

AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY
SOCIETY



JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER

Volume 9

No. 4

CONTENTS

Editorial	122
Aylsham and water transport by Robert Malster	123
Mission to Wherryemen, & Aylsham natives including the wherry Bure by Geoffrey Nobbs	137
Mr Biedermann's invention by Roger Polhill	141
Aylsham Inns and Public Houses: an update by Maggie Vaughan-Lewis	146
Society News	148
Sir James Edward Smith 1759–1828 – a talk by Barbara Miller – Ann Dyball	148
Round Tower Churches – a talk by Richard Barham – Ann Dyball	152
Notices	155

Front cover: Biedermann's survey map of the Aylsham Navigation,
courtesy of Aylsham Town Hall Archive.

Back cover: Sir James Edward Smith, MD, FRS, PLS, courtesy of the
Linnean Society of London.

The **JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER** is the publication of the Aylsham Local History Society. It is published three times a year, in April, August and December, and is issued free to members. Contributions are welcomed from members and others. Please contact the editor:

Dr Roger Polhill, Parmeters, 12 Cromer Road, Aylsham NR11 6HE
roger@polhills.co.uk 01263 733424

Chairman: Dr Roger Polhill

Secretary: Mr Jim Pannell 01263 731087 jpannell487@btinternet.com

Aylsham Town Archivist: Mr Lloyd Mills archive@aylsham-tc.gov.uk

Website: aylsham-history.co.uk

We have now come to the end of the series of winter lectures for 2011–2012, all of which have been very well attended, and for which we greatly thank our speakers. The February lecture on round tower churches will be complemented by a guided tour of several churches in SE Norfolk, led by our speaker Dick Barham, on Wednesday 25 April. Please see the insert and book a place as soon as possible with Ann Dyball.

In addition it is hoped to arrange a visit to Caistor St Edmund on 20 or 21 June, while archaeological work is in progress. Please see the note on p. 155.

We now have a full quota of lectures for next season and these will be listed in the August issue of the Journal. We are also very grateful to Dr Rebecca Pinner, from the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at UEA, for agreeing to take the Autumn course on the Hidden Histories of Medieval and Tudor East Anglia, as advertised on the last page. We hope this will nicely complement the very successful series of lectures last Autumn on East Anglia in the C18.

Finally we draw your attention to the events to mark the centenary of the Great Flood in August 1912, noted on p. 155. Several of the articles in this issue provide background to our work on the history of the Aylsham Navigation.

Aylsham and water transport

by **Robert Malster**

For hundreds of years the waterways of England played a vital part in the transport both of goods and passengers. Travel by sea and river was convenient and relatively easy, if sometimes rather dangerous, and places that we now consider difficult of access were well served by the relatively simple craft of medieval times.

An early trade on the Norfolk rivers was the carriage of peat, widely used as fuel. The digging of turves in the river valleys of east Norfolk and Suffolk was a significant local industry for some four hundred years, and evidence is to be found in the records of Norwich cathedral priory that peat was supplied to the priory kitchens. East Anglia was the most densely populated area of England in early medieval times, and the eastern part of Norfolk was one of the most prosperous parts of the kingdom, if one is to judge from the tax assessments of 1334; with woodland being relatively scarce in the area there was a ready market for this fuel.¹

Not only are there records of peat being brought to Norwich in considerable quantities both for burning in the priory kitchens and for the use of the citizens, but it is highly probable that most of it was delivered by river from the turfpits that were to become the broads. At Yarmouth the tolls levied to defray the costs of building and maintaining the town walls included in 1346 one of a penny on every boatload of turves, while at Norwich a similar royal grant of murage in 1297 included a toll of a penny for every boat laden with firewood, turves or other things whatsoever, exceeding 20s.

While we know little of the type of craft used on the rivers in the 12th and 13th centuries, it is probably safe to assume that the square-sailed keel of the Norfolk rivers was already assuming the purely local form that it had in later centuries, quite different in hull shape from the keels of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire waterways and from those of the Tyne. It should not surprise us that craft so different in design had the same name: the word *keel* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *ceol* and the Old Norse *kjoll*, both of them synonyms for boat. The early keels were small and somewhat simple craft with a mast more or less amidships setting a single square sail, not greatly different from those to be seen in 17th and 18th-century prints of the city of Norwich.

The fact that passengers as well as goods travelled by water in the 14th century is made obvious by the inquest on the victims of a disaster that occurred on 19th October 1343, when a boat called the *Blitheburghesbot* sank in a storm near Cantley while on its way upriver; there is nothing in the record to tell us what kind of vessel she was. Besides the sea coal worth 10s, salt worth 12p, three barrels of iron and various other goods with which she was laden the vessel was apparently carrying passengers, for 38 men and women lost their lives as a result of the sinking, which was caused by ‘a great rain that fell that night and the darkness of the night and the great and strong wind and the immoderate loading of goods and people which the boat could not bear’. Only two men escaped with their lives.²

In commercial terms the Norwich River was the most important of all the rivers since it served the city of Norwich, once the second city of the kingdom and a major manufacturing and commercial centre. The River Yare was a major highway of trade, carrying downstream to Yarmouth the city’s manufactures and bringing in many of the necessities of life, including coal, and even stone for the building of the Cathedral. Such was the vital role that it played in the city’s life that from an early period the city corporation took responsibility for maintaining navigation and ensuring that the condition of the river remained in a satisfactory state.

In 1422, for instance, the Assembly ordered that ‘the King’s River’ should be cleansed from ‘the mills called le Calkemyll to the gates called le Bishopesyates’ by the inhabitants of that part of the city ‘Over the Water’. It also stipulated that the river from Bishopsgate to Thorpe should be similarly dealt with by the inhabitants of the other wards, Conesford, Mancroft and Wymer. ‘Over the Water’ was the area north of the river, originally one of the several separate settlements that coalesced to form the city.³

The carrying of ‘muck’ by keels or boats on the river was strictly banned, but all sorts of ‘mucke or other vile stuffe’ was constantly finding its way into the river from the street drains, and it was necessary to repeat the ‘cleansing’ every so often. In 1543 there was ‘a gret comunicacion’ in the city court about the ‘ffeyeng’ of the river, *fyng* being a dialect word meaning cleaning or ‘sorting out’. In the course of this discussion it was decided that a cofferdam of boards and posts should be made in the middle of the channel so that one side could be

somehow drained, enabling carts to be driven into the river to carry ‘oute of the rever the gravell and suche like that shalbe taken in making the rever depper wher shalow places are’.⁴

The city corporation was always concerned to control the use of the river, for it was a vital commercial link with the port of Yarmouth and thus with the outside world. And in order to control the river they had to exercise control over the watermen who used it, as they sought to do in 1570 when the Assembly set out to regulate the ‘passage boats’ and the watermen who operated them.⁵ It was enacted that the Mayor should licence three boats, and that the people operating them should obey certain instructions regarding the carriage of people and merchandise. It was found necessary to reinforce the rules governing the use of boats on the river from time to time, as in 1616 when the Assembly passed ‘A Law to be observed by watermen’.

‘Forasmuch as the transportacion of goods by the Ryver from this Citty to the Towne of Great Yermouth and to other places and the bringinge of goods from the said towne of Great Yermouth and other places to this Citty and the passage and repassage of merchants ffactors and other persons in wherryes to and from this Citty ys very behovefull and comodious not only for the freemen of this Citty but for all the kings subjects whom it concerneth,’ it was decreed that no waterman should use any keel, boat or wherry on the Sabbath day, that every waterman should enter bond for the safe keeping of goods committed to him, and that the indentures of apprentices taken by keelmen and wherryemen should be enrolled by the Town Clerk. ‘And that no keleman wherryman or other waterman usinge passage upon the said Ryver shall willingly or wittingly cary or suffer to passe in any their keles wherryes or boates any common Rogue, harlott, ffelon or other person notoriously knowne or suspected to have committed any such cryme. . .’.

The coming and going of petty criminals by river continued to worry the city officials, for in 1667 there were complaints that a house on the Common Staithe in King Street ‘(being a publick-house) harboured dissolute persons, who put off from thence at unseasonable times’, whereupon the mayor ordered that the boom across the river should be shut between 10 pm and 4 am in summer and 9 pm and 6 am in winter.⁶

The names of twenty-four keelmen are recorded in a list of those who were admitted to the freedom of the city of Norwich between 1548 and

1713. Others were freemen of the borough of Yarmouth, where the last keelman was admitted in 1795, a dozen years after the admission of Matthew Underwood, the first wherryman to become a freeman of that town.

