of death is given by either.

There is one possible explanation. In the codicil Peter asked that his body be put 'into a Leaden Coffin soldered up' and delivered to his executors in Bombay, to be conveyed to Anjengo and buried in the grave of 'my former Wife my ever dear and beloved Ann Wrench.' Indeed, he left £500 sterling to John Cotton, Commander of the *Hawke*, provided Cotton carried out his wishes – 'but not otherwise.' He added, 'I hope he will not fail to show me this last Instance of his regard against all objections or remonstrances that may be made to it.' He also left a bequest to James Forbes, and in doing so asked for his support. 'As Mrs. Wrench has approved of my request to Captain Cotton I beg Mr. Forbes will endeavour all in his power to prevail on him to grant it.'

The Company would surely have been appalled had they known that a body was being carried for weeks on board one of its ships at the height of the hot weather. No doubt Captain Cotton would have been in dire trouble. Perhaps everyone concerned decided that Peter's wishes should be carried out but agreed that no formal record should be kept. There is nothing in Anjengo to show whether Peter's body was eventually buried

with that of his first wife; the grave has no inscription other than hers.<sup>17</sup> It is unlikely that the truth of what happened will ever be known.

As for Betsy, she had remarried by the time probate was granted in October 1778. In 1780 she was living with her new husband in Chiswick and refusing to pay the £50 annuity that Peter had left to his sister Rebecca in Aylsham.<sup>18</sup> Rebecca died 20 years later without receiving a penny.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile the East India Company was determined to retrieve the money it considered it was owed from Peter's estate. The Company took his widow and the Indian based executors to court and won. The executors appealed and lost. I am still trying to disentangle the ramifications of the case, which rumbled on into the next century. I suspect the facts may prove to be as elusive as the date of Peter's death.

## References

<sup>1</sup> R.W. Ketton Cremer *Country Neighbourhood*

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.171

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography: Benjamin Wrench*

<sup>4</sup> Court Minutes 1742–1744, India Office Records B67

<sup>5</sup> Log of Warwick India Office Records/E/205

<sup>6</sup> Sutherland, Lucy S. *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, p. 53

<sup>7</sup> Wake's will shows him to have been immensely wealthy. Among his charitable bequests were £1,000 to 'deranged persons' and £1,000 'for poor imprisoned debtors'. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1757 p. 577 noted that his daughter had a dowry of £30,000 when she married.

<sup>8</sup> IOR:Home Misc. Vol.78

<sup>9</sup> IOR:Despatches to Bombay. E/4/998

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* E/4/999

<sup>11</sup> National Archives PROB 11/1046

<sup>12</sup> Another reason for panic might be the fact that Betsy's 16-year-old sister was also travelling on the *Hawke*, for whom Betsy must have felt responsible.

<sup>13</sup> IOR/MAR/B/309G

<sup>14</sup> Log of *Boscawan* IOR/MAR/B/572

<sup>15</sup> Vol. i. p. 460. Not true. Two seamen, in separate incidents during the voyage, fell from the rigging and were drowned. Perhaps Forbes was referring to passengers only.

<sup>16</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol 48 p141

<sup>17</sup> *Indian Monumental Inscriptions, Volume III, Madras: List of inscriptions on tombs or monuments in Madras*, vol. 2, p. 181

<sup>18</sup> Norfolk Record Office, MC.1188/1

<sup>19</sup> NRO, Will of Rebecca Cook, 1800

## Society News

### **The Reformation in East Anglia: the material evidence – a talk by Vic Morgan**

Vic Morgan enthralled a large audience on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February. His illustrated talk gave us an extensive overview of the Reformation of the Church of England in East Anglia, focussing on the material evidence. He explained how changes in liturgy dictated church architecture and furnishings. He stressed that for many such changes were unwelcome; that they did not occur uniformly on a certain date throughout the country.

