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Front cover: Kirstead Hall

Back cover: Spot the Feature Quiz. Answers on page 120.

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This has been a very successful year for the Society as indicated by the reports for the AGM included in this issue and the individual accounts of visits during the summer and the lectures in the Autumn.

We are sorry that Peter Pink and Jean McChesney have felt it is time to retire from the Committee. We are most grateful to Ian McManus for taking on the role of Treasurer vacated by Peter. We are also very pleased to welcome Geoffrey Sadler to the Committee with his expertise in IT. We also record with sadness in this issue the passing of Valerie Belton, who over many years contributed a great deal to the Society and its publications.

The small research group working on the Aylsham Navigation is now submitting final text of the book in preparation for marking the centenary of the Great Flood in August 2012. Two short pieces reflecting facets of that are included here. We are most grateful to Dr Sarah Spooner and Dr Jon Gregory from the School of History at UEA for tutoring the project and taking on the editing. They also gave a brilliant series of lectures on *East Anglia in the Eighteenth Century*, a pertinent background to the researches on the Navigation and of much general interest. We extend our thanks to our evening lecturers and all the contributors to the Journal. Derek Lyons kindly took the photos for the *Spot the Feature Quiz*.

Please see the Notices at the end of this issue and the insert in which Jim Pannell requests you to notify him by the end of January if you would like to come to the Social Event in March.

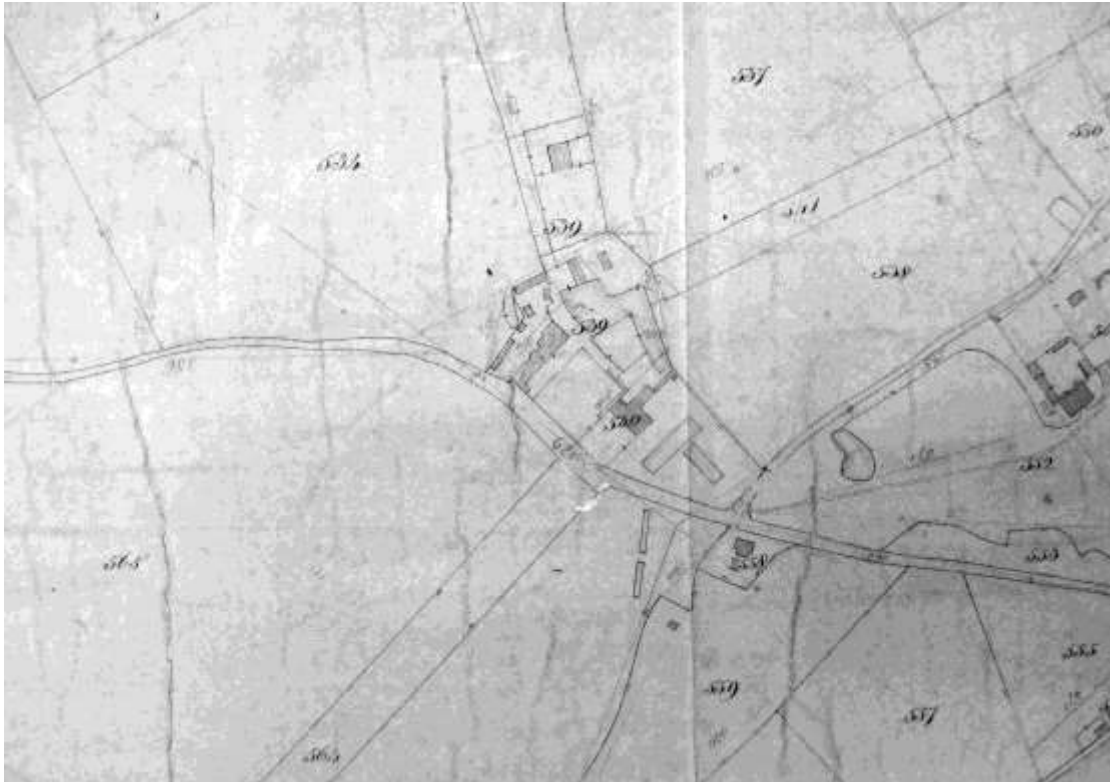
### **3. The Later History of Aylsham Old Hall**

#### **Maggie and William Vaughan-Lewis**

##### **The Old Hall estate**

When John Hobart, Earl of Buckinghamshire, bought the Old Hall from Thomas Wyndham in 1751, the conveyance gave a full description of the estate as formerly held by Baispoole and the Wyndham family.<sup>i</sup> The Old Hall was in fact a secondary part of the deal, the much larger Erpingham manor commanding most of the £6,300 paid. The mansion house, barn, stables, outhouses, gardens and orchards came with 145½ acres of land, each close of land, meadow and pasture being described. The house and its immediate surroundings totalled 3 acres. The two fields at the rear of the house, which were largely arable but with an orchard in between, added about 20 acres.<sup>ii</sup> 10 acres of meadow were next to the yards and large fields, and a further 30 arable acres lay on the same side of the road.<sup>iii</sup>

The remainder of the lands lay across the Blickling Road and stretched all the way up to ‘Able Heath’, bounded by Heydon Road and the Blickling parish boundary. Few of these closes had specific names (just acreages), which is consistent with old open field land enclosed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the ‘Walk’ was identified, with ‘Pond Meadow’ next door and a close at the ‘flash pit’. The lane earlier known as Brabon’s Lane or Ride was still there but now unnamed. Just 4 acres of the estate lay elsewhere in Aylsham: Burgh Bridge meadow in the use of Edmund Jewell gent. The Hall abuttals show that Edmund Cotter gent then lived in what is now known as Peterson’s House. It would be a few years yet before the Peterson family would acquire Aylsham Wood manor and install Benjamin, the younger son, in Peterson’s House. Interestingly, much later when West Lodge was sold in 1817, Petersons Lane was known as Dirty Lane, presumably always a muddy route. The ‘common pasture’ land opposite the Hall, still grazed by sheep today, was called The Old Market Common.<sup>iv</sup>



Section of Aylsham tithe map of 1840 centred on Old Hall

### **First tenants: 1751–1819**

With the ownership firmly in the hands of the Blickling estate, the Hall became home to a variety of well-to-do tenants, many linked by marriage. Over the years the farmland and house would be let or sublet separately making interpretation of the few surviving sources more complex.

As we have seen in the last article, the leaseholder in 1751 was widow Catherine Scott. Catherine was a local girl, daughter of John Thompson of Burgh. She had married Francis Scott in Aldborough in June 1704, the son of Francis and Lucy Scott of Camberwell, south London.<sup>v</sup> The Scotts were a long-established family of lawyers and owners of manors in Camberwell, with Lucy being the only heiress of her father Peter Vancourt a London merchant.<sup>vi</sup> Catherine had no brother and she and Francis had no children. In 1714 Thompson made his nephew, Robert Gallant of Aldborough, the main heir to his substantial property including a malthouse and watermill at Burgh. When Francis died in

December 1740, he left £200 to Robert, by then a physician in Yarmouth.<sup>vii</sup>

Catherine Scott lived on at the Old Hall until she died in 1759. The residue of her lease of the house and her own property in Horsey were left to her executor, the Revd Thomas Gallant of Blickling.<sup>viii</sup> Catherine made a number of other generous bequests including £200 and his choice of her books to Peter Baret esq of Horstead, an active JP in the area for years and Sheriff for the County in 1744. Intriguingly she also left him her ‘water engine’. If this was at Aylsham (rather than at Horsey) perhaps it was used to manage the water flows around the water courses that almost encircled the south and eastern sides of the Old Hall.

Thomas Gallant was Robert’s younger brother and had been Rector of Blickling (and Burgh) since 1733. He married Dey Jewell, a daughter of Aylsham attorney Edmund Jewell, in Burgh in 1736.<sup>ix</sup> She had 10 children, 6 of whom died in infancy leaving only four daughters. In 1757 Thomas was still described as of Blickling, presumably living in the Rectory, but on inheriting the Old Hall lease the family clearly moved in. Having paid the Old Hall rates for 1760–61, he made his will in October 1761 as ‘of Aylsham’. Dey, presumably, had lived in the Old Hall before, when her father leased the house between 1727 and 1731. Thomas died at 65 in November 1761 and Dey left the Old Hall for another home in Aylsham, living another 35 years.<sup>x</sup>

## **George Hunt Holley**

The Hall now continued to be home to a sequence of professional men, in particular lawyers and clerics. From 1762 to 1788 Aylsham attorney George Hunt Holley leased the property and paid the rates. He was agent and lawyer for William Windham of Felbrigg and may previously have acted for Thomas Wyndham of Cromer/Clearwell. Sapwell says he was born 1725 in East Tuddenham but was orphaned soon afterwards. While living with his grandmother in Holt, he attended Gresham School and at her death in 1744 became apprenticed to Edmund Jewell attorney of Aylsham his guardian.<sup>xi</sup> In June 1746 in Blickling he married another of Edmund’s daughters – Amy – and settled at Hill House, Aylsham as a solicitor, working with Edmund. Amy died in April 1748, a few days after the death of their infant daughter Amy, and George remarried a

further three times.<sup>xii</sup> By 1762 he and his growing family were living in the Old Hall, his widowed sister-in-law Dey having moved out.