All this makes it perfectly clear that in the 16th and 17th centuries the river was a highway not only for goods consigned to city merchants and for merchandise produced in Norwich for export but also for passengers, both lawful and illegal. Indeed, there is a supposition that the wherry originated not as a cargo vessel but as a passenger craft such as that seen on Corbridge's prospect of Yarmouth.⁷ Whether this craft, seen under oars, was in truth the forebear of the sailing wherry has to be open to doubt, for a detailed depiction of the *Happy Return* on a horn cup dated 1789 in the Castle Museum at Norwich shows that the 18th-century wherry was surprisingly similar to later craft, though smaller. On one side of the cup is 'Success to the Happy Return' and on the other is 'Robert and Mary Adkins, Irstead. September 12th 1789'. Intriguingly, six years later Robert Adkins is recorded as master of another wherry, the *Beeston* of Barton.⁸ There is simply not sufficient evidence to prove the lineage of the wherry, though we do know that in the 17th century craft bearing this description were engaged in a regular service between Norwich and Yarmouth. Charles Palmer, the Yarmouth historian, says that before the days of the stage coach the most commodious conveyance from Yarmouth to Norwich was by 'a barge or wherry' and tells how when in 1725 a coach was advertised to run every Tuesday and Friday the innovation was resented by supporters of the barge.⁹

The journey was not without its dangers in the 18th century. The same historian records how in 1712 a wherry carrying passengers to Norwich was upset on Breydon and 20 people were drowned, and in 1782 the *Royal Charlotte* barge on its way from Yarmouth to Norwich was sunk by a sudden squall, six people losing their lives. Less than three years later 'the barge' carrying passengers and goods upriver was overset on Breydon by a sudden gust of wind, but the 18 passengers were picked up by two passing keels and no lives were lost.

By the time the Town Clerk of Yarmouth set about registering the inland waterways craft visiting his town, pursuant to an Act of Parliament of 1795, the keel had been largely replaced by the wherry, a craft with relatively sleek lines having its mast at the fore end of the hold and a

loose-footed gaff sail in place of the keel's square rig.¹⁰ Of the 154 vessels whose details he noted down 35 were keels and almost all the rest were wherries. By far the largest was the 50-ton *Mayflower*, one of fifteen wherries belonging to Norwich.

Only three of the keels in the register were from the North River, that is, the Bure and its tributaries. These were the 28-ton *Two Friends* of Coltishall, the 40-ton *Trial* and the 20-ton *Venture*, both of which latter craft belonged to Panxworth, a village that in later days at least had no links to any waterway.

The phraseology of the register entry is ambiguous and could be taken to imply that the *Trial* and the *Venture* had begun their current voyage in Aylsham. The printed form into which the name of the vessel and that of the master was inserted contains the paragraph

‘And that the Line and Extent of the Navigation in which the said *Keel* has been usually navigated, is from *Aylsham* to *Yarmouth* extending 40 Miles, or thereabouts.’

The words in italics have been written into the form. However, as the *Trial* is said to be 40 tons she would be somewhat large for the Aylsham Navigation, and it is likely that the reference is merely to the limits of navigation on the Bure and not to the voyage of the two keels. Government forms do not always make plain quite what they mean.

Those keels that did survive into the 19th century were for the most part relegated to rough work such as the carrying of heavy timber, leading to the misleading statement so often made that the hold of the keel was open, without any hatch covers. It is clear from the description in *The Norfolk Tour* and from other evidence that until their relegation to the timber trade keels did have hatch covers of much the same form as those of the wherries; silken textiles for export would hardly have been carried in an unprotected hold. An advertisement that appeared in the local newspapers in 1779 relating to the sale at Coltishall of the *John and Joseph* was specific in referring to her as a ‘hatch keel’.¹¹

The waterways

While it is uncertain whether boats might have reached Aylsham in the Middle Ages, at the time the Navigation was proposed the head of

navigation on the Bure was at Coltishall. The Bure rises near Melton Constable, known to students of the old Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway as 'the Crewe of Norfolk', and flows in a generally south-easterly direction through Aylsham, Wroxham and Acle to join the Yare at Great Yarmouth. It has two main tributaries, the Ant, which has its source not far from North Walsham, and the Thurne.

The Thurne once flowed north to enter the sea between Horsey and Winterton. Anyone who has sailed down the Bure past St. Benet's Abbey and then made a drastic alteration of course to starboard to follow the Bure south-eastwards towards Upton and Acle will not find it hard to believe that at one time the Bure and the Thurne were one river, the waters of the Bure/Thurne heading northwards to an estuary represented today by that low-lying area south-east of Horsey through which the sea has more than once broken in quite recent times. The original course of the river to the sea is represented today by the Hundred Stream, a minor waterway that gained its name from the fact that it formed the boundary between the hundreds of Happing and West Flegg.

It might be asked how the Bure came to change direction and to flow southwards towards Acle? While no evidence can be found to explain this change it would appear that a new straight channel was dug to carry the waters of the Bure/Thurne into an existing waterway which carried the drainage of East Flegg eastwards to the sea. The reach below Thurne Mouth, known to the watermen of old as Thurne Reach or Long Thurne, is surprisingly straight, in contrast to those stretches of river above Thurne Mouth and below Acle Bridge, and it could well be an artificial cut.

There have been other changes over the centuries in that part of the river below Acle. It seems that at an early period the Bure flowed into the sea between Caister and Yarmouth until diverted southwards by a sandspit deposited across its mouth, just as the sandbank on which Yarmouth arose forced the waters of the Yare to find a new outlet to the sea to the south.

Tom Williamson has suggested that there might have been links between the changes to the Thurne and Ant.¹² Pointing out that the blocking of the Thurne outfall by an accumulation of sand would have been likely to cause severe flooding in the Thurne valley, he speculates on the possibility that the monks of St. Benet's might have diverted the

flow of the Ant southwards into the Bure in an endeavour to reduce the amount of water flowing into the Thurne and so relieve flooding of abbey property in Martham and elsewhere.

Elsewhere many alterations were made to the course of the rivers for the advantage of navigation.¹³ When St. Benet's Abbey was built on the island in the marshes known as Cow Holm, close beside the water highway that already carried a considerable volume of trade, there was a large loop of the River Bure to the south-west of the site around Ward Marsh. Significantly, that loop continued to form the boundary between the hundreds of Tunstead and South Walsham, and is still followed by the local authority boundary. At some time, probably about the 16th century, a broad straight cut was made from the new mouth of the Ant to near the abbey gateway, cutting off the loop and providing a much improved channel for navigation.

A navigation enabling craft to reach the Suffolk town of Bungay had been operating with considerable success for just about a century when the people of Aylsham decided to take steps to improve the trade of their town by making the Bure navigable onwards from Horstead. In the early 18th century supplies of corn for the weekly market at Aylsham as well as other commodities were landed from seagoing ships at Cromer or unloaded from wherries at Coltishall and brought to the town by waggon, but in the 1770s news of the building of canals in other parts of the country persuaded the millers and merchants of Aylsham to formulate a scheme that would bring wherries to their town.

On 27th January 1773, Parliament was petitioned for a Bill to extend the navigation of the Bure, otherwise the North River, to Aylsham, and there being no opposition the Bill had an unusually rapid passage through parliament, being passed on 7th April. The route was surveyed by a Henry Augustus Biedermann, of whom a little more in a subsequent article of this issue. John Adey, who was later to become clerk to the commissioners of the navigation, estimated that the work would cost £6000, of which £1300 was already available by voluntary gifts, with a further £200 or £300 expected. A subscription was to be raised to find the remainder. It turned out that a considerable amount of excavation was required and the commissioners ran out of money before construction was completed. The project reached fruition only after

‘many difficulties and interruptions’, as William White put it in his 1845 county directory.

Work began on 29th June 1774, at the lower end of the proposed navigation, and the first boat, Mr Ansell’s *Grampus*, passed through Horstead lock on 16th March the following year, followed three days later by a Yarmouth keel with a cargo of bricks, pavements, coals, cinders and salt.¹⁴ A resident of Coltishall, Mrs William Hardy, recorded in her diary on 29th November 1774:

"Tuesday, Mr. Mrs. and Miss Smith went with us to the new river to see the lock; carried the men 2 bottles of gin. Mrs. Ives gave the men a barell of beer at J. Neaves and he forced them to drink it abroad."