East Anglia has the largest concentration of mediaeval churches. Some show signs of pre-reformation practice, some of Puritan doctrine and others of Victorian remodelling. To see a full representation of the Catholic Church at this time we need to look further afield.

For those brought up over five hundred years in the English Protestant tradition, it can be difficult to believe how today's whitewashed walled and pewed churches looked then. Those with a secular mindset are dismayed at the perceived credulous beliefs in purgatory and in payment for masses to be said so your soul should not linger there – concepts at the heart of religious belief.

To see some of the pre-reformation fittings, we were shown images of the remains of rood screens and the stairs up to the rood where the large wooden statue of the Crucified Christ was in direct sight-line of the laity. The screen divided the priest from the people as he handled the bread and wine believed to change into the actual body of Christ. Binham Priory's screen of saints was over-painted with a text in English from Crammer's 1539 Bible, a very puritan statement. This paint has now degraded allowing the original saints' faces to show through.

In Wenhaston church, Suffolk, there was a panel over the rood in the chancel arch that was whitewashed by Protestants. This was taken down in the nineteenth century and left in the churchyard. Overnight rain removed the wash to reveal the chillingly scary painted doom of purgatory complete with souls being weighed in scales.

A piscina is a stone basin usually near the altar and sedillia. Here the priest washed the vessels used in the mass. Evidence of a piscina in an

unusual setting, as in Aylsham church, shows where there had been a chantry chapel and where masses for your soul were said.

The writings of Robert Martin of Long Melford give us a vivid record of the feasts, processions and ceremonies there in pre-reformation times. They show how much people could connect their daily lives with a spiritual life. So precious was their allegiance to such ways in some parts that people hid plate, vestments, furnishings in the hope of a return one day to the old loved traditions.

These were some of the material evidences of pre-reformation churches. Churches where Protestant ideas endured show statues and screens defaced, any previous colour and wall paintings painted over. The altar was now called a table for the Lord's Supper and was moved forward away to a place with no connection to transubstantiation. Binham still has a wonderful Jacobean table possibly placed there from a house. A good time to see these tables is Lent when altar furnishings are removed. Southwold church has a circular table looking rather out of place now liturgy has moved on.

Wilby near Attleborough is a 'prayer book' church ; nothing has changed since 1632. Here are Laudian table , pews and a three decker pulpit.

At the reformation, the Church of England now had the monarch as Head, not the Pope. To make this change very clear to all, it was decreed that a Royal coat of arms should be placed above the chancel arch in the sight line of all. Tivetshall has a wonderful example of the Arms of Elizabeth 1.

Vic talked of the concept of the numinous, the feeling of attraction and awe characteristic of man's sense of communion with God. At a time of high mortality, low levels of literacy, belief in miracles and the certainty of an afterlife, the pre-reformation church could provide a spiritual narrative. From the font to the places for masses for your soul after death, from the depiction of Bible stories in wall paintings to the painted flying angels above your head, you knew how religion worked in your life.

The reformation with its academic base in the 'new learning' opposed superstition, corruption and accrued traditions which were not Bible-based. Hence the severity of the furnishings, the emphasis on the pulpit and pews and place for the Bible in English. Vic showed us the material evidence for both traditions.