At Jewell's death in 1770, Holley succeeded to the practice and in 1775 John Hogg, of a prosperous King's Lynn merchant family, joined him as junior partner. Hogg bought West Lodge, a fine house next to the Old Hall.<sup>xiii</sup> Tradition says that Hogg living in such a grand house at the age of 25 prompted Holley in 1787 to build, at great expense, Blickling Lodge (now Burebank) on the Ingworth Road. Certainly he left the rented Old Hall in 1788, but thirteen years seems too long a period to wait just to outdo Hogg. Holley could have afforded the £5,000 to build his substantial house within three years of Hogg's arrival, for in September 1778 George married his fourth and final wife Martha Rush in Catton. Martha was the daughter of the Revd John Rush of Baconsthorpe and sister of the Revd William Barker Rush, Rector of Heydon and Itteringham.<sup>xiv</sup> As the last of the Rush and Barker families, having the previous year buried her brother in Baconsthorpe, she was an extraordinarily wealthy 65 year-old spinster. A contemporaneous letter suggests this was a marriage of convenience – wealth for George and care for Martha. Martha Patteson's letter to John Patteson of 20<sup>th</sup> October 1778:

You are to know that Mr Holly is commenced gentleman by having married Miss Rush of Catton, a spinster of about 65 years of age. She is said to be paralectick from head to foot. But never mind that, she has a fortune of £60,000 and has given him £15,000, and if he makes a kind and loving husband she will give him £15,000 more. NB there has been two servants turned away for laughing at the bride. No objection to a little scandal or ridicule when people act in a manner to make themselves fair objects for it.<sup>xv</sup>

The arrangement presumably worked well; the couple lived in the Old Hall and then Blickling Lodge until George's death in 1798.

During 1790 and 1791 George Hunt Holley and the Earl of Buckinghamshire had a long-running dispute over both Blickling and Aylsham poor rate assessments.<sup>xvi</sup> Holley's new house, of course, lay in Blickling parish but he had pieces of land in Aylsham. He thought the assessment on his lands was too high and that the Earl of

Buckinghamshire was paying too little. In March 1790 Holley also was planning to enclose some meadow against the Earl's wishes and this may have added to his resentment. Robert Copeman, the Earl's steward, commented that month that Holley 'will not settle the poor rate business in an amicable manner'. Although little Aylsham evidence survives, the two rate appeals probably ran together. He took the Blickling overseers to appeal sessions three times, claiming irregularities in the rate-making and the rate was quashed in April and July 1790. He tried to appeal again in October but the matter went to arbitration. Copeman thought Holley was being 'malicious' and 'he must not expect to tyrannize over all the world with impunity'. Valuations were carried out. Copeman warned Holley he could only get at most 2s 6d improvement (per month seems likely) and would not recover his legal costs before both he and his son would die! Copeman's forecast was right; the Aylsham poor rate books show that the Earl of Buckinghamshire's rate remained unchanged and Holley's actually went up by 1s 10d. In Blickling both lost out as the arbitrators' re-assessment reported in Jan 1791 pushed the Earl's up from £500 to £598 and George's from £80 to £87. In addition he had to pay £21 in costs! His partner and old neighbour John Hogg also thought the rate 'illegal' and the Aylsham officers' conduct 'unjustifiable' but he felt his position as JP prevented him taking the matter to the Sessions.<sup>xvii</sup>

Holley's will left Martha a life interest in the majority of his extensive properties (probably largely acquired with her wealth or brought by her to the marriage).<sup>xviii</sup> Martha died two years later in 1800, leaving all her personal estate to the three children of her husband's cousin and son-in-law John Holley.<sup>xix</sup> John Holley had married George's daughter Elizabeth and they had produced what seem to be the first, or possibly only, grandchildren for George prior to his death: George Hunt, Martha and Ann.<sup>xx</sup> After George moved to his new house, John and Elizabeth moved into the Old Hall, taking over the last few years of his father-in-law's lease. Between 1789 and September 1792, John paid the rates.

## **Robert Copeman**

At this time it is not clear where Robert Copeman, the Blickling steward was living. During the rates dispute George Holley accused Robert Copeman of not paying Blickling rates for a property he occupied.

Copeman noted that the property he was in belonged to the Earl and that the rates were therefore included in the Earl's overall assessment. It is likely that he occupied one of the smaller houses in the village near Blickling Hall. However, Copeman had his eye on a better house.

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1790 the Earl of Buckinghamshire signed a lease to Robert Copeman gent of Blickling of 'his messuage, houses, barns, and lands, etc in Aylsham', the Old Hall for 21 years at £140 per year rent.<sup>xxi</sup> However the lease was not to start until 10<sup>th</sup> October 1792 presumably reflecting the end of John Holley's lease. There is a curious note in Copeman's notebook that he persuaded the Earl to sign. Copeman was apparently afraid of being thought responsible for 'Mr Holley' not getting the 'new lease of the farm'. Was John negotiating a second lease? And did Copeman intervene, hoping to have it for himself?<sup>xxii</sup> Holley, in preparation for having to leave the Old Hall, took on a similarly sized house and farm in Aylsham by March 1792 and paid double rates that year.<sup>xxiii</sup> Copeman was paying for the Old Hall by March 1793. Holley stayed in Aylsham, serving as Deputy Lieutenant for the County in 1798 and marrying thirdly, in June 1801, Sarah Addison, daughter of the Rector of Saxthorpe. He was Guardian of the Poor in Aylsham in 1803 but he and Sarah later moved to his original home parish of Holme-next-the-Sea.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Copeman's farming lease is unremarkable but it is rare to find the lease term starting more than a few weeks or months after the document was signed. Does this almost two year gap imply that the house was not ready to be occupied? The start of a new lease for a new tenant was often the point at which house upgrades were done. Might it date when the changes were made to alter accommodation on the upper floor and in the attics?

John Maddison, who knows the Blickling estate well, is of the view that the changes to the Old Hall might as easily date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the early 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>xxv</sup> The panelling used to divide the upstairs saloon and turn it into a bedroom may well have been 18<sup>th</sup> century. The major changes to most of the windows could be of the 1790s and the arching of the top of the front door and the attic work are both hard to pin down but again could be late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The alterations to the house included a Welsh slate roof and it seems that the pitch of the roof was lowered. This would have been a major undertaking and would have



involved some considerable time to accomplish. While the new pitch might have been deemed more pleasing it seems unlikely to have been done for aesthetic reasons, but rather would have been the result of major damage to the timbers. But the opportunity may have been taken to create more habitable space in the attics – traditionally done for nursery space and for servants.

As these changes are all consistent with such a date, Robert Copeman senior was probably responsible for the modifications to the Old Hall at the time of taking on his lease. Having been steward of the Blickling estate for 21 years, he would have had sufficient influence with the Earl of Buckinghamshire to argue for an upgrade of a house now 100 years of age, possibly no longer in good repair and certainly with some features, such as the mullioned windows, now seeming decidedly old-fashioned. It seems unlikely that previous tenants would have made the case for improvements and the apparent hiatus around the departure of Holley and the arrival of Copeman hints at a letting void which would have enabled the substantial and disruptive changes to be made. While, from an architectural standpoint, the changes to the building could have been made over the following 20 years or so, there is no sign (in the poor rates) of the house being empty again for the extended period needed for structural modifications.

Robert may also have been preparing for his future: his master was nearly 70 and not in great health. His plan was timely as the Earl died in 1793. In his notebook, two documents show Copeman's desire to improve the Old Hall property.<sup>xxvi</sup> In March 1793 Colonel Harbord, the late Earl's son-in-law, now Blickling's owner, signed a permit allowing the ploughing of land not covered by the lease:

Robert Copeman of Aylsham being desirous of changing the situation of the orchard in his occupation, I hereby give my licence and consent that he may throw the present orchard into the inclosure at the back of his garden and keep the same on plow tilth, together with that inclosure so as the same be treated as the rest of the arable land of the farm in his occupation. Provided that the said Robert Copeman do inclose with a good fence and keep and leave the same in repair, a proper orchard out of the aforesaid inclosure near the said garden, or out of the Pond Piece on the opposite side across the road and plant the same at his own expence.

On examination these two sites were not found proper for an orchard and in December 1795 a follow-up licence allowed Copeman to replant the original site after first ploughing it to improve the condition of the soil. He was also given permission to fence it to prevent damage to the young trees by cattle on the field.<sup>xxvii</sup> It appears that this had been Baispoole's large orchard and that after 100 years the trees were in such poor condition that re-planting was required to regenerate productivity. That Robert Copeman argued for improvements to the orchard at the back of the Hall is consistent with him already having 'improved' the house itself.