Perhaps it should be explained that the word ‘abroad’ in those days had a somewhat different meaning from what it has now. Mr Neaves, for what reason we can only conjecture, refused to allow the men to drink the beer on his premises and insisted that they went elsewhere to broach their ‘barell’.

It is unlikely that such ‘treats’ held up the work significantly, but the fact is that progress on the locks at Buxton, Oxnead, Burgh and Aylsham progressed only very slowly, and it was far from complete when in October 1777, the engineer, John Smith, reported that some £3600 had already been spent and that another £2951 was needed to finish the project. Eighteen of the local landowners and tradesmen came to the rescue, lending sums of between £50 and £150 each, and the work went on.

There were further problems ahead, however. At Burgh the navigation was carried on an embankment leading off from the original river just above the mill, with the lock standing at one end of the embankment, and it was probably this work that proved so costly and caused financial problems. It also resulted in John Smith decamping. A mile above Burgh bridge the navigation left the river altogether, a new channel being dug alongside the river to reach the basin at Aylsham.

In March 1779, John Green of Wroxham was appointed joint engineer, and the navigation opened throughout in the October of that year. That was by no means the end of the work, however, because it was soon found that shoals forming in the channel were reducing the depth and dredging operations needed to be carried out.

Horstead lock could accommodate wherries 54 ft long by 13ft 9in beam, but the other four locks could take vessels with a beam of no more than 12 ft 8 in.¹⁵ In spite of such a restriction the navigation played a significant part in the mercantile life of Aylsham, as many as 26 wherries trading to the town at one time.

Aylsham's waterborne trade

No doubt aided by the trading activities centring on the Staithe at Millgate, the town of Aylsham entered on a period of economic prosperity that saw the population grow from 1,667 in 1801 to 2,741 fifty years later. In mid-century there were five coal dealers in the town, two of them at the Basin, four timber merchants, and a millwright and agricultural machine maker, among many lesser tradesmen in business there, indicating a thriving centre of commercial activity.¹⁶

White's directory of 1855 speaks of 'a considerable business in coal, corn and timber' and lists five wherry owners operating from 'the Canal basin' to Yarmouth. These were James Brown, corn and coal merchant, Copeman & Soame, Robert Margetson and John Mayston, all coal merchants, and Samuel Parmeter, who was a corn miller. Ten years later the Bullock brothers, John Thornton Bullock and Stanley Bullock, had taken over both the milling business and the wherries from Parmeter.

It is difficult to discover much information about the wherries owned at Aylsham before the later years of the 19th century. The Bullock brothers, and later Stanley Bullock on his own, had wide business interests, being maltsters and corn, coal, seed, oilcake and timber merchants as well as millers. At the end of the century Stanley Bullock owned the wherries *Alexandra* and *Cyprus*, and possibly also the *Palmerston*, named after the politician who was Prime Minister for two terms in the middle of the century. Another miller, Benjamin Cook, owned the *Kate* and the *Zulu*, and Thomas Shreeve had the *Albert*. Another wherry owner was William Calver, a timber merchant with a woodyard in the Cawston road.

When a gasworks was opened at Aylsham in January 1850, with celebrations that included a public dinner, an illumination and a ball, the navigation provided a ready means of bringing up the coal for the retorts. A newspaper report of the occasion tells how the church bells were rung, bands paraded the streets of the town and country people came in from

miles around to gaze at the new streetlights, and ‘festivities and dancing were the order of the night in every inn and public house in the town.’

Besides the watermills at Aylsham there were others on the navigation at Burgh, Oxnead and Buxton whose millers also owned wherries to bring corn to their mills and to carry away the flour they produced. It was Horace Gambling, the Buxton miller, who about 1860 went on a cruise with a parson friend, the Rev. T.A. Wheeler, in a wherry that he normally used for trading. It is said that the hold was swept out and garnished for the three-week holiday, after which the wherry reverted to its normal role of cargo-carrying. Later millers at Buxton Mills, Ling & Co., had four wherries, the *Bertha*, *Britannia*, *Emily* and *Widgeon*, three of which they insured with the Wherry Owners’ Insurance Friendly Society in the early years of the 20th century. At Burgh coal merchant James Helsdon had the *Mayflower*.

In 1908 the North Walsham firm of Pallett, Barclay & Co. took over the business of Benjamin Cook at the Dunkirk roller flour mills at Aylsham and set up the firm of Barclay, Pallett & Co. to run those mills. With the business they acquired the Aylsham wherry *Zulu*, which was at Aylsham in August 1912, when heavy rain caused severe flooding that put the lock at Buxton out of action. Unable to pass through the damaged lock, the wherry had to be hauled out by workmen from John Allen’s boatyard at Coltishall, taken across the road, and launched again below the lock using the same technique as would have been employed to haul her out in the yard.

Throughout most of the 19th century there was a boatyard at Millgate operated by members of the Wright family. Thomas Wright appears as a boatbuilder in Pigot’s directory of 1830, and later directory entries mention both Robert and Thomas Wright, apparently working together in the same yard, which was probably little more than a piece of open ground on which wherries could be built in the open. There would probably be a small shed in which their tools could be kept, and perhaps a sawpit on which logs could be sawn up into planks by two sawyers, one top, one bottom, using a very large saw, and not much else. Presumably the Wrights built small pleasure boats of the kind to be seen in illustrations of the local regatta as well as wherries.

In the 1860s there might not have been enough work for both Robert and Thomas, for the latter took over the Royal Oak in Millgate; quite

possibly he combined serving beer with helping out in the boatyard, for it was not unusual for workmen to have more than one string to their bows at that period. About 1870 a new generation took over the yard, Elijah Wright taking on the business. One of the wherries built by Elijah, the *Gipsy*, gained fame as the only Norfolk wherry to have cruised on the continental waterways, after being converted for pleasure use. Her owner, Henry Montague Doughty, of Theberton in Suffolk, took her to Friesland in 1888 for cruising on the Friesland meres, where she more than held her own with the native Dutch craft.

The *Gipsy* wintered at Leeuwarden and next year went on to explore other Dutch waterways before striking out in 1890 much deeper into Europe. In his book *Our Wherry in Wendish Lands* Doughty recorded that ‘the *Gipsy* has now voyaged through the entire length, from north to south, of the German Empire.’

There were other boatbuilders at the lower end of the navigation, in Coltishall. One of them, operating in mid-century, was a Thomas Wright, presumably not the same man who was at that time operating at Millgate. Others were Edward and Samuel Press, John Kerrison, and from about 1870 John Allen. It was Allen’s yard that built the last trading wherry, the *Ella*, in 1912, going on to launch a succession of Broads pleasure craft and to refit wherries into the second half of the 20th century.

Some of the smaller wherries that used the Aylsham Navigation had what were known as slipping keels, an addition to the integral keel that was the backbone of the wherry. When in the lower reaches of the rivers this keel greatly improved the windward performance of the wherry; it could be removed when entering the navigation so as to decrease the draught of the vessel. Made of oak, it was held in position by three bolts which could be inserted or removed from inside the wherry; at the bow end were two vertical irons which fitted either side of the stem, and further aft was a rope led up on deck with two appropriately placed knots which aided the wherryman in positioning the keel correctly when refitting it. The keel was removed after passing through Coltishall lock and left moored to the bank; it was not hauled out and left on the bank so as to avoid it drying out and warping, which would make it impossible to insert the bolts when the wherry returned downriver. Plugs were of course inserted into the three bolt-holes when the keel was slipped.

Use of the navigation by pleasure craft seems not to have been encouraged, but there are two mentions in Broads literature of trips up to Aylsham. One of them was made by Harry Brittain, a Norwich bank manager who in his spare time sailed the Broadland rivers in the pleasure wherry *Zoe*, built by Robert Harrison at Ludham in 1873, but it was not in a wherry that he voyaged to Aylsham. The first edition of his *Notes on the Broads and Rivers of Norfolk and Suffolk*, published in 1887, says simply that one could sail up the Bure as far as Coltishall, but the second and third editions which came out in 1888 and 1889 include an additional chapter, "Up the River Bure to Aylsham".

As the Broads yachts of the time were somewhat deep-draughted he advised that the yacht be left at Coltishall and the trip up the navigation be made in an open boat. It is uncertain in what type of craft he made the voyage, but it was certainly one that could be both sailed and rowed. Besides the *Zoe* he also owned a 23 ft yacht, the *Buttercup*, but from what he says in the book it was probably a smaller boat that he used to reach Aylsham. Just before reaching Little Switzerland, a series of pits that had for many years provided marl for fertilising the fields, Harry Brittain and his companion were passed by a wherry, and as they were anxious to know how long their journey upstream would probably take, they asked the question of the man on board.