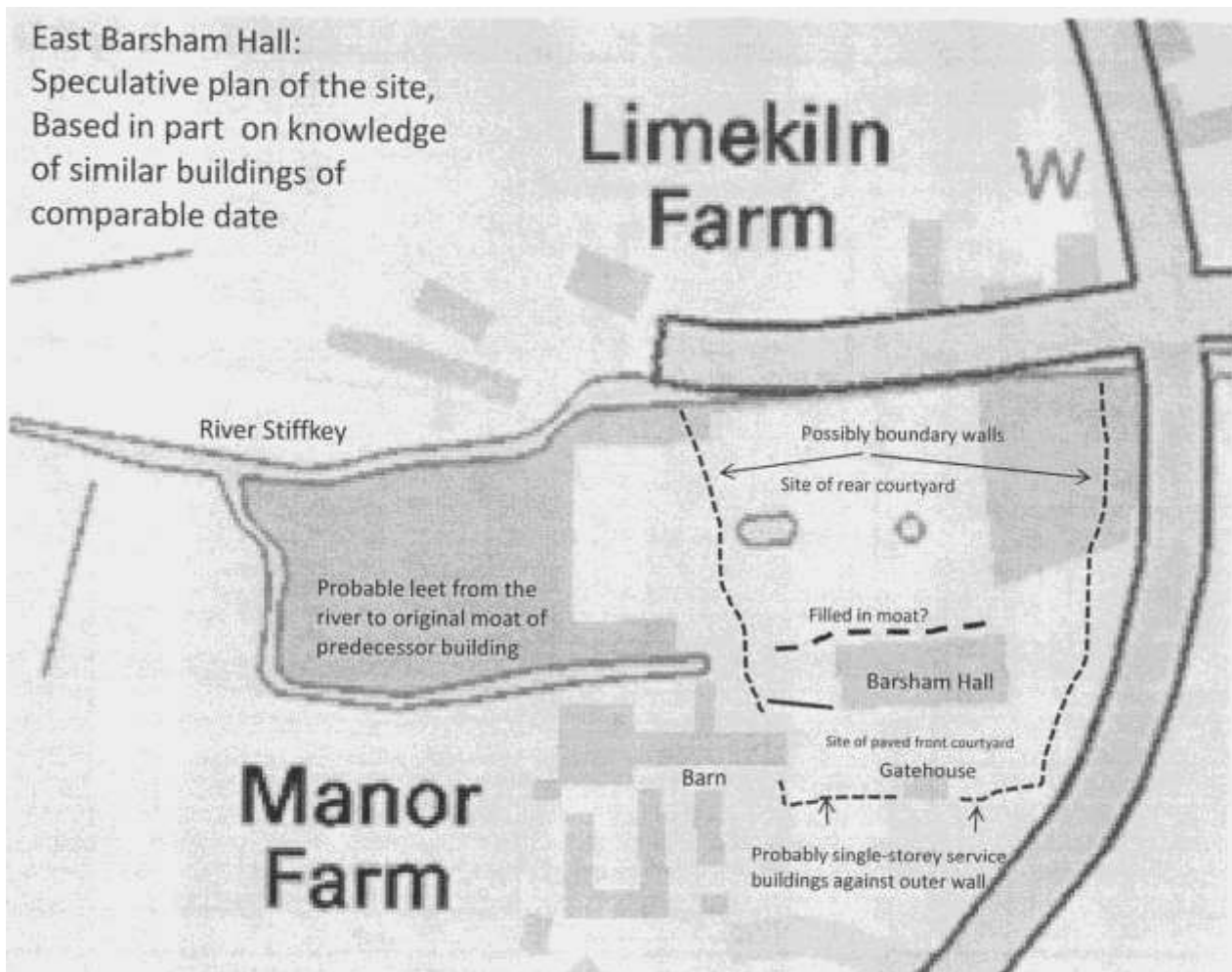
**Lynda Wix**

## Visit to East Barsham Manor House



South front of Manor House from *Country Life* courtesy IPC Media Ltd.

The Society was privileged to have a tour of this very fine highly decorated brick Tudor manor on 16 May 2011. Lady Guinness most kindly showed us round and I am grateful to Sir John for devoting an entire afternoon in preparation for the visit. The repeated modifications provide conundrums of interpretation to be teased out. The paradox is that today, as a result of early 20c campaigns of restoration Barsham is a more complete and habitable house than it was for a great part of its history. Indeed 19c taste celebrated it as a romantic ruin.