His wish to retire to a fine house may have been also to please his wife 'Kitty' Turner, a well-connected young lady whom he had married by licence on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1771 in St James Westminster. The couple had only one son, Robert Copeman later the banker of Aylsham.<sup>xxviii</sup> The young man had been articled as a solicitor with Mr Smyth in East Dereham where he was still living in May 1793. Robert senior had been the chief steward for the Manor of Aylsham Lancaster for some years and Thomas Smyth, his deputy, had held the courts for him. Robert junior appears as the deputy steward in 1792, presumably now 21 and at the end of his training. Robert senior stepped down the next year and his son became steward of the manor and, at least briefly, agent for the Blickling estate. They may have lived together in the Old Hall although Robert junior may have moved into the Bank House after 1800. Robert Copeman senior died in 1803 and his son succeeded to the lease of the Old Hall. It seems likely that Katherine, Robert senior's widow, continued to live with her son until her death in 1832.<sup>xxix</sup> It is clear that Robert junior renewed the lease on the Old Hall in 1813 since he continued to farm its lands and others of the Blickling estate for very many years. Robert junior married in 1815 and started a large family.

His neighbour, John Hogg who had been partner to the Copemans in the legal practice, died unmarried in October 1815. West Lodge, that fine house, was soon the topic of interest. John's executors, four of his nephews, decided not to sell the house at first and it was advertised in September 1817. Applicants were to apply 'personally to Mr Robert Copeman of Aylsham'.

One prospective tenant, Mrs Mary Preston, thought that ‘an odd condition’. She had met Copeman before, a ‘queer man, whose manners disgusted me on enquiring about his own House, *ci devant* occupied by the Bedingfields’. From her description Robert Copeman junior appears to have previously advertised a house of his own and she had taken a great dislike to him. Her friend William Gunn went to see Copeman for her. His reply unfortunately has not survived but Mary’s letter of October 1817 makes clear that Gunn shared her opinion:

...your amusing account of your Aylsham Embassy... of your ‘tete a tete’ with Mr Copeman and I am at a loss which is preeminent, this gents vulgarity, presumption or insolence, not forgetting the exorbitance of his expectation for Premises so totally ineligible to any Tenant; as being I trust very unlikely to become a pleasant neighbour to such a landlord shall never again apply to him.<sup>xxx</sup>

Copeman may have been deliberately difficult with enquirers, for the same month he bought West Lodge for himself.<sup>xxxi</sup> The property is described in detail, with its large garden and shrubberies and fields on the other side of the Blickling Road, on his admission to Aylsham Lancaster manor the following year. He did not rush in to occupy the house; in 1818 Copeman paid the poor rates on his new property, but West Lodge itself was shown as empty. The house may have needed redecoration and updating. In 1819 he was in but still paying rates for Old Hall. As we shall see, Copeman retained the use of the Old Hall lands for himself while subletting the house.

## **Tenants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a boarding school**

The Hall was let to a succession of clerics, with just 2½ acres of garden and orchard. The run of tenants can be traced from trade directories, census returns and poor rates, where the rates for the house and farmland were now separately shown. However, the £25 valuation of the house seems to have been a standard figure for quite a number of good houses without much land and so the Old Hall cannot readily be identified from the poor rates alone.

By September 1820 the Old Hall house was occupied by the Revd George Jarvis. That the Old Hall subsequently had a succession of short-lease tenants for many years makes it unlikely that expensive work would have been done to the Hall at the outset of or during this period. The suggested circumstantial case for repairs in about 1791 is quite robust although there is another possibility that the roof and attics may have been changed around 1820.

At the census of 1821 Robert Copeman was in 'School House Lane' – ie in West Lodge and Jarvis was in the Old Hall. George was, from 1813, successively curate at Banningham, Tuttington and Swanton Abbott and from 1826 vicar of Tuttington.<sup>xxxii</sup> So in 1821 he was still a young man in the early stages of his clerical career. But the entry for Jarvis is very strange. Only one 'family' is noted, yet there were 17 males and 8 females. By contrast Robert Copeman now with eight children, wife Anna, almost certainly his mother and perhaps four or so servants only managed 16, the next highest total in the whole of Aylsham. George only had three daughters and a son. Who were all these people in the Old Hall, particularly the large number of men?

The answer has been traced through the newspaper. George was born to William and Diana Jarvis in September 1784 in Wymondham where by July 1808 he had started a school.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In *The Norfolk Chronicle* on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1808 he announced that the business of his Boarding School 'will commence on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July'; terms were 25 guineas per annum for Classical Scholars and 18 for English Scholars.<sup>xxxiv</sup> After July 1809 he stopped advertising. While Jarvis's school may have continued it is at least possible that he joined the Revd Roger Buston in his 'Latin School' in Wymondham.<sup>xxxv</sup> In January 1812 George married 20 year-old Rhoda Crafer of East Dereham; one of the witnesses was George's younger sister Ann Jarvis. After George was made curate of Banningham in 1813 he spent the rest of his life in the Aylsham area.<sup>xxxvi</sup> George and Rhoda started having children: Rhoda, Harriet and Charlotte (when they were still living in Banningham) and George in 1819 after the family had moved to live in Aylsham at the Old Hall.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Three more children were born in Aylsham between 1821 and 1826: Elizabeth, Caroline and Anna. Further children, including Melissa in 1833, were born after they moved into their long-term home at Buxton Vicarage.

To supplement his curate's pay, George Jarvis set up a boarding school in the Old Hall from 1819 to 1825 as shown by advertisements in *The Chronicle*.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In January 1819 he advertised his 'Grammar School' in Aylsham: informing 'the public that his school will be reopened for the reception of pupils on the 18<sup>th</sup> inst. An English Assistant wanted'. The wording suggests that the school might have started during 1818 although he could have been referring back to his school at Wymondham. On 17<sup>th</sup> July 1819 Jarvis noted his Grammar School starting the new term. On 8<sup>th</sup> January 1820 Miss Jarvis, presumably George's sister Ann, entered the fray:

#### Ladies Boarding School, Aylsham

Miss Jarvis respectfully informs her friends and the public that her school will be reopened on Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> instant.

NB Young gentlemen under eight years of age boarded and prepared for Grammar Schools.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1821 Jarvis again advertised his Grammar School. It is clear that by the time of the census of 1821 George and his sister were running a flourishing educational establishment based at the Old Hall. The numbers living at the Old Hall at the census imply that substantial dormitory accommodation would have been needed for the girls and the young boys. It is therefore possible that the work to the attics was undertaken around 1819. By July 1823 George Jarvis was charging fees of 30 guineas per annum for Latin and Greek pupils. French was taught by Monsieur de la Fleurière of Norwich. By 1824 in addition to board and tuition in the classics, pupils were taught 'Mathematics, History and Geography'. By 1825 land surveying was offered together with the 'most useful branches of Mathematics'. However, no further advertisements were run as in 1826 Jarvis was made vicar of Tuttington and curate of Buxton and the family moved into Buxton Vicarage. The Jarvis school in Aylsham was probably closed. In January 1826 a certain L Wortley offered a limited number of just three boarding places at his Aylsham Academy; it seems that he wished to fill part of the vacuum left by Jarvis's departure. Wortley soon moved to Roughton.

In 1822 'Reverend John Dent Parmeter' was in 'Blickling Road' and seems as a result a possible for Old Hall.<sup>xxxix</sup> While he may have lived and worked in Old Hall it is equally possible that he was elsewhere in

Blickling Road, perhaps at Knoll House. He might have taught at another school and lived at his father's large house in Cromer Road.<sup>xi</sup>

Robert Copeman was still the head tenant of Old Hall in the 1830s; he continued to sublet the Hall garden and orchard to a succession of clerics, keeping its farm lands in his own use throughout.<sup>xli</sup> By 1836 the Revd Peter Pering lived in 'Blickling Road'. He was curate of Aylsham and Oulton in the 1830s and seems to have been the younger brother of the Revd Benedict Pering, Aylsham's vicar, both of an Exeter clerical family. Peter and his wife Mary had at least one child born in Aylsham, Sarah in 1837. Wright's map of 1839 lists Pering still in the Old Hall and its large orchard. However as the 1840 tithe apportionment showed the Blickling estate as owners but listed no occupier, it seems there was a gap between tenants.

At census time the following year another cleric lived in the house: Frederick Hildyard and his wife. Visiting them was his younger brother James who became Rector of Ingoldsby Lincolnshire and appears as a classical scholar in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>xlii</sup> Frederick moved to Swannington sometime after 1840 when he became Rector there. Poor rates for October 1842 to March 1843 show that Hildyard had previously occupied the house and gardens at an estimated rent of £33 15s against a rateable value still of £25.<sup>xliii</sup> However in all three entries the property is marked 'empty' and the 1845 directory is unclear about who was in the Hall. But by 1850 Mrs Charlotte White had arrived. Her husband, the Revd John Neville White rector of Tivetshall, had died in 1845, and Charlotte may have moved with her daughters to Aylsham shortly after his death. They and their servants remained in the house until 1853. *White's Directory* of 1854 and *Craven's Directory* of 1856 both show the Revd Samuel Hobson in Blickling Road. Hobson had just become vicar of Tuttington, after George Jarvis's death, a post he held for 24 years.