"Not very long, sir; you'll have a fair wind nearly all the way," they were told.

Passing through the first lock, Brittain asked the young attendant what the dues were, and received what he described as the most objectionable of all replies: "We always leave it to the gentleman, sir." A satisfactory tip was handed over, but the writer was not pleased at the reply he'd been given.

"Buxton lock and the three above it are slightly different in principle to the one at Coltishall, inasmuch as the water runs through 'slakers' constructed *in* the upper gates, and not below them. The effect of this to one working through for the first time is rather a surprise, and the only thing I can compare it with is being shut up with two miniature waterfalls, the torrents of which, combining, lash the pent-up water into foam, whilst the imprisoned boat dances about as though wishing to escape from all the uproar. We were fortunate in having the voluntary help of a wherryman here, but as we sailed away (after the inevitable

drink) he informed us we must not expect to find any help at the upper locks."

Further on they had a head wind, and Brittain's companion went ashore with a towline. While bow-hauling the boat he had an encounter with a swan which objected strongly to his presence but eventually flew away over the meadows.

"In the reach which runs straight for Aylsham lock we overtook a wherry, but as we were in no particular hurry we gave up our turn, and worked them through, much to their delight. It seemed that they had left Yarmouth the previous day at six o'clock in the evening, and sailed on till midnight, when they stopped at Wroxham Bridge. By six next morning they were again under weigh, and it will be easily believed that they were becoming a bit fagged, although I am bound to admit they did not appear so when we saw them 'cleaned up' two hours later, in the town. In due course we, too, passed through the lock, but did not again overtake the *Zulu*, as the wherry was called.

Nothing worth noting occurred till we reached the head of the navigation, where we arranged with a well-known North River waterman – 'Mate' Bircham – to take our little craft back to Wroxham."

They themselves hurried to the station and took the train.

The other Victorian yachtsman to voyage to Aylsham was Peter Henry Emerson, the pioneer of 'naturalistic' photography, who in 1890–91 spent a twelvemonth exploring the waterways in his little pleasure wherry *Maid of the Mist*, named after the steamer that plied the waters at the foot of the Niagara Falls. He looked with disdain at lesser members of the human race, the lowest of all in his estimation being the factory workers of large towns and cities such as Norwich, and he certainly did not esteem those inhabitants of Aylsham that he came across during his visit in February 1891. "On Thursday at ten o'clock we started for Aylsham, a town proverbial for its stinginess, for 'Aylsham treat' implies that you pay for yourself," he recorded on 11th February.

"At the bright little village of Buxton, the mill-hands came out to watch us pass through the lock, wondering what we were about at this time of year. We sailed peacefully through the picturesque Lammas, and I ate my lunch as I sat steering through the silent plantations beyond . . . The landscape assumed a greenish tinge as we drew near Aylsham, but with the evening chills the winter returned, and we began to grow weary of the

constant panorama of locks, mills and bridges. Our spirits rose, however, as we saw the malt-houses on Aylsham Basin through the mist. As we moored after dark in the deserted basin, a wherryman came up and remarked – “You’ve been expected.” Jim looked at me, winked, shook his head and disappeared in his cabin.

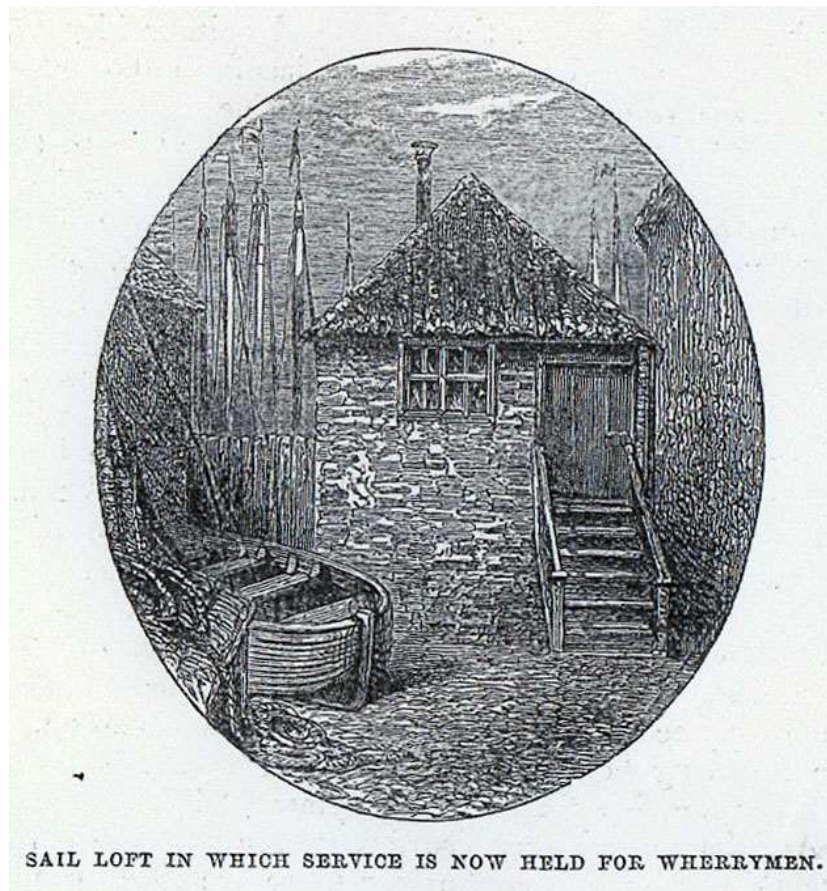
Neither Emerson nor his skipper, Jim, was at all impressed by the visitors who stared at the wherry and asked the most stupid questions. An old man in a wideawake hat asked Jim if they were there to load a huge log that lay nearby on the bank; a woman carrying a hungry-looking, peevish baby asked Jim if he’d take them to Newcastle – ‘you’re going to Newcastle, ain’t you?’

‘These town joskins talk of us country joskins,’ said Jim, the last thing at night, ‘but I’m blowed if ever I see such a lot of duzzy fools. The questions they ax too, lor’! they’re enough to craze a donkey’s heart. I shall be glad to see the green again, sir. Fare to me, towns spile men, sir.’ ‘Amen to that,’ I answered, and we turned in.

References

- ¹ Lambert, J.M., Jennings, J.N., Smith, C.T., Green, C. & Hutchinson, J.N. (1960). The making of the Broads: A reconstruction of their origin in the light of new evidence. Royal Geographical Society Research Series, No. 3.
- ² Hudson & Tingey (1906). The records of the City of Norwich.
- ³ Op. cit., Vol. 1: 377–388.
- ⁴ Op. cit., Vol. 2: 171.
- ⁵ Op. cit., Vol. 1: 140–141.
- ⁶ Blomefield, F. (1806). History of Norfolk, Vol. 4: 70.
- ⁷ Malster, R. (1971). Wherries and Watermen: 57. Terence Dalton.
- ⁸ NRO, Y/C38/3.
- ⁹ Palmer, C.J. The Perlustration of Great Yarmouth, Vol. 1: 345.
- ¹⁰ NRO, Y/C38/3.
- ¹¹ Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Mercury, 23 October 1779.
- ¹² Williamson, T. (1997). The Norfolk Broads: A Landscape History: 76. Manchester University Press.
- ¹³ Malster, R. (1973). The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads: 88–89. Phillimore.
- ¹⁴ Millican, P. (1937). A History of Horstead and Stanninghall.
- ¹⁵ Salis, H.R. Norfolk Navigations.
- ¹⁶ White, W. (1855). Directory of Norfolk: 408.

**Mission to Wherrymen, & Aylsham natives including the wherry
Bure** by Geoffrey Nobbs



The School House and School Room in Drabblegate were built in 1857. The house, at the junction of Drabblegate and the Banningham Road, was built by the Rev. Edmund Telfer Yates, Vicar of Aylsham. It was intended to be occupied by the curate with an adjoining mission room. The room was used for some years as an infants' school and Sunday school, and services were held there periodically until about 1892.¹ A licence had also been granted in 1844 for the use as a chapel of part of a Millgate cottage owned by Samuel Parmeter, and easily reached by workers on the canal.² During their working lives however, Aylsham wherrymen would probably have spent as much time in Yarmouth as in their home town, and for their brief leisure moments little was accessible in the port for their welfare or spiritual guidance. Public houses and beer drinking were the inevitable alternative. Most of the crews on the Aylsham and Bure Navigation wherries bringing grain, etc to Yarmouth favoured such establishments at the North End as the Wherry, in later times the Lord Collingwood, and the Packhorse.