It is possible to outline four stages in the history of the site. First a putatively medieval moated structure for which at present there is scant physical or archaeological evidence. Secondly an early 16c build that imparted the fundamental character to the house by way of layout and decoration for which it became renowned and which it retains today. For the first time I want to suggest, however tentatively, that it may be possible to detect two phases in this early rebuild. Thirdly a long period of neglect in the 18c and 19c, during which the house was subsumed into a larger estate. Fourthly it was subject to a process of restoration in the 20c that took it back to something like the appearance and functional layout that it had in the early 16c. Ironically modern planning legislation and the desire to conserve rather than to restore means that such a thoroughgoing restoration would not be permitted today!

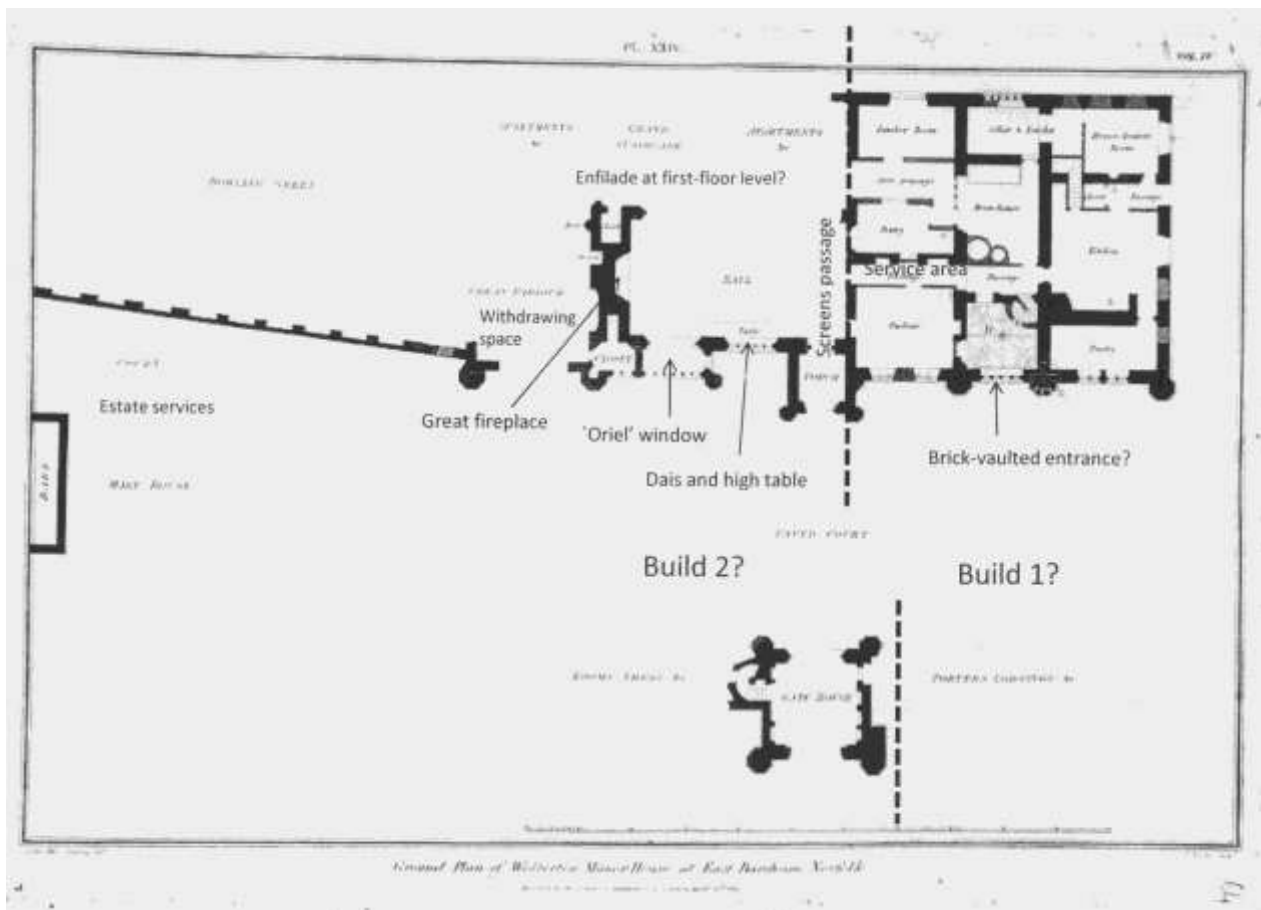
The building is in a valley bottom as is typical of medieval buildings that needed a source of water to feed the moat. Sir John tells me that he believes a moat, now filled in, ran immediately parallel to the rear of the