By the late 1850s the persistent leasing to clerics ended. In 1858 it seems Henry Bidwell esquire was in what *Kelly's* described as 'The Manor House' on Blickling Road. This cannot have meant West Lodge which is always identifiable by its long-standing residents George Copeman and his daughter Anna Rawlinson. It is not clear from the directory entries which Henry Bidwell this was; there were branches of the family in Norwich and North Walsham and elsewhere, all using

Henry as a frequent first name. In 1861 none of the census entries seems to relate to the Old Hall indicating the house was unoccupied, at least on that night. However, in 1868 James Gay esq was paying £333 rent for Old Hall and its farm; he and his family were living in the house with several servants at the time of the 1871 census. It appears that his son James remained there into the mid-1880s. A respected JP and Deputy Lieutenant, James Gay jnr, shown by *Kelly's* in 1879 again as at 'the Manor House', was also of Thurning Hall. The farm land was rented separately by 1879 and run thereafter with the estate's other Aylsham farm, Valley farm.<sup>xliv</sup>

At some point between 1883 and 1888 the Gay family moved out and Thomas Copeman, the youngest son of Robert the banker, moved into Old Hall with his third wife Mariana (née Shuckburgh) at a rent of £40 a year. In 1891 he was 65 but he had four children aged from 2 to 7. He lived long enough to see in the new millennium. By 1901 his widow was still in the house with their children, the eldest son Robert following the family career as a bank clerk. Two of the five sons died in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Marianna died in 1908.

The last hundred years has often seen the Old Hall home to the National Trust's staff: Lord Lothian's head gardener Herbert George Ocle used the address between 1903 and 1912 but the house was let to barrister William Webb Follett in 1908. Although Capt Robert Spencer Follett (later DSO) listed the Old Hall as one of his homes in 1910, unfortunately the 1911 census lists only a cook and a servant looking after the 17 rooms. From the 1930s to the late 1970s the Trust's area agents Nicholas Corbin and Michael Rogers and their families enjoyed residence. More latterly a wine business was run there but the recent creation of a long leasehold means the house is once again home to a family. Over this time much has changed: the Welsh slate roof was only replaced with pantiles in 1950-51. The Edwardian timber summerhouse at the head of the canal was rethatched in 1972 and the current owners have recently recreated the original in brick. In 1963 some work was done to brickwork around the front door and on the south wall of the house but this did not materially alter the appearance of the house. In other respects the front view of the house today is much as it was by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Recently restored to a high level internally, the

partitioning in the saloon has been removed, once again opening up the grand room that Miles Baispoole created in 1686.

## Sources

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<sup>i</sup> NRO, NRS 12535, 27E1. NRS 12525, 12529 and 12532 also relate to the title. The transaction was just one part of the Earl's arrangements to spend the £35,000 that he had inherited from Sir John Maynard, contingent on its being invested in real estate.

<sup>ii</sup> Field 541 in middle of 537 and 538 on the 1840 tithe map TNA, IR30/23/22.

<sup>iii</sup> Tithe numbers 535 Great Meadow, 533 Lower Nine Acres, 534 Stable Close

<sup>iv</sup> NRO, NRS 16625 This seems to be tithe number 559, by then owned by Robert Copeman. It was not part of the Old Hall estate in 1751 although the 2 acre Pond Meadow that was part of Old Hall must once have been part of the same common land. Between 1817 and 1840 this land was taken over by the Copeman family as part of their holding around West Lodge. This seems to be Aylsham's only late 'enclosure' and was probably done by Robert Copeman with Lady Suffield's agreement. Court books do not survive for this period.

<sup>v</sup> A future article on Francis Scott is in preparation.

<sup>vi</sup> MI in St Michael; E Farrer, *A Description of all Coats of Arms on brasses ...*, 1889; HE Malden, *A History of the County of Surrey, Volume 4*, 1912

<sup>vii</sup> Dorothy Thompson had married Henry Gallant NRO, ANW will 1713-14, fo 416; Henry Gallant of Aldborough, grocer, will proved April 1725, left all to wife Dorothy, NRO, ANF will 1724-26, 132/376, NRO, WAL 1512.

<sup>viii</sup> NRO, ANW will 1758-59, fo 387 (1759) no 99. Farrar has 1769 in error.

<sup>ix</sup> The name is variously spelt Dey and Dye. Edmund Jewell of Brancaster married Amitie Dye of Aylsham at the Cathedral in 1713.

<sup>x</sup> NRO, TRAF 381-2 89x5, ANW will 1762-63, fo 84 (1762) no 43, widow Dey Gallant bur Blickling 1797; Norwich Chronicle Apr 17 1762.

<sup>xi</sup> W Rye in *Norfolk Families* gives George's parents as Francis Holley of Holme-next-the-sea and his wife of 1722 Frances Hunt, daughter and heiress of James Hunt of Sharrington and Letheringsett.

<sup>xii</sup> His second wife Ann, mother of most of his surviving children, was buried at Blickling in 1766. A son George in his will of 1778, named his siblings Elizabeth, William, John, Edward, James and Mary Ann – NRO, AYL 596. George married thirdly Rachel Cubitt at Erpingham June 1769.

<sup>xiii</sup> A future article will cover Hogg and West Lodge.



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<sup>xiv</sup> William's high-handed behaviour is noted in *Good Neighbours*.

<sup>xv</sup> D Cubitt, AL Mackley & RG Wilson eds, NRS Volume 67, *The Great Tour of John Patteson 1778–79*, 2003.

<sup>xvi</sup> NRO, MC 3/365; C/S1/15 1790-1792.

<sup>xvii</sup> Letter to Walpole February 1792, NRO, BUL 16/12 705x2.

<sup>xviii</sup> At her death they would pass to his eldest surviving son James Hunt Holley, TNA, PCC will 1798, PROB 11/1315.

<sup>xix</sup> NRO, NCC will 1800, Harwood 122.

<sup>xx</sup> W Rye gives John Holley as son of John Holley of Holme by his wife Jane Smith of Lynn. John junior was born in 1761. John, in early 1796, married for the second time to Mary Anne Sneyd of a substantial family of Ashcombe Park near Leek in Staffordshire. Their daughter Penelope subsequently married her cousin Revd John Sneyd. AC Fox-Davies, *Armorial Families ...*, 1929; websites on the Sneyd family and Ashcombe Park; IGI.

<sup>xxi</sup> NRO, NRS 12099, 27B2.

<sup>xxii</sup> NRO, MC3/365.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The other house/farm was 'late Thomas Morrills' previously of Jarrett Dashwood.

<sup>xxiv</sup> TNA, PCC will 1813, PROB 11/1547; Lt Col JR Harvey, *Records of the Norfolk Yeomen Cavalry ...*, 1908.

<sup>xxv</sup> Email exchange between Maddison and the authors.

<sup>xxvi</sup> NRO, MC 3/365.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The orchard, duly fenced off, can be seen on the 1840 tithe map as plot 541.

<sup>xxviii</sup> See Roger Polhill's article ALHS Vol 8 no 8; Robert junior's birth, probably in London, has not been found. In a draft letter of 1789 Copeman gives his son's date of birth as 1<sup>st</sup> October 1770, a surprising error. Copeman senior was a bachelor when married - Lambeth Palace Library, Vicar-General marriage allegation, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 1771.

<sup>xxix</sup> She does not appear separately anywhere in the poor rate books but was of Aylsham when she made her will (NRO, NCC will 1832, Cooke 569); Katherine acquired the lease of the manor of Pulham by 1805. Her son was her steward there and became lord of the manor in 1832.

<sup>xxx</sup> NRO, WGN 1/6/109, 1/6/110.

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> NRO, NRS 16625, 36G dates the indenture to 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 1817.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Aylsham Local History Society, ed T Mollard, *Aylsham in 1821*, 1997.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> CCED; Venn; parish registers.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *The Chronicle* ran a range of advertisements every January and July announcing the new term of both free grammar schools and paid-for establishments.

<sup>xl</sup> Buston was headmaster of this school for nearly 20 years before his death in 1817. Obituary *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1817. Jarvis later was a committed advertiser of his school and Buston in 1810–11 gave up his curacy at Barford just north of Wymondham in favour of Jarvis. Barford parish register shows the transition from Buston to Jarvis as officiating minister.

<sup>xli</sup> Venn; CCED online database; parish registers.