Inns were expected to offer accommodation too, but many watermen probably slept aboard their vessels to avoid expense, and when the wherry was their floating home and wife and family accompanied them in their work. The Bowling Green Inn at the head of Breydon Water where the Bure, the North river joins the Yare, thence the harbour and quays, was another favourite meeting place. Bowls was very popular in Aylsham, with at least five greens there in 1839, so no doubt many of its wherryemen would have enjoyed a drink and chat with other watermen and Breydoners relaxing on or by Yarmouth's Bowling Green pub. It is recorded that upriver there was also a good green at Lamas but presumably passing laden vessels would have been unlikely to pause there.

Yarmouth continued to suffer in the mid-1800s from the unruly behaviour of seamen from many parts; a mission was set up to counter this and a church built close to the seafront especially for the beachmen. In the case of the wherryemen, a similar mission provided services for them in an old sail-loft and the mission boat Gabriel was busy on the five rivers, harbour and Breydon, visiting the wherries and their crews. In 1859 letters 'From the Wherries' were published,³ proposing a church be built as replacement for the cramped sail-loft. There was at about the same time a printed Wherryemen's Appeal⁴ circulated – attractively worded in non-literate manner and asking for 'a small Chapple and Reding room wher we may pass away our spare time, having watched the unceasing Efforts of the Clergey and scripture Reader to bring us the mesage of salvation'. The appeal was backed by many wherryemen including seven from Aylsham-owned vessels and seven, too, from Horstead and Coltishall, but there is no way of telling whether any of the latter would have used the Navigation. Very soon, the foundation stone of the Wherryemen's church of St Andrews was laid at Yarmouth, close by the river near Fullers Hill and the building was completed in October 1860, the Rev. Gott being the first in charge & useful financial assistance stemming from Angela Burdett-Coutts 'the wealthiest woman in England' who used her inheritance in good works. John Gott continued until 1864 when in his last sermon at St Andrews he recalled 'how I have set out before you those blacker & more open sins that are still so common along the waterside of Yarmouth, Drunkenness, Adultery, Sabbath-breaking, Swearing.... these special sins which are Satan's

special services'. Clearly he considered there had been plenty of work to do! Ms Burdett-Coutts, as a friend of Dickens, may well have visited Yarmouth when he was researching 'David Copperfield' and among many other involvements she supported the fishing industry, setting up the Columbia fish market in London. The wherryman's reading room, a building near St Andrews church, had undergone a remarkable change of use, for it had been a brothel! The conversion must have been particularly significant to this benefactress, for she established with Dickens an early home for 'fallen women' in London, and was later created Baroness Burdett-Coutts for all her good works.

The Mission to Wherryman was so well supported that at one stage a policeman had to be stationed at the church door to ensure all watermen wishing to attend services could get in! The movement continued its work until at least 1883 when the usual Annual Report was published, and probably continued long after that.

In the 1880s the *Lord Collingwood* was run by a native of Aylsham, his brother William Barber being known to all as 'Flea', a man of varied talents including wherrying, boatbuilder, smelter and fishpoacher. On one occasion his wherry's hold had been searched and an illegal cargo of river fish discovered, for which he was sent to prison. Despite the setback he continued to break the law. His notoriety was already known to Dr Smith Wynne, another Aylsham born man when on board his yacht they first met on the river in 1884. The Doctor was suspicious of the help offered. He wrote "However, I had a better opinion of my friend when he talked of a towline – rather than lazily leaning on a quant. Well, says he, I was born up the North river – my name is Barber. Good God thought I, have I got that poaching rascal on board who is always being sent to prison for breaking the law of meum & tuum.

I told him I was born at Aylsham. Were you really, why so was I. Good God bless my heart, you don't say that, why how old are you – a year or two my junior. But I soon found by the description of the cottage in which he lived, his relations and stranger than all when he heard of my father's name he exclaimed – 'Why my mother was for some years servant in your father's house⁵ – she was his cook, her name was Slaughter and your father gave my parents their first wedding dinner. She's now a fine old woman of 83 and lives at Hickling. I said – did you

know so and so? going through all the old well remembered watermen who used to know us as boys and whose wherries were our play houses.

‘Did you know Cap’n Gray ⁶ as we called him of the *Bure*? ‘Law, yes he was my uncle. Why! I used to go to his cottage every week to look at a model wherry he had – ‘Why’, says the waterman, ‘I have got that same model at my house the Lord Collingwood Inn at Yarmouth’ (and so he had for I soon went to see it). We were now great friends and I certainly hoped he would not turn out to be the man I thought. Being born in the same town seemed to be a bond. [This vessel] the *Bure* of Aylsham – old Capn Gray's wherry I used to know so well as a boy. He used to clean her paint with soft-soap and she looked like a new wherry coming into port after her voyages to Yarmouth’ ⁷

The model was subsequently displayed at Yarmouth’s Tolhouse Museum but sadly in 1944 was destroyed in an air raid. It had been another reminder of the days when the Aylsham Navigation, its men, cargoes, and wherries, were such an important factor in the life and commerce of Great Yarmouth.

References

¹ Sapwell, J. (1960). A History of Aylsham. 171 pp. Jarrold, Norwich.

² Geoffrey Gale draft text for forthcoming book on the Aylsham Navigation.

³ ‘Seaman’s and Fisherman’s Friendly Visitor’ 1859 [Geoffrey Nobbs Collection]

⁴ Significantly, one copy of the appeal is preserved in the Lambeth Palace Archive of Burdett-Coutts papers with others from Bishop John Gott of Truro formerly of Yarmouth who had worked so hard with the Baroness to establish the Wherrymens Church. The other copy is held at NRO ref MC 634/24 amongst the documents of William Forster, an Aylsham Navigation Commissioner, who died in 1906.

⁵ Dr Fred Smith’s residence is shown in Wright’s 1839 map, and overlooked Aylsham market place from the south. He and his family were immediate neighbours of William Repton, Clerk to the Navigation Commissioners. Dr Smith as a leading member of the Aquatic Club sailed his boats the *Louisa*, *Caledonia* and others from Millgate on the Navigation, the latter a lateener being built there by Bob Wright. These yachts were crewed by Dr Smith’s sons including Dr Wynne who later set down *Caledonia*’s lines – now held at Yarmouth’s Time & Tide Museum.

⁶ ‘Captain’ James Gray, master of the wherry *Bure*, was shown in the 1839 map to be living in one of the Millgate cottages owned by Samuel Parmeter who was probably owner of the wherry.

⁷ W.A.S. Wynne’s Sailing Logs NRO MS 21477 T134E

Mr Biedermann's invention

by Roger Polhill

Henry (originally Heinrich) Augustus Biedermann surveyed the River Bure from Ingworth to Coltishall for the proposed navigation in October 1772. The plan, of which a small part is shown on the front cover, indicated canals to be cut to straighten the waterway, the locks and bridges to be built, the water levels needed and the estates of the landowners along the river. Biedermann was born in Germany at Blankenburg (probably Blankenburg am Harz) in 1743–1744. He was surveyor and draughtsman to Duke Charles of Brunswick from about 1760 to 1765.¹ We have no exact record of when he first came to England, but he was married to Mary Allridge in London at Marylebone in February 1768 and a daughter was baptised in Hillingdon in November 1770.

He helped John Adey, the Aylsham solicitor, ease the proposal through Parliament.² They took the coach to London on 22 January 1773 and were away six days "attending Parliament upon the Petition". The Bill received its second reading on 16 March and on 20 March Adey took the coach to London and stayed 19 days "attending the soliciting and passing the Act" – a period when the Act would have been printed and needed proof reading. Biedermann went up on 5 April, perhaps just as a witness or to bring up money. The Act received Royal Assent on 7 April and it just remained to pay the "carriage of parcels and Acts" and to pay the Clerk at the Houses of Parliament £218 7s, about £13,000 in modern currency.