present house. Parts of the original timber-framed medieval house may have been incorporated in the West Wing of the new build. There may well have been extensive curtain walls to the site, as at Baconsthorpe, Shelton and Oxburgh. I am told there is much brick rubble in for example the area with trees parallel with the road to the east. The line of what I take to be a courtyard wall is depicted on the early 19c plan and the area in front of the house is described as 'paved'. Very tentatively I have sketched in where these walls may have been. At comparable sites single-storey service buildings are attached to all or part of the length of the curtain wall. There is a substantial barn complex to the west of the house.

The manor came to Henry Fermor in the early 16c through marriage and gift from the family of the Wodes. The indications are that Henry's father had been one of those successful lawyers whose services were very much in demand in this increasingly litigious period. Blomefield describes Henry Fermor as "a person of great worth and dignity" in his *History of Norfolk*. We may deduce that he was a member of the Howard clientele for Thomas earl of Arundel made him his feodary in Norfolk. Also his son, William, married a daughter of the late Thomas Knevett, bringing with her a dowry of £200. This was arranged under the auspices of the Duke of Norfolk and the Knevett connection was expressed in heraldic glass once in the oriel window in the great hall. Great provincial magnates such as the Howards impressed their authority upon their 'country' through ostentatious display of their 'power' houses, as at Framlingham and at Kenninghall. By extension their magnatial control was extended through their clients, such as Fermor. From this perspective the new manor house was an expression not only of his power, but also of his patron, the Earl of Arundel. Interestingly, in the early 18c there still survived among the heraldic glass in the oriel window the arms of the Howards. Fermor was high sheriff in 1533 (24h8) by which time he was also a knight.

From the south approach there are three ceremonial entrances. Obviously a notable feature is the detached gatehouse and the asymmetry of the whole south approach. Similar detached gatehouses, or gatehouses in line with curtain walls, can be seen at Baconsthorpe and as late as c.1600 at Stiffkey. The early 17c main entrance at Blickling echoes this phenomenon but is more fully subsumed within the south façade.





The survey by John Adey Repton in 1807, annotated to show features discussed.

The gatehouse at Barsham is in keeping with the late-medieval development in which the gatehouse came to dominate its attached structures. There are comparisons with Layer Marney in Essex, built about the same time, and the earlier, attached, gatehouse at Oxburgh.

Very tentatively I would like to suggest that we may have three slightly separated campaigns of building in the 1520s and 1530s – the east block, the gatehouse and the west block. Although I am not persuaded to pursue the argument the display of heraldry on the porch appears to be that of Henry VII, which would date this part of the building to before the king's death in 1509. In the early 18c there was glass in the oriel window of the great hall with a date, '1538'. Blomefield ventured the opinion that this was the year in which the house was built. I suspect it may record the year in which the western section was completed. The first consisted of the block to the east of what is now the main porch on the south façade. This may have been on a virgin site, adjacent to the original early-medieval hall to the west, and to which it was attached.

The three-storey tower block built during this phase provided a grand entry and, presumably, through access to the inner courtyard. The type is to be seen at Oxburgh but on a much grander scale. Interior walls to the north of this block are substantial without evidence of entry to a rear court. In his will Henry provided his wife Winifred with "lodging in the east end of the house during her widowhood". This suggests that this block was considered to be self-contained and able to accommodate a widow's household, while by implication her son and heir occupied the building centred on the great hall to the west.