<sup>xlii</sup> Obituaries in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1853 (George senior was buried in Buxton in December 1852) and 1849 show that his cleric son, also George and who pre-deceased him, was his only surviving son. George junior, although ordained, became a teacher of mathematics at Queen's College Birmingham – J Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. George left his whole estate to his father in his PCC will made and proved in 1849, TNA, PROB 11/2103.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Small advertisements appear between January 1817 and January 1821 in *The Chronicle* by J Middleton noting new terms at the 'Aylsham Academy'. This was probably not Aylsham's long-standing free school but another in competition with Jarvis. Both advertised their Aylsham schools in July 1819.

<sup>xliiii</sup> He was not yet in fact ordained. *Pigot's* directories for 1822 & 1830; CCED and Venn show him Deacon in 1825; Priest in 1827 with curacies at Briston and Letheringsett in 1826; Rector of Alderford and Attleborough in 1844. Parmeter was still shown in Blickling Road in 1830 but not in 1836. He may have assisted with the teaching and then continued to run the school after Jarvis moved to Buxton but there is no corroborating evidence that young Parmeter was in Old Hall. Aylsham parish registers show him as officiating minister in 1831.

<sup>xliv</sup> Robert Parmeter's PCC will of 1831, TNA, PROB 11/1790, gives no further clue.

<sup>xlv</sup> NRO, MC 3/848, 715x7 Blickling rents for 1803-10, MC 3/368 rents for 1829-34 & MC 3/397, 506x8 rents for 1831-39 show by default that Robert Copeman remained the tenant of Old Hall for years after his move into West Lodge.

<sup>xlvi</sup> *ODNB* online.

<sup>xlvii</sup> NRO, C/GP 1/299.

<sup>xlviii</sup> The rentals show James Lee Case farming both followed by John Goulder, NRO, MC 3/408-19, 516x2.

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## **The Rivers, The Railway, and The Rain; The Flood of 1912**

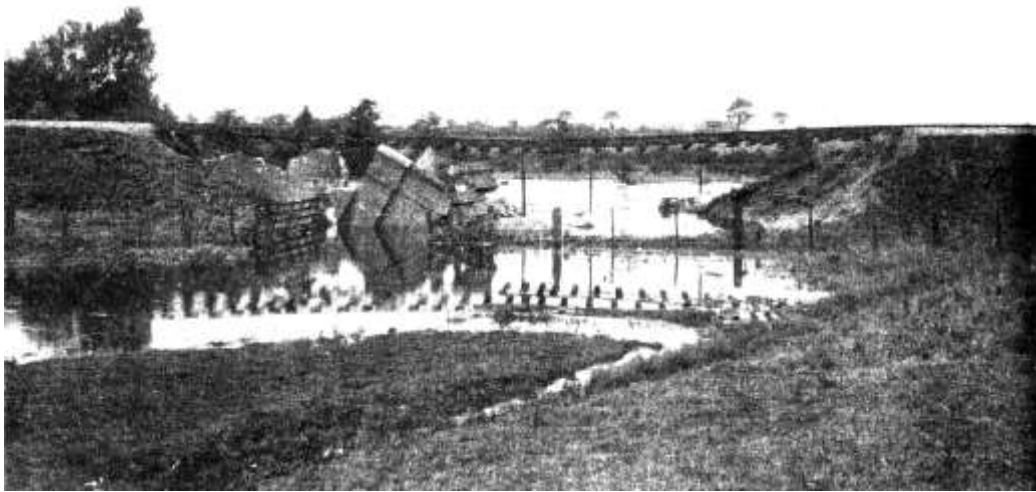
**Jim Pannell**

If you were able to follow the River Bure upstream, from Aylsham, you would pass Ingworth Mill, Blickling Mill, Itteringham Mill and then Saxthorpe Mill. You would then pass through Little London before turning south west towards Thurning. Glyn and Brenda Sutton took me deep in to their wood in the area known as ‘The Moor’. There they showed me the Bure running through the trees in a channel that had been dug to replace the old river route, of which damp sections could still be seen. A little further on we came to a confluence. The River Bure flows from its source to the west from the Melton Constable Lake and streams beyond. The tributary stream named the Blackwater flows from the south-west from its source at Thurning Lake and streams beyond.

A few metres up the Blackwater we came to the remains of a bridge. In this peaceful spot deep in the woods, there was no house or other person in sight. The only sounds were birds singing, and Glyn’s Norfolk voice relaying to me the story that his father-in-law had told him – that this was the scene in 1912 of a catastrophe, and the source of ‘our Norfolk Tsunami’.

Now we come to the railway. The Midland and Great Northern Railway was built from Great Yarmouth, through Stalham, North Walsham, Aylsham, Corpusty, Little London and ... you have guessed? Yes, through Glyn’s wood and on to the railway town of Melton Constable, and Kings Lynn. The railway crossed the river Blackwater exactly where we were standing.

Ben Rust<sup>1</sup> says that six inches of rain fell on August 27<sup>th</sup> in this area; about a quarter of our annual rainfall. This was in addition to rain that had already fallen over a prolonged period. The railway bridge had a small culvert beneath to carry the flow of the River Blackwater. This became blocked, and the water backed up to Thurning Lake. The river at this point flows through a quite deep cut v-shaped valley with steep sides; unusual for this part of the world (see photo 4). It was easy to see how the water would form a huge ribbon lake, rather than flooding marshes and a flood plain, which is what would happen generally in Norfolk.



Blackwater Bridge after 1912 flood.



Repairing Blackwater Bridge

The pressure of the water burst through the embankment, destroying the bridge and leaving the railway line hanging over from each side. The surge created a huge wave which flooded in to the River Bure and downstream, destroying bridges at Corpusty and Saxthorpe. The first photo above shows the scene at the Blackwater bridge with the embankment breached, and huge pieces of broken embankment. The

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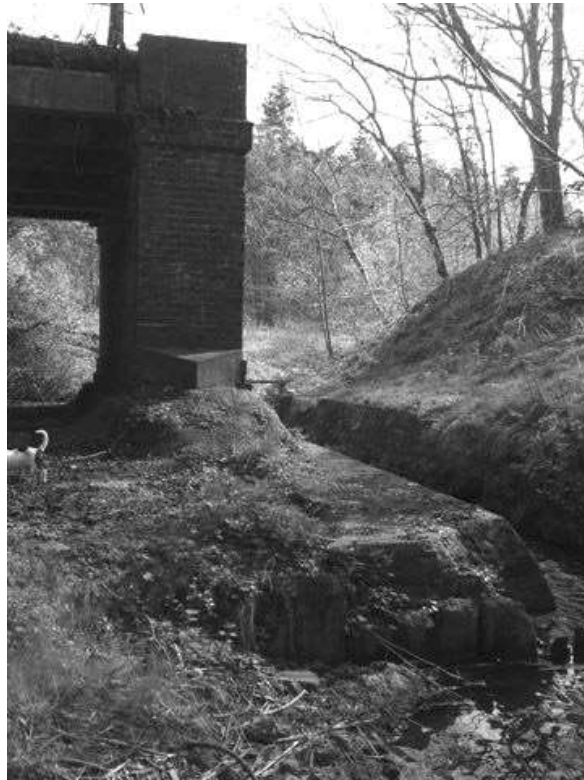
Bure surge was a disaster for the Navigation. Although already in its declining years, and unable to compete with rail, the Navigation commissioners could not obtain the necessary funding for repairs and the Navigation never re-opened. Many of the Bure bridges today, such as that near Saxthorpe Hall, are bridges rebuilt following that 1912 flood.

The remains of the Blackwater bridge are, in fact, the remains of the rebuilt bridge. A large overflow channel was built beneath the new bridge so that such a flood could never recur. The second photo above taken in late September 1912 shows the bridge under repair. It is a fascinating photograph, showing the temporary single track line on timber supports to the left, a steam crane, a stationary locomotive-type boiler, and a Beyer Peacock 4-4-0 locomotive on the ballast train. Note the large number of workmen around the site.

The bridge has now been dismantled for safety reasons, and the scene is natural and quiet, with no suggestion of the drama of 1912. But Glyn has seen the river in spate, and he could quite imagine the scene that must have unfolded at Blackwater Bridge – the source of the ‘Norfolk Tsunami’. He also had lots of thoughts about old friends, life in the army, children, politics, education, fly fishing, the credit crunch, The British Legion, turkeys, Norwich City, nurse Jenner, old Aylsham, gardening, marriage ... but hey Glyn – one thing at a time!

Interestingly, Ben Rust tells a very similar account of how the flood occurred at Aylsham; a story passed to him by his father. According to Ben’s account,<sup>3</sup> water backed up at the Drabblegate railway embankment. Eventually the embankment gave way, causing the great destructive flood down the Bure. I think the scene of this would have been the metal bridge that now spans the Bure and carries the Weavers Way footpath.

Now, did the flood from the Blackwater breach contribute to the breach at Drabblegate, or did it dissipate on the flood meadows through Irmingland, Itteringham, Blickling and Ingworth leaving the Aylsham breach as the main cause of the flood? Ben Rust observes that heavy rains since 1912 have resulted in vast areas of floodwater spreading across the meadows of the Bure Valley. It would be good to have a definitive account before we write the book on the Aylsham Navigation. If anyone has any more information, please contact me or the editor.