Tenders were put out to construct the Navigation in August 1773, but it wasn't until June 1774 that the Commissioners were in a position to offer a definite contract to complete the Navigation for a sum of £4,200. As there was no satisfactory offer Biedermann was employed to superintend the work for a salary of £200 a year. But costs soon exceeded the revenue raised by donations and subscription. By August 1775 the work had virtually ground to a halt. At that meeting it was "ordered that for the present the Lock at Horstead shall be shut up, and that Mr John Colls of Horstead [the miller there] shall immediately put a lock upon the same – that against the Meeting Mr Biedermann the Engineer shall form an Estimate of a Sum at which he will undertake the whole of the remaining work he either to give sufficient security for the performance or to

receive only Six Hundred pounds when he has expended Nine Hundred and in the same proportion till the Work is perfected". And "that no further Work shall be done in relation to the Navigation until the next Meeting".

Not surprisingly Biedermann left the project at this point. Fortunately he had found employment with Sir Harbord Harbord to survey his estates in Woodbastwick, Stanningfield and Frettenham in 1773, fine maps of which have been on display at the Norfolk Record Office this year.

He seems to have lived at Woodbastwick for some years, where he is recorded as taking on apprentices in 1778 and 1786.³ He was employed at Holkham in 1779 and made a map of Wells in 1780 and Warham St Mary and All Saints in 1783. Later he did enclosure work particularly for the Dashwood family in Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, settled at Tetbury in Gloucestershire and died there in 1816. He was naturalised in 1804, but retained the German spelling of his name though in the Aylsham papers he is often referred to as Biederman, with a single "n".

I contacted the Railway & Canal Historical Society in the hope that they might have some record of Biedermann's work in England prior to 1772 and Grahame Boyes kindly alerted me to the following document in the Navy Board records of the National Archives.⁴ It was submitted in 1768, the year he was married to an English girl, who may have helped him with the text, but there is a good turn of phrase and considerable assurance. As the proposal was rejected the drawing is sadly not preserved.

A General Description of a Machine for cleaning and Deepening the Bottom of Harbours, Ports, Rivers, Etc.

Invented at Uxbridge Middlesex 1768

1

The desired Effect is produced by means of a Machine entirely different from any hitherto made up of in England, Holland, France or Italy.

2

There are Two things to be considered 1st the Machine itself 2^{ndly} the Vessel in which it is to be fixed.

3

The Machine is fixed on board a flat bottomed Vessel whose breadth must be 25 feet 3 inches: The Length40 ft, should it be required that

the Horses should be kept constantly on board the Vessel contains the whole.

4

The General Dimensions of the Machine are as follows. viz: in Length 60 feet; in Breadth 33 feet 6 inches. Perpendicular height from the bottom of the Vessel 24 feet

The Dimensions shew the Measure of a Sluice or Arch of a Bridge through which the said Machine may pass.

5

From the Calculation of the Engl. and Frenc. Authors of Naval Architecture, a Cubic feet of Oak weighs out of the Water 66 lb, allowing this, the whole Weight of the whole Machine including the Iron Work and Horses will not much exceed 36 Tons.

6

I should here observe that if the Water is higher or lower, ebbing or flowing, all this cannot Under the Effect of the Machine.

7

These Machine deepened the River etc from one foot to eighteen feet.

8

From the Consideration and Proportion of the Model, such a Machine will produce either in Harbour or Rivers, where necessary a lesser, or still greater Depth without any considerable alterations to the said Machine.

9

It may be worked on any sort of ground, except Rocky, and for this use I have a Machine in hand for to cut the Rocks in the River, etc.

10

Though great care has been taken that the Model should be of a convenient size, have taken $\frac{5}{8}$ of a foot, for the measure of a foot.

11

The Earth which is brought up is thrown out about 10 feet from the Water so that the Machine may be transported alongside a Ship, at the same time, and with surprising facility take in their Ballast, supposing their Ballast Ports are no higher above the Water, than the above mentioned Proportion

But should this be attended with too many inconveniences there will still be the advantage over what is now in Practice on the Thames, that in something like manner but in less time and much greater

quantities the Ballast, or whatever Ground it is may be carried wheresoever one will.

12

Whilst the Machine is at Work, there will be no need of any more Men, than those necessary for keeping the Horses to Business, who may likewise be employed about all other necessaries.

13

The Transporting of the Vessel from one place to another will require no more hands, or any other Methods than another Vessel of the same size.

14

Through different observations by loaded Wagons and Water Works, observed that the Horses commonly take about 320 feet long in a minute.

15

The machine is drawn by 4 Horses.

16

The Space of the Circumference which the Horses move through is 75.42 feet, consequently the Horses will go 4.25 times in a Minute through the Space after the above mentioned Proportion.

17

In the same time the Horses goes one round the Walk, the Chain and Bucket will move through a space of 30.12 feet.

18

When the Horses goes once round the Walk the Bucket Wheels will turn 1.66, so that when the Horses goes 4.25 times in a Minute the Bucket Wheels will move about 7 times in the Mean time.

19

Every time the Bucket Wheels turns once round 8 buckets will be emptied, which is in a Minute 56 buckets.

20

Every Bucket will raise all the time $\frac{1}{2}$ cubic feet ground, which is in a Minute 2.8 cubic feet and in an hour 1680 cubic feet.

21

Through several Experiments I made myself the cubic foot of the ground or sand in the Water weighs 102 lb after this Proportion, the Machine will raise in a Minute 1 Ton 856 lbs and in an hour 85 tons.

22

The other Particulars shews the Drawing and the Model.

In fine this Machine where it shall be wanted to work, will rapidly produce the Depths required, and be found superior to any we have hitherto had, and of universal, and very important uses.

H.A. Biedermann

Inventor

27 February 1769

Mr Biedermann description of a Machine for deepening the water in Harbours, Ports, Rivers, etc.

27 February 1769

GC, TS, JW, EM, RT

The Inventors attended with Machine Model which the Board examined But finding it would cost £2000 to compleat a Machine according to that Model, & considering the little use they had for it supposing it answered the Purpose intended acquainted the Inventors that they didn't think it advisable to enter into any treaty about it but recommended it to them to apply to the Corporation of Trinity House.

References

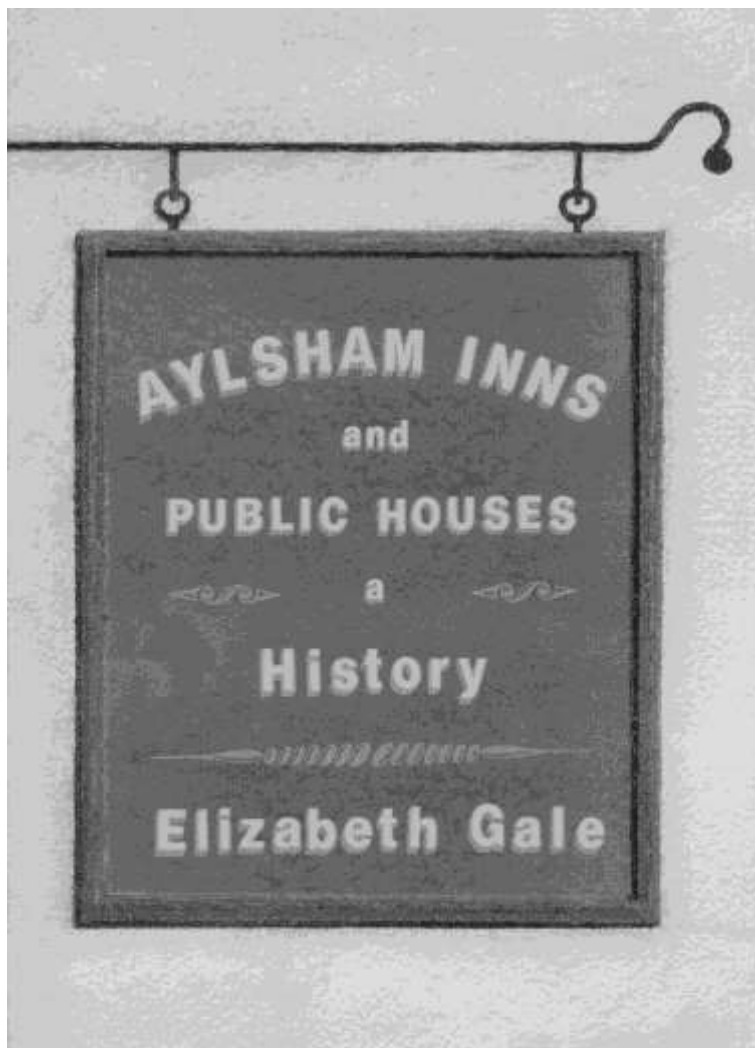
- ¹ Eden, P. (1975–1976). Land surveyors in Norfolk 1550–1850. *Norfolk Archaeology* 35 (1–2). [See p. 130 (1976)].
- ² Minute Books of the Aylsham Navigation and Mr Adey's Bill. Aylsham Town Archives.
- ³ National Archives – Board of Stamps: Apprenticeship Books, Series IR1.
- ⁴ National Archive – Navy Board Records: ADM 106/1175/118, H.A. [transcribed as Het in the catalogue] Biedermann

have hitherto had, and of universal, and
very important uses

H.A. Biedermann.
Inventor.