The rebuilding of the old early medieval hall to the west included fundamental contemporary features that Sir Henry Fermor would have been familiar with from his attendance at Court. Increased emphasis was placed on *comfort* and *privacy*. Comfort was expressed in terms of tapestry hangings, linenfold panelling (itself an effective form of insulation) and heating by means of stacks and fireplaces. Privacy was expressed in terms of the ability to segregate members of the family and their closest personal servants from the rest of the household. At its full development in palaces such as Hampton Court and Whitehall this involved the adoption of the continental renaissance practice of the *enfilade*. This was a sequence of ever-more private rooms to which access was controlled.

The key feature of the west wing is the surviving massive original chimney stacks with the associated original fireplaces for the hall and the rooms to the westward of it. The flamboyant decoration of the chimneys and their echoing in the verticality of the pinnacles and turrets draws attention to and is an evident celebration of the roofline in a way that supersedes the patent horizontality of earlier forms of halls. The siting of the stack at the end of the great hall was unusual and not a practice adopted elsewhere. The normal practice was to become that of siting the stack on the wall away from the entry side, as seen at Hatfield and Audley End. This would have been the north wall at Barsham and suggests that at this date the provision of a stack-heated hall was still in its infancy.

Around the time that Barsham was built there was the addition of an oriel window to the high end of halls. This provided space for a limited 'withdrawing' within the space of the hall for the occupants of the dais table. Examples are to be seen at Henrave in Suffolk, at Oxbridge colleges, and at Strangers' Hall in Norwich. At groundfloor level there

would have been a withdrawing chamber and above it would have been a solar. There is some indication that the latter was largely the domain of the upper female members of the household. Although now used for other purposes both these rooms have been reconstructed during the course of the 20c. The small turret staircase to the southwest of the hall would have provided entry to these reserved spaces. More formal access to both the private spaces to the left and the public suite to the right may have been provided by a staircase letting off the northwest end of the hall as indicated on the 1807 plan.

This putative grand staircase would have given access to a suite of apartments running parallel to the length of the hall, and possibly beyond into the east wing. The rooms are likely to have been in *enfilade*, with one room leading into another. A similar arrangement of bedrooms is in place today, but now with access from a corridor. Such an arrangement would have provided the three components of a truly renaissance *palazzo*: the conduct of life for the house's elite largely on the first floor, the *piano nobile*; on this floor a suite of rooms with ever-more-restricted social access, the *enfilade*, and a grand staircase, the *escalier*, to provide ceremonial access to the *piano nobile*.

Such a precosity of layout is in harmony with the display of fashionable renaissance materials and decoration in the form of carved and moulded brick. Against this is both the lack of positive evidence yet uncovered in the existing structure and the evident importance of the still essentially late-medieval arrangement of withdrawing chamber and solar.

The other unresolved conundrum is the precise original construction and use of the eastern block of the house. Even a cursory glance reveals much modification. For example there are interior timbers that are more than scantling and may represent what was once an exterior surface, looking to the north. Certainly, as one would expect, the piecemeal addition of space has been by adding outshots to the north in order not to interfere with the impressive south front. Between the east and west wings there is a space now occupied by the staircase imported from Thursford Hall in the 20c. Roof timbers revealed here are of scantling and this appears to indicate a less substantial structure, supporting my thesis of two separate blocks and phases of building concealed by the coherence of the frontage.

Quite apart from its scale and its likely interior layout the other indicator of both status and fashionability of the house is the use of brick.

In the case of Barsham and other buildings of around the same date the building techniques in brick, including polygonal turrets, circumvented some of the structural problems otherwise required to be resolved by the use of stone. Most vernacular buildings of the time were timber framed with wattle-and-daub infill, as would have been the old hall at Barsham. In this respect the early Tudor Barsham would have struck contemporaries as being all the more remarkable.