Remains of Blackwater Bridge

As a side note, these events must have made the railway engineers realise that their provision for the passage of floodwater through culverts and brick arch bridges was inadequate. The bridges could not cope with the upward pressure of the water, and the culverts must have quickly blocked. Most culverts and some brick arch bridges were replaced with metal bridges. One also wonders what the repair bill might have been, and whether these events contributed not only to the end of the Navigation, but to the demise of this lengthy, rural railway line which closed in 1959.

### **Sources and Acknowledgements.**

<sup>1</sup> Rust, B. (1986). Aylsham Rainfall. Aylsham Local History Society Journal 1: 118–120.

<sup>2</sup> Two photographs kindly loaned for copy by Mr and Mrs Sutton.

<sup>3</sup> Rust, B. (1988). The Great Rainstorm of 1912. Aylsham Local History Society Journal 2: 46–47.

Many thanks to Glyn and Brenda for a lovely woodland walk, and to them and Ben Rust for sharing their interest.

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**The Dydlers' Tea Meeting**

by **Diana Polhill**

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## SOCIETY NEWS

### Valerie Belton†



Valerie Ross Belton 5<sup>th</sup> July 1925 – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011

The funeral of Valerie Belton took place at St Lawrence Church Ingworth on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2011. Only a few members of the Society now remember Valerie, who was our second secretary for nine years from 1988. A local history group seemed a proper home for Valerie, who arranged many of the Society's early visits to notable sites around Norfolk.

Valerie was born in Norfolk in 1925 on a remote farm west of Kings Lynn in the Marshland, not the Fens, as she would insist. When she was eight she attended a boarding school in Hethersett and later The Cheltenham Ladies' College, eventually reading history at St Hilda's



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College, Oxford. After leaving Oxford, she first took a job at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. She soon discovered that a job in the Civil Service was not for her. She would regale visitors with amusing stories about her experiences there. She then returned to the West Country and began teaching at Westonbirt School. After a spell at Bromley High School for Girls she was appointed Head of History at Spalding High School and from there moved to West Bridgford in Nottingham as Deputy Head. Finally she was appointed Headmistress at Edgbaston High School for Girls in Birmingham. She remained there for twenty two years, imparting her ideals and insisting on high standards.

Valerie moved back to Norfolk on her retirement and went to live in Ingworth. The village was ideal for Valerie in many ways: it was near the coast and so she was able to pursue her main hobby of bird watching and it gave her the opportunity to follow her other interests and contribute to local affairs. She worshipped regularly at St Lawrence Church and became Secretary to the Parochial Church Council and wrote a guide to the church; she joined Ingworth Parish Council and became a governor of Erpingham Primary School, where she was regularly to be found hearing small children read. These visits clearly gave her great pleasure. For the school too, the 'Erpingham Voluntary Controlled School', she wrote a history. Valerie was not by background a local historian, but she gained expertise in this branch of history by attending weekends at Maddingly Hall, Cambridge. She also produced a number of articles for the Journal about different aspects of local history. In December 1982 she wrote an article about the 'Aylsham to Norwich to Cromer Turnpike' which she later expanded and published as a book.

Although Valerie never married, she clearly enjoyed the company of children and inspired affection. Her family, particularly her nieces and nephew, remember her with great fondness. Valerie was generous in spirit and independent minded, firm but kindly.

As with many of our members it is only after they have died that fragments of their interesting early lives are revealed.

**Ann Dyball & Geoffrey Gale**

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## Visit to Long Melford

by Gillian Shephard



We boarded the coach in the market place at 8.30 a.m. on 14 July. The weather was dismal-rainy and damp – but by the time we reached Long Melford it had cleared and mercifully remained fine for the rest of the day.

On our arrival at Holy Trinity Church we were given coffee and scones before the guided tour began. Our expert guide was Clive Paine, whom some of us had met on a previous outing.

We began our tour outside the church. This gave us a magnificent view of the 15<sup>th</sup> century building, with its flushwork decoration, its many windows, and the carved inscriptions below the clerestory that commemorate all the people who helped pay for the building of the church. Most notable are the members of the Clopton family, who have their own chapel and chantry chapel inside the church. We are urged to pray for the souls of all these benefactors, and we are also told what they had provided. The 15<sup>th</sup> century English was difficult to read from ground level; fortunately an excellent transcript was provided.

The Lady Chapel was built separately at the east end of the church. It was designed as a place of processional devotion on Marian feast days, so the central section contains the altar, and is surrounded by wide aisles. There are some wonderful carvings on the pillars of the chapel.



On entering the church, two things immediately strike you – the light coming through the glass in the many windows, and the immensity of the architecture. The first twelve piers in the nave are the oldest – 14<sup>th</sup> century – and the rest of the church was completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The oldest carving is a 14<sup>th</sup> century bas-relief in alabaster, depicting the Adoration of the Magi. In the north aisle is the only known example of a stained glass window depicting three hares, each with two ears, but only three ears between them – a symbol of the Trinity.

The Easter Sepulchre, in the north wall of the chancel to the left of the high altar, is also worth a mention. Being the holiest place in the church, John Clopton and his wife wished to be buried there. Their tomb lies facing upwards, and on the ceiling of the sepulchre is a medieval wall painting of the risen Christ – a very moving experience. The other side of the sepulchre opens into the Clopton Chantry Chapel, where a priest would live and sing daily masses for their souls.

There was so much of interest to see – the magnificent vaulted roof, many wonderful carvings in stone and wood, beautiful stained glass windows, etc. We could have stayed longer, but we had to fit in lunch somehow. There was a wide choice of pubs and cafes in the village, so we split up, and all managed to meet at the coach three-quarters of an hour later. The village is delightful – full of lovely old buildings. The site was occupied first by a Romano-British village. Flemish weavers – refugees – settled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the village grew rich during the cloth boom of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



Kentwell Hall, courtesy Judith & Patrick Phillipps.

KENTWELL HALL was a short coach journey away, north of the village, through an avenue of lime trees nearly a mile long. It is privately owned by Judith and Patrick Phillipps. After an introductory talk by Judith, we were free to explore as we wished. Peacocks strolling around set the atmosphere. The moated hall has been continuously occupied. John Clopton (!) began building in the 1490s; it was continued by his descendants in stages, and finished by about 1540, except for the top floor of the centre block, added in 1578.

The Moat House is part of the original house, and is a rare surviving example of a service building of that date, containing a dairy, a bake-house, a brew-house, and a solar on the first floor.

The tessellated courtyard in front of the house was designed by the owners as a striking maze in the form of a Tudor rose. The interior reflects the changes made by successive owners, and since 1971 Patrick and Judith have made a wonderful effort to renovate and restore the rooms, to great effect. Each room feels lived-in, and many interesting items of period furniture, together with some lovely paintings, have been incorporated.

They have spent much time landscaping the grounds and gardens. Kentwell has many fine trees – cedars, ancient yews, the limes in the avenue, a 1000 year old oak, etc. Judith has created some lovely topiary effects, including one border devoted to The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

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There is a walled garden, a sunken garden, a fishpond, an herb garden, a rose garden, a wildlife pond, and many shrubberies and wooded areas. Old outbuildings include a basket-maker's hut, an archer's hut, and a felter's hut. One interesting building is the Camera Obscura, which demonstrates how a camera lens works. It is fascinating to go inside, in the dark, and see the various views upside down on the walls.

There have been farm animals at Kentwell for hundreds of years. Evidence is found in the Domesday book. Now Kentwell is seeking to conserve Rare Breeds of Farm Animals. A new Home Farm is being developed based upon the early 19<sup>th</sup> century stables and the much older Dog Kennel Moats. There is an original 16<sup>th</sup> century cottage, and a great aisled barn of much earlier date. The other buildings have been built from scratch using traditional methods. The animals are all rare breeds – Norfolk Horn Sheep (the rarest in England), the Lincoln Longwool, the British White Cow, the Old English Goat, the grey Dorking Chicken, the Suffolk Punch, the Tamwoth Pig, etc. Fish are bred in the moat, and the dove-house has about 50 breeding pairs.

After a final cup of coffee in the stable-yard café and a final farewell to all the baby animals wandering about, we rejoined our coach and had a trouble-free journey back to Aylsham.

Many thanks to Ann Dyball for all the hard work she put in to organising this interesting and delightful outing.



Hare Window, Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford

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## VISIT TO KIRSTEAD HALL

by Claudia Pim



The sun shone as we approached Kirstead Hall along a modest gravel drive on the afternoon of 15 September. We gathered on the front lawn for a talk by the owner Dermot Murphy. He explained that he and his wife, Judy, had lived in the house for 32 years. Their son and his young family are also in residence so this is a real family home.