Aylsham Inns and Public Houses: an update

by Maggie Vaughan-Lewis



In the last issue of the journal, it was noted that there would not be a reprint of Elizabeth Gale's seminal book on the inns of Aylsham. It seems a fitting time then, to add to the published bank of knowledge bringing together references found since 2001. In correspondence during 2009 Elizabeth noted two of her new finds and I offer those, with new items which William and I have seen while researching the area, mostly in the wonderful Aylsham Lancaster Manor court rolls. Sadly many have been found since Elizabeth's death including a completely new inn site on the Cromer Road which she would have loved!

The page numbers below refer to the 2001 book entries.

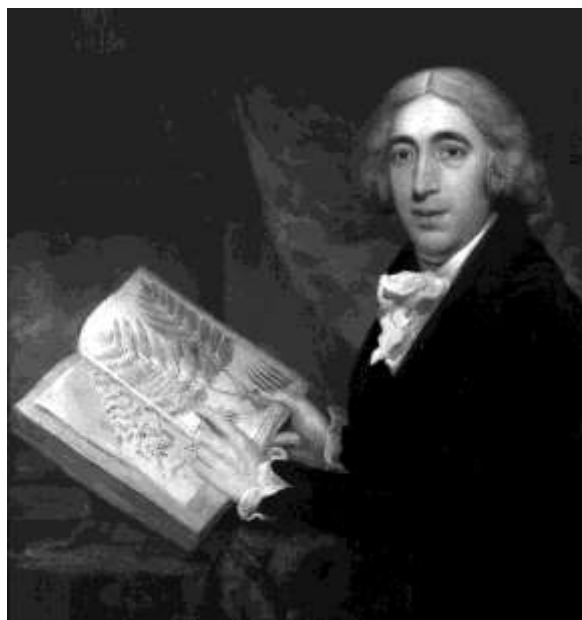
Red Lion, Red Lion Street	p. 60, 96	Was formerly known as the Globe (E. Gale)
The Fox, Fox's Loke	p. 96	Demolished in 1936. Council Minutes (E. Gale & Geoffrey Gale)
The Black Boys	p. 13	Earliest reference to use the full name now 1625 in a letter of Sir John Potts
The Kings Head (former)	–	Court roll reference of 1756 to a house 'formerly the King's Head in the Market Place '. By then, the name had been taken over by the Griffin (see below)
The King's Head	p. 50	Window tax return 1697 John Barrett paid 10s (probably the Red Lion Street building)
The Griffin	p. 96	Now identified as a former name of the Kings Head, Red Lion Street (later The New Inn)
The Goat	–	The earlier name of the Griffin, later the Kings Head (later New Inn), see Court Rolls for 1755 [owners Benjamin Clarke, 1745–1755, Benjamin Woolsey, Maltster 1755–1766, Susan Boon 1766]
The sign of the Crown	–	Found in the Canterbury Cathedral archives relating to earlier site on 5–9 Cromer Road

In confirmation of Elizabeth's passage on early women brewers, often brewing from home (pp 9, 102) there are lists of 'common brewers' in the manor court rolls as early as 1467. 'Katrine Egyrmond, Margaret Collett als Howard, Matilda Portland, Ana (or Agnes) Baronn, Katrin Potte or Patte, Sibill Hanes, Cecilia Purry, Hawicia Feltwell, Margaret Pye, Katrine Farman and Margaret Goodrede' were all fined for selling beer by 'amphoros' [an iron-bound vessel of wood or leather] and not by the official measure.

As this is a recurrent entry, their jugs must have been popular!

SOCIETY NEWS

Sir James Edward Smith 1759–1828 – a talk by Barbara Miller



When Barbara Miller returned to Aylsham for her seventh visit in fifteen years, she also returned to an exploration of the life of a local eighteenth century botanist, Sir Edward James Smith, a leading Norfolk figure of whom most of her large audience were unaware. James Smith, a St Peter Mancroft parishioner, born in Gentleman's Walk, is perhaps particularly to be remembered for seizing an unlikely opportunity and acquiring for England the collection of specimens, manuscripts and works of Carl Linnaeus, the famous Swedish botanist who laid the foundations for the orderly system which is still used for classifying plants. The president of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks, to whom Smith had been given a letter of introduction when he was in Edinburgh, encouraged him to buy the collection, though, as Barbara pointed out, it is surprising he did not buy it himself. The King of Sweden was at the time diverted by a visit abroad and somehow a march was stolen on Catherine the Great, another would-be purchaser. Fortunately Smith also had a father, who although initially unfavourable, listened to the arguments and was wealthy enough to provide the nine hundred guineas for the collection, which duly arrived up the Thames in 1784. The ensuing excitement saw the election of James Smith as a Fellow of the Royal Society.

After study in Edinburgh, where his botany tutor was Dr Hope, the first to teach in Britain using the Linnean system, he continued his studies in London. Two years later he left for the grand tour during which he took his degree at Leiden. On his return he lectured and published and became a founder member of the Linnean Society and its first president, a post to which he was re-elected each year during his life. However some ten years later, not enjoying living in London, he insisted on coming back to Norwich for nine months of the year, remaining in the capital for the other three. Clearly his large body of friends felt he was committing professional suicide by this move back to the provinces. What however Barbara showed us so clearly was that Norwich was a cultured place whose citizens were members of intellectual and polite society nationally, not a mere backwater. Many Norfolk men had wide scientific and social interests and the exchange of ideas with those in London was rich and constant. This was the age of the learned amateur. Nevertheless, there were letters from the Linnean Society begging him to come to London: his response was to send a Norfolk Black turkey!

Another point that came out so clearly from Barbara's account is that we are inclined to forget the restrictions suffered by an individual compared with today. James Smith, as a free churchman whose father was an elder of the Octagon Chapel in Norwich, had to go to Edinburgh rather than the great English universities for his initial studies, as Oxford and Cambridge were not open to a non-conformist. Also his scholarly approach to botany, his lifelong interest, had to be through medicine which he later taught in both London and Norwich. Botany was deemed a suitable subject merely for young women, before the difficulties caused by Linnaeus and his labelling of the sexual parts of flowers. By a certain irony, the March 2012 edition of 'The Garden', the magazine of The Royal Horticultural Society, reports that botany can no longer be studied on its own at a British university, but only as part of plant sciences. So, things have in a sense gone full circle, though academic restrictions for women have long been swept away.

James Smith was all for breaking down barriers, whether religious where he supported the Catholic Emancipation Act, or in opening up studies beyond the community of scholars to readers who would not have the Latin to cope with more traditional scientific works. He 'found the study of botany locked up in a dead language' according to the memoir

of his wife Pleasance. So he wrote with pride in English. 'English Botany' was a huge work that was published in thirty six volumes over twenty three years from 1790 and beautifully illustrated by James Sowerby. A more comprehensive work was the four volumes of the 'English Flora'. 'I have said heart shaped not cordate, furrowed not sulcate', so out went the words with the Latin roots in the volumes that appeared just before his death. He also spent many years as 'the competent botanist' writing up the work of his contemporary John Sibthorp, the Oxford professor of Botany, who died of consumption at the young age of thirty seven after his return from Greece and Asia Minor with his magnificent water colours by Bauer and three thousand specimens of plant material, a collection that was left in a chaotic state because of his death. This resulted in the 'Flora Graeca', of which Smith completed seven and a half of the ten books before his own death. Again, it was Sowerby who worked on Bauer's illustrations. Smith was rather worried that his words would be eclipsed by Sowerby's illustrations.

And these were only his major works.