The nearly contemporaneous work in brick at Layer Marney was undertaken by Italian craftsmen previously employed by the king's Office of Works. There is a brief period in the third and fourth decades of the 16c when decorative brickwork and moulded terracotta were extremely fashionable. In the case of terracotta a group of Italian artisans were active in East Anglia. Examples of their work can be seen in monuments in Oxburgh church and the Jenney monument in St George's Colegate in Norwich, also evident in the terracotta frames of Shrubland Old Hall in Suffolk.

In terms of decorative brick immediate comparisons are with the so-called Great Cressingham Priory (the Jenney family again) with its polygonal turrets and chimneys and closer to hand with Little Snoring rectory and Thorpland Hall. The friezes consist of alternating panels of moulded brick depicting arms, tracery and heads. The patterns for the arms are likely to have been provided by a member of the College of Arms, or to have been copied from a local source such as arms recorded in now-lost stained glass. The tracery and heads are probably copied from a continental print, possibly purporting to represent a figure from classical antiquity. Ultimately the heads are likely to be based on coins or medals. This decorative feature was carried on into the house, where Blomefield records in a room later known as the nursery "several antique heads of men and women in antique dresses, on the wainscot".

The second type of decorative brickwork is to be found on the chimneys and finials. Although mostly restored they seem similar to those depicted in a plate from the early 19c. The third type of brickwork is the splendid coats of arms on the various entrances. This differs in that it has been carved in situ rather than having been made in moulds and then applied to the wall. The supporters displayed on the porch are the griffin and the greyhound. Those on the gatehouse are the griffin and the lion. Pevsner dates this change to 1527 but Blomefield says that the griffin and greyhound are the supporters of Henry VII. The royal arms displayed are

the lions of Richard 1 quartered with the fleur-de-lis – a claim to the throne of France not relinquished until the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. On the right are the arms of Fermor, and on the left those of Fermor impaling Stapleton. On the equivalent heraldic display on the porch there is also a display of Tudor family badges. These consist of the Beaufort portcullis, inherited by Henry VII from his mother, Margaret Beaufort, This again suggests a rather earlier date for this portion of the building.

There are also niches that before the reformation are likely to have contained devotional sculptures. By the time they were seen by Blomefield they were occupied by "janitors", that is doorkeepers. These were probably installed by James Calthorpe, because the supporters of his arms were wild men with clubs.

James Calthorpe married Mary the daughter of the last Fermor in 1629 and she has a fine monument c. 1640 in the church. Their child predeceased them and the property passed to James's son by his second wife. The direct Calthorpe line died out in 1720 and the property passed to two aunts, one of whom was married to Thomas Lestrange. The main seat of the Lestranges was at Hunstanton and by the time Francis Blomefield saw the house in the 1720s or 1730s he described it as being "now very much decayed, and ruinous". A restoration was undertaken by D J Coleman from 1919 and further work was undertaken c. 1938 by a colourful character with curious finances, Count Habsburg-Lothringen. This included the complete reconstruction of the western end of the house behind the surviving 16c façade. The decoration of the chimney shafts was recorded in the early 19c and this record may have been the basis for some of the sensitive restoration.

In the 1960s Barsham was occupied by the popular ensemble the Bee Gees. Residual evidence of their presence is still to be seen in the cabling for sound systems threaded down one of the flues of the 16c chimney stack. Since then the house has been in the gentler care of the present owners, Sir John and Lady Guinness. Lady Guinness is a North, an old Norfolk family whose portraits hang in the great hall and drawing room.

After a much-appreciated tea at the house we visited the church to see the grand monument to Mary Calthorpe. We then took a look over the fence at the Old Rectory, Little Snoring, with its decorative brickwork from the same period.

**Vic Morgan**

## **Correction – Church Terrace.**

In my recent article, ‘Bricks in Aylsham’<sup>1</sup>, I referred to buildings in Aylsham that showed new style and materials, being influenced by the arrival of the railways. Among these I included Church Terrace. Numbers 8 to 12 Church Terrace make up a grade 2 listed building from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore well pre-date the arrival of the railways in Aylsham (about 1880). There is a photograph in the archives of Church Terrace in 1850.