We were divided into two groups for the tour of the house and grounds. Before entering the house, we learnt from their hand-out that: *“The Hall is a pretty E plan Tudor/Jacobean house with a brick south front with blue brick diaper and three stepped gables. It has an attached dairy where Mr Murphy now restores fine furniture. In the eleventh century the site was on land belonging to the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. The Black Death affected the area badly and, after the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, the land was sold to speculators. In 1544 the site was bought by Thomas Godsolve, a lawyer. One of his grandsons, another Thomas, inherited the property in 1566 from his father, now ennobled, and it seems that he began building the house incorporating parts of an earlier building. Sir Thomas Spooner was the owner by 1626 and it appears that he enlarged the Hall further to its present form. There is a 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century dovecot to the south west. More recently, Edward Seago, the artist had his studio there.”*

Mr Murphy pointed out the ruddling (applied red colour) of the brickwork and a large cavity above the porch which may have been a Priests’ Hole or a depository for treasure. Inside the porch we were shown an apotropaic or good luck symbol – a circular mark.



Kirstead dovecot



Cock's head hinge

Despite the impressive façade, Kirstead Hall is only one room deep. Inside we saw 9" Tudor panements, a vast Tudor fireplace and noticeable subsidence of the window frames. We observed that all paintings and furniture in this hall were labelled and there were many scrapbooks and albums of great interest – some showing “the ugliest ancestors in Norfolk” according to Mrs Murphy. She explained that the Great Hall once had a superb fireplace but this had been acquired by Bernard Matthews for his home at Great Witchingham. We noted the dog-leg staircase leading up from the Great Hall, reckoned to be one of Norfolk’s best. We glimpsed the cellar with brick floors and lath and plaster walls where a bier would be kept, before moving into the still room with its pierced cupboards for food storage. We observed the cloudy, dappled panes in the diamond lights, and wall beams, bearing marks of tallow candle burns, which Mrs Murphy suspected had been re-cycled from elsewhere in the building.

We then entered a small dining room with truncated mullion windows before leaving the house to visit the dovecot. We learned that the earliest recorded dovecot was around 1000BC. The Normans brought them to England though Kirstead’s dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and actually has a very modern fibre glass cupola! Doves formed an important part of the domestic economy, producing meat, feathers for bedding and manure.



John Godsolve

The dovecot was built to house 450 nesting boxes. Originally, these were placed at ground level and upwards as the prevailing black rat (*Rattus rattus*) was an unthreatening vegetarian species. But with the advent of the carnivorous brown rat, boxes had to be placed higher. To collect the birds from these elevated boxes a circular spar and ladder contraption is used. Another apotropaic symbol has been found on the dovecot wall.

Leaving the dovecot, we saw Grade 1 Listed pigsties next to the main house and a three-trunked yew, estimated to be 1000 years old. From the rear of the house we had a clear view of the elaborate chimney-stacks and the Dairy wing added to the house around 1640. We learned that the house has little or nothing in the way of foundations and is served by a French Drain (a shingle-filled trench). Some of the diamond panes show 18<sup>th</sup> century graffiti.

Before the tour ended we were told that a cupboard in the kitchen had the Cock's Head hinges which denoted a Catholic household (*see photo*).

Next, Dermot Murphy treated us to an extensive talk in his workshop where he conserves and restores antique furniture.

Finally, after this absorbing tour we were entertained to tea and scones taken on the lawn. A most interesting and informative visit, enhanced by the very welcoming approach of Dermot and Judy Murphy.

If anyone wishes to arrange their own tour they may contact Mr and Mrs Murphy via their website - [www.kirsteadhall.co.uk](http://www.kirsteadhall.co.uk) – or telephone 01508 558269. They are also part of an organisation called *Invitation to View* - [www.invitationtoview.co.uk](http://www.invitationtoview.co.uk).



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## **The Role of Women in the Middle Ages**

**– a talk by Dr Carole Hill**

Carole Hill's theme for her lecture on 27 October was the religious experience of medieval women. Sources to illustrate this are to be found in poetry, literature, painted glass, rood screens and the wills of widows.

The constraints on women were stated. Women could only control the household finances if they were widowed; a married woman was not allowed to leave a will without her husband's consent. Further, an aristocratic woman may have experienced a deep spiritual life but was expected to keep private any visions and revelations.

In this context St Brigid of Sweden, a vowess and a married woman with children had a great influence on the women of Norfolk in the fourteenth century and beyond. She advocated a state of married chastity in widowhood and the value of being a vowess, a female member of a lay religious order

Countries on the continent with proximity to Norfolk had a tradition since the twelfth century of revelations from married female saints. Such women did charitable works in hospitals for the leprous. They popularized the Seven Works of Mercy as seen in wall paintings on some Norfolk churches. Brigid followed on from this influence.

Carol spoke of some Norfolk women. Margery Kempe from Bishop's Lynn could not read. A priest Alan of Lynn was literate. He had been on a pilgrimage to the Carmelite Abbey at Syon near Isleworth that had Brigid's texts in the library so could talk of her work to Margery and others when he returned to Lynn.

Another woman, Margaret Purdons, as a widow was mentored spiritually by a hermit living in the grounds of St Giles Church in Norwich. Her will not only shows her piety but a network of like minded lay women sharing books possibly including texts from Brigid.

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St. Brigid chose to be a chaste vowess in widowhood. Those who made the same choice in Norwich went through a ceremony of licensing, were given a ring and were robed as though entering a convent. To be a vowess was chosen in preference to remarriage. Such a status gave security to her family and their estates when the woman had sole control. Was independence and control of her family's affairs the main driving force to be a vowess or were religious motives uppermost? We need to remember that this was an age of high maternal mortality. It was not unusual for a woman to have a succession of marriages as husbands died too. This could lead to complicated family allegiances and land ownership though it could also provide financial security. We are far from the age of faith that these women lived in so how can we judge their motivation in making their choices.

A vowess felt the burden of preserving the salvation of her children. This could be a hard task when religious demands clashed with childrens' lifestyles. Margery Kempe refused to visit her son until he repented of his misdeeds. Margaret Paston had to deal with sons cavorting with prostitutes.

Carol suggested Norfolk had a special exposure to Brigid. Cardinal Adam Easton was once based at the Benedictine cathedral priory in Norwich before moving on to Oxford University and Rome. On his death, books including a defence of the sainthood of Brigid, were bequeathed to Norwich Cathedral library in 1407.

Once Caxton developed printing in the vernacular, the popularity of St Brigid increased.

It seems that many couples in civic life had a child in holy orders especially in Carrow Abbey in Norwich. Perhaps this was influenced by their mother's religious persuasion.

Many years after Brigid's death, Julian as a Norfolk religious woman championed this spiritual parenting. Her writings on the Virgin Mary and the Motherhood of Christ emphasised the role of the female.

The times these women lived through seems a long time ago. If we wish to see an image of St Brigid in Norfolk we can go to Horsham St Faith church and look on the screen.

**Lynda Wix**

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## Of Ice, Mammoths and Men – a talk by Martin Warren



Reconstruction of Anglian ice sheet as envisaged by Martin Warren

Martin Warren, now a freelance researcher masterminding the Northfolk Project, very kindly stood in on 24 November for the scheduled lecture by Julie Curle on Wildlife in Archaeology that had to be cancelled at short notice. He gave us a fluent discourse with brilliant images, ranging widely over the subject areas he knows so well from more than thirty years with the Museums and Archaeology Service of Norfolk.

The long coastline of Norfolk jutting into the North Sea has provided an exceptional opportunity to study climate change and its effect on the geology, wildlife and human habitation. New facets continue to emerge with the development of technology, fresh lines of enquiry and chance exposures of fossils from cliffs that hold relics from many millennia. North Norfolk is a very exciting place to work.

Ice sheets have dramatically shaped the landscape by great thrusts and folds, most evident in the Cromer Ridge, raised to 100 m, the chalk overlain by sands and gravels. The Anglian glaciation almost half a million years ago would have had an ice sheet, much like that of modern Greenland. At times it abutted the North Norfolk coast as a low cliff that periodically surged forward and rafts of chalk hundreds of metres long were thrust and folded by ice moving from the north and north west.



Reconstruction of West Runton Lakebed with mammoth by Martin Warren.

Satellite imagery now shows previously undetected patterns. The dry summer of 2006 in the North Norfolk area revealed crop marks in stripes characteristic of tundra thaw and freeze effects on the soils. On the north west part of the Cromer Ridge very large scale stripes can be picked out from Google Earth maps, indicating deeper geological structures through soil differences just below the surface.

Further round the coast the Trimmingham Lake Bed deposited after the creation of the Cromer Ridge sits at the top of the 60 metre cliff. Comparison of molluscan shells and ostracods found at the top with those in deposits at the bottom indicate that they are of different ages but that the upper deposit is not at all modern. New refinements to a dating technique that analyses the degradation of amino acids within proteins of the shells (amino acid racemisation) confirms that the upper deposit was deposited shortly after the Anglian stage, thus proving the deposits of the Cromer Ridge itself must belong to the Anglian stage (marine isotope stage 12), which spanned the period 474 to 427 thousand years.

More dramatic was the much-publicised exposure of a mammoth bone from the cliffs at West Runton in the storms of December 1990. More bones were exposed in December 1991 and excavated the following January. In 1995 a lottery grant of £40,000 enabled a team with a variety of skills to unearth and identify remains of a wide range of mammals, fish, amphibians and molluscs. The freshwater bed from the Middle Pleistocene, about 700,000 years ago, also had good deposits of pollen,

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allowing a comprehensive reconstruction of the environment as a slow-flowing river passing through a richly vegetated lowland under temperate conditions. A large part of the skeleton of the mammoth was recovered, sufficient to show that it was a male perhaps 39–40 years old as indicated by the progressive wear of molars. More remarkable was clear evidence that the animal was seriously lame, the femur at the right knee joint with chronic pathological symptoms. As the pictorial reconstruction suggests spotted hyenas, present in the deposit, though unable to pierce the thick hide, would have been able to gore it from the underside and through the feet. A monograph relating the full extent of the discovery was published in 2010 by Elsevier and edited by A.J. Stuart & A. Lister.

Another remarkable find has been made further south. In 2000 a hand-axe was found on the foreshore below Happisburgh cliffs. Subsequent searches by a team from the Natural History Museum in London and the Ancient History of Britain Group (AHOB) have located further flakes along the coast that represents an old outlet of the River Thames. These early Pleistocene relics at the edge of the boreal region have been dated to either of two warm periods between 780 and 970 thousand years ago. These are the oldest stone tools ever found in northern Europe and are associated with fossils of horses, hyenas, deer and other extinct mammals. There is no evidence yet that these hominins used fire or had clothing and represent a group considerably earlier than Homo or Neanderthal man.

Seismic surveys for North Sea oil and gas exploration are providing remarkable detail of the land surfaces exposed when sea levels were much lower some 9700 BC, extending right across to modern Denmark. Professor Vince Gaffney and his team have been able to plot the wide undulating plain, with a large central lake and a complex of meandering river systems, with associated lakes and channels. The old land surface now called Doggerland, with reference to the modern Dogger Bank, has yielded fragmentary animal and human relics since early in the last century, but is now taking on a much more structured representation. Also in the North Sea, Rob Spray and Dawn Watson have been doing pioneering work diving on the chalk reef that extends for 20 miles around the coast from Cley to Trimingham. They have surveyed the marine biodiversity and produced many images of this beautiful world.

So all in all North Norfolk continues to be a great place for geological and archaeological research. The lecture ended with an invitation to join Martin on geology walks that start again next Easter and advertised on his home page at the Northfolk Project and the online Field Guide to North Norfolk Geology

**Roger Polhill**

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# MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2011

**Apologies.** Roger Crouch, Ian & Sue McManus, Joy Newall, Mr & Mrs Pim, Lord & Lady Walpole, Sheila Wintle

**1. Minutes of the last meeting on 7 October 2010** were accepted.

**2. Matters arising.** None

**3. Secretary's report.** Jim Pannell reminded the Membership about subscriptions and membership. Last year the membership card was used as receipt of subscription. When cards are received this year they will also have the Member's name and address on the front. If cards are not received within a few weeks it maybe that the subscription hasn't been paid. If the subscription has been paid but no card received, please tell any Committee Member.

Jim said that the year 2010–2011 had been another busy and successful year for the Society.

The winter lectures were consistently well attended and covered a range of interests including 'The Reformation in East Anglia: the material evidence' presented by our own committee member Vic Morgan. An interesting series of speakers has been arranged for this winter.

The Society's autumn course was 'East Anglia and the settlement of America' presented by Douglas Baker which was, as usual, well attended. This autumn we have 'East Anglia in the eighteenth century' presented by staff of the Department of Landscape Archaeology from UEA.

The annual Society dinner was held at Northrepps Country Cottage, home to some of the Gurney family, and again enjoyed by over 30 Members. A similarly interesting evening is already being planned for 2012 (provisional date 22 March)\* at The Saracen's Head.

The Committee is grateful to our past Chairman and life member, Geoff Gale, who has continued to oversee the maintenance and sale of Society publications.

Thanks are also due to Lloyd Mills, the Town Archivist, for his continued support and to Jayne Andrew, the Learning Officer at the Heritage Centre, for working with us. Members may not realise that Jayne has loaded the wonderful collection of Aylsham archive photographs on to ipads and these can be accessed easily in the Heritage Centre.

August 2012 will be the centenary of the great flood and the closure of the Bure Navigation. Stuart Wilson from Brampton chairs a Navigation

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Group which plans to celebrate the occasion. As part of that group, some Society members have been working closely with Sarah Spooner and Jon Gregory from the UEA, towards writing and publishing a book that will be the definitive history of the Navigation. It is hoped that the book will be launched at an event in Aylsham in September 2012. Also, as part of the wider group, a Trust is being formed with the purpose of creating, promoting and maintaining a footpath following the Navigation from Aylsham to Coltishall using existing paths wherever possible.

Jim said it had been a pleasure to work as part of the Society's Committee, including Ann inspiring visits, Peter guiding our finances, Gill overseeing membership matters, Sheila producing minutes and refreshments, and all under Roger's enthusiastic leadership. In addition to Chairing the Society, he is Editor of our excellent Journal and is a central figure in the Navigation research.

Jim concluded by saying he was looking forward to the next year of Society activities, which he hoped the Members would support and enjoy.

**4. Treasurer's report.** Peter Pink presented the annual accounts. These were still to be audited and, when they have been, will be printed in the Journal. Peter is standing down from the post of Treasurer. He spoke of his time both as a Committee Member and latterly as Treasurer. The Committee has co-opted Ian McManus to complete Peter's term of office.

**5. Report on Newsletter and Journal.** Three parts were issued this year, including the last part of Volume 8. An Index and Contents Pages are available if needed. Volume 9 starts with the benefit of a coloured cover. The first three parts, including the December issue in press, have leading articles on the Old Hall, Blickling Road. We are most grateful to Maggie and William Vaughan-Lewis for their time and erudite research into the fascinating history. The other articles and several reports on the most successful visits this year are also greatly appreciated.

The web site has been updated several times and is easily found with Google at [aylsham-history](http://aylsham-history) or more fully as [www.aylsham-history.co.uk](http://www.aylsham-history.co.uk). If anyone would like to expand its scope please let the Committee know.

**6. Report on publications.** Geoff Gale reported that Society books had sold steadily throughout the year. The publication 'Aylsham Inns and Public Houses' is now out of print and will not be reprinted.

**7. Report on Visits.** Ann Dyball reported that there had been successful visits in 2011 to three Tudor/Elizabethan houses. This theme allowed us

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to compare and learn from these fine buildings each of which has owners who have rescued the buildings and put them to different uses. She thanked Mr and Mrs Phillips, Lord and Lady Guinness, also Dermot and Judy Murphy for their kind hospitality, welcoming us into their homes. Thanks were also due to Dr Vic Morgan, our Committee Member, for his enthusiastic and well-informed assistance. Clive Paine provided an excellent guided tour of the exceptional church at Long Melford. The small village churches at Kirstead and East Barsham also had various points of interest.

The visits are not only educational, they provide an opportunity to socialise. However, the cost of coach hire is prohibitively expensive for local visits so car sharing is encouraged. For the Kirstead visit, Ann arranged a meeting place at a local pub and about half the group enjoyed lunch there.

Ann, and the Committee, have many ideas for next year but, if there's somewhere you would like to visit, let any Committee Member know. If you have strong views regarding transport i.e. car sharing/coach hire – again tell any Committee Member.

**8. Election of Officers and Committee.** Jim Pannell and Rosemarie Powell had been nominated and were re-elected to the Committee. Lynda Wix, who had previously been co-opted by the Committee, had been nominated and was elected. Jean McChesney is standing down. The Committee will co-opt a Member to complete her term of office. Any Member who would like to be considered for co-option should contact Jim Pannell.

The current committee comprises: Roger Polhill (Chairman), Ann Dyball (Vice-chairman), Jim Pannell (Secretary), Ian McManus (co-opted Treasurer), Gillian Fletcher (Membership Secretary), Sheila Merriman (Minuting Secretary), Victor Morgan, Rosemarie Powell, Lynda Wix.

The Chairman presented book tokens and flowers to Peter Pink and Jean McChesney and said how much he appreciated their contributions to the Society. Peter has been a member since 1995, on the Committee from 1998 and a most able Treasurer from 2001. Jean has been a member since 1994 and on the Committee since 1997, for many years organising the outings and much valued for all her quiet sensible advice.

**9. Any other business.** The Chairman said that the Friendship Hall Association had asked him to advise everyone using the Friendship Hall that the car park has an uneven surface so care should be taken when walking across it.