However, these dwellings were built using unfamiliar grey bricks, and in a style that is unusual, even perhaps unique, for Aylsham. They have a symmetrical grey brick façade with a pediment over three central bays. There are brick pilasters at the corners and party walls. The entrances are three-panelled doors with semi-circular fanlights<sup>2</sup>. This must have been strikingly different architecture for the town at the time.

### **References:**

<sup>1</sup>‘Bricks In Aylsham’ by Jim Pannell, vol. 8 no. 10, Dec 2010.

<sup>2</sup>‘Norfolk Heritage Explorer Historic Environment Record’ Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service / Norfolk County Council.

**Jim Pannell**

## **Annual Social**

For some years the History Society has managed an annual social for members.

Three years ago, members enjoyed a visit to Elderton Lodge at Gunton Park. Two years ago, Geoff Gale organised a very interesting visit to St Giles House, a lovely Skipper building in Norwich. Last year we visited Sea Marge at Overstrand with its ‘millionaire village’ character and associations with Winston Churchill. This year we enjoyed the hospitality of Northrepps Country Cottage and its connections with the Gurney family.

What about next year. Do members want an annual dinner, or some other form of social? Where would you like it to be? How much do you want to pay? Please let Roger or me know if you have an opinion to share.

**Jim Pannell**

## Opening of the Aylsham Heritage Centre

by Jayne Andrew



Saturday July 2<sup>nd</sup> marked the official opening of Aylsham Heritage Centre, housed in the old Parish Room in St Michael's Churchyard. The official ribbon cutting ceremony was carried out on the threshold of the building in the beautiful summer sunshine by Alan Quinn, who's initial idea it was to renovate the centre, with Gerry Grimes and Giles Margaron. The invited guests then toasted the success of the centre with champagne and a piece of celebratory cake!

The opening follows years of effort and dedication by the committee, ensuring that the building was restored and protected for years to come. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Biffaward meant that Matthew Thomas could be appointed as Architect in 2007 and external repairs could be completed by N.F. Coverdale of Cawston. In 2010, the committee were delighted to be informed that further bids were successful from Biffaward, Heritage Lottery Fund, Geoffry Watling Charity and the Town Close Trust. Jayne Andrew was appointed in October 2011, and work began to complete the internal work.

The opening exhibition is all about celebrations and events in Aylsham from 1800s to the present day. The exhibition uses scans of documents from the archives, and also lots of the photographs from the photographic archive. A data projector and screen allows for a constant display of films or photographs to complement the exhibition. The exhibition covers all the major events that have been celebrated in the town, from the Derby to the wedding of William and Catherine. Some of the Masque of Anne Boleyn display is also kindly on loan from Blickling Hall, with some of the costumes also on display courtesy of Peter Purdy. There is also a children's quiz basket to help younger visitors explore the exhibition.

The biggest draw for many of the visitors on Saturday was the ability to browse the photographic archive on the two ipads owned by the centre. Guests were able to browse photos from areas of interest to them, many finding pictures of their own houses, or even themselves! Even those who were initially nervous of the technology found them easy to use and found the collection of photographs fascinating.

The day was a very relaxed and enjoyable one, with many favourable comments and reactions to the materials on display, the interior of the building and the visibility of the archive material. Work now continues to decide on future themes and to work with local schools to develop further learning opportunities.

Thanks must go to the committee for having the determination to see the project through to this point. Thanks must also go to all at the town archives for their support, and for their hard work in maintaining the archives so that there is such an interesting range of material for people of the town to view.

The centre will be open every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 10.30–3.30 pm, and hopefully the first Saturday of every month. Volunteers are always welcome! We hope to welcome lots of people through the doors in the coming weeks and months.

The centre will continue to house a range of themed displays to exhibit materials from the archives, and will work with schools and community groups to develop learning opportunities for all. 07919962814  
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Photos courtesy Derek Lyons