Although brought up as a sickly child and remaining a slight figure, James Smith seems to have had the energy to lead a very active life of scholarship, teaching and visiting. He had a great gift for friendship and the languages he learnt as a young man at home, Latin, Italian and French, the latter no doubt aided by the fluency of his father who was a silk and wool merchant involved in trade abroad, were essential to him as a scholar and in his discussions with others in Europe. With many of these he corresponded throughout his life. As a young man he had introductions to men like John Crowe with his garden at Lakenham and his interest in mosses, and the apothecary Henry Rose who was in touch with William Hudson then in charge of the Chelsea Physic Garden. In Edinburgh the son of the physician to the King of Sweden shared his house and recommended James to the faculty at Upsala. In Naples as part of the grand tour he met William Hamilton to whom Banks had sent out a gardener. In Paris he worked in Rousseau's herbarium, although his father later commented that Rousseau's book 'Heloise' (and Abelard) was 'not quite fit for young persons, especially females'! He met the founder of Liverpool Botanic Garden, the banker William Roscoe, and introduced him to London society before going with him to Houghton

where he catalogued the library; he stayed at Woburn with the Duke of Bedford and was a friend of Sir Stanley Raffles who founded the London Zoo.

After the death of his father in 1794, he married Pleasance Reeve, of Lowestoft, whose father bought them one of Thomas Ivory's houses at the south end of Surrey Street in Norwich and gave them £100 a year. Pleasance was a good manager and although the marriage was childless, it seems to have been a very happy one. It was easy to imagine the bustling house, the people staying, the lectures to give and concerts to attend and James keeping to his strict routine of work through it all. 'Dearest Pleasy' he writes from away. They attended the Willow Lane chapel and James even found time to write hymns 'God loves the Seraph and the worm' ...!

The Linnean Society purchased James' collection on his death, and took over thirty years to recover from the expenditure. Pleasance outlived him by many years and only died in 1877 aged nearly one hundred and four. Among her nieces was one Alice Pleasance Liddell, of 'Alice in Wonderland' fame. Pleasance herself wrote a memoir of her husband and edited his correspondence but sadly, as often happens, destroyed anything critical of him. The family of James and James himself are remembered in St Peter Mancroft in Norwich while James and Pleasance lie together in the Reeve family vault in the churchyard of St Margaret, Lowestoft. With her usual energy, Barbara, together with her husband, had returned to Lowestoft to clear the vault of a thick thatch of ivy.

Barbara not only has the ability to research meticulously and introduce her audience to wider issues and numerous other contemporary figures, but is masterful at delivering a lecture that is rhythmically attuned to the needs of her listeners: a closely argued detailed passage is followed by light hearted reference to her own experience or a telling amusing phrase from the letters or works of the object of her investigation. It was no different on this occasion.

This was a rich and deeply satisfying evening with a lively lecture. As so often, it was apparent from the intense discussions afterwards how much Barbara Miller had stimulated the interest of her audience.

Ann Dyball

Round Tower Churches – a talk by Richard Barham

Richard (Dick) Barham's talk on 26 January, which was received with great interest by a large number of members, gave a practical guide to visiting Norfolk's round tower churches. Numerous clear illustrations enabled us to distinguish different developments in style and the materials used in the towers themselves as well as general changes in the architecture of the churches.

Dick first explained how most round tower churches were in the Eastern Counties with over two thirds being in Norfolk and a further fifth in Suffolk. Mostly now they are in small and remote parishes or in traditionally poor parishes of Norwich, so perhaps there was never much money for their construction or repair. Then too with falling congregations after the Second World War there was clearly need for outside financial help. The Pastoral Measures Act of 1968 enabled a parish to rid itself of a redundant church and various national and local bodies, like the Churches Conservation Trust, were formed to help maintain these churches. The Round Tower Churches Society was founded by Bill Goode, a Yarmouth butcher, in 1973 and a £20 donation was given to Cranwich near Mundford the following year. In 2011 Cranwich was helped again, but this time with £5,000!

There are always exceptions to any general principle, and sometimes parishes like Redenhall and Martham did have the money to keep abreast of architectural fashion: in both places round foundations have been found under square towers. In the fifteenth century there are octagonal tops like the particularly high one, at Beachamwell again, where flushwork is introduced. Here again there must have been money available to enable the bells of the Mass to be better heard by those working in the fields. These towers were essentially built as belfries.

This brings us to Pevsner's 'Round Tower problem'. Were circular towers built because of the lack of freestone in the area or was the style influenced by the round examples in Europe, especially Germany? Probably both points may be argued: it is possible, though not quite aesthetically satisfactory, to construct quoins of flint, as shown by a picture of the square tower at Hethel whose corners looked only slightly 'chewed' when viewed in close up. Perhaps those who were traders became familiar with continental practice and it came to be adopted and extended. Natural conservatism and aesthetic preference must also have come into play. Certainly round towers worked well with the materials

local to the area. We were warned of becoming too distracted by the Saxon/Norman question, since rural craftsmen do not suddenly change their practices because of a change in their political masters.

Close up photographs enabled us to distinguish ferruginous conglomerate, 'pudding-stone', from the geologically earlier carstone and we looked at grey flints from the sea and thought about collecting the brown iron-stained flints from the fields all through the year. We were also enabled to identify the different seasons of building a tower with slow drying lime mortar, so height increased by only eight to ten feet during the summer building period, to avoid the danger of slumping and having to begin all over again.

We looked particularly at belfry windows. An example of twin windows with pointed arches, with a set back central carstone shaft was picked out at Bessingham, whereas at Beachamwell both triangular and round heads are found: each example could properly be called Saxon. At East Lexham an almost entirely early tower has tiny arched openings in pairs with a rough circular arch over, embracing the two. At Howe the window heads are round and single with the openings splayed to try to increase the light. Sometimes, as at Roughton, there is a double belfry window and a lancet below with two splayed circular windows nearer the bottom. This church also exemplified the frequent feature of a raised nave roof, as often with clerestory windows, again to increase the light. The base of the tower has pudding-stone laid in a herringbone pattern, likely to be a Saxon feature here. In the fifteenth century there are octagonal tops like the particularly high one, at Beachamwell again, and flushwork is introduced on alternating faces of the octagon. Unfortunately the builders did not get the stages of this tower quite straight! Hales was another particularly interesting example. Here the lancet belfry windows are now separated. The apse has Norman features with blind arcading on the outside, interrupted by later lancets, while the north doorway has rich and varied Norman decoration in six orders and the south one is only a little less striking.

Yaxham led to thoughts about tower arches, that is the arch between nave and tower. Here a doorway above the simple arch must have provided access to the tower by a ladder from the nave. Tower arches are important because study of these with the sequencing of building work to nave and tower has enabled the old idea of towers being built earlier, separately from the church for defensive purposes, to be overridden.

We moved on to a wider consideration of church architecture and changes from the early period. At Bedingham near Bungay the essentially Norman decoration of the priest's doorway shows the slightly pointed form of early Gothic; at Binham too arches developed, with the many Norman round arches of the clerestory leading, on the north side, to three bays of pointed Transitional ones near the west end. Below, the builders had got further with the earlier style. More detective work was needed at Gresham and Fritton. At Gresham it was clear that the church had been widened as the original roof line was evident in the west wall; Fritton (St Edmund, once in Suffolk) perhaps revealed a certain rivalry between parishioners and clergy, since the ridge of the nave was off centre to the tower and to the chancel, the latter being the priest's responsibility, because some rich parishioners had enlarged the nave on the south side. Viewed from the interior, the apse here appears to be virtually tucked away in a corner. This church, like several others, is delightfully thatched.

We were also made aware of decay: Thorpe Parva near Diss was probably in decline from the Reformation. Now two fragments like rotten teeth protrude from a field; Moreton-on-the-Hill suffered a more recent catastrophe in 1959 when the noise of the tower collapsing into the church was 'like the sound of falling gravel'. At least here, thanks to the Norfolk Churches Trust, a glass screen has been placed across the nave, allowing a view through of the remains of the tower. At Ingworth, where the tower was ruined in 1822, the broken stump has been turned most successfully into a vestry and thatched like the church. We ended with some soulless but functional work by the army in the Breckland military training area. At least the fabric is being kept dry.

Mr Barham ranged widely over Norfolk round tower churches and we are grateful to him for helping us to see more acutely. We are arranging a visit to a cluster of these churches east of Loddon in the immediate future, to include Hales and Haddiscoe.

References

Pevsner, Nicolaus, both Norfolk volumes, original and editions revised by Bill Wilson, Suffolk revised Enid Radcliffe
Hart, Stephen, East Anglian Round Churches
Knott, Simon, Norfolk & Suffolk churches website, particularly for the illustrations

Ann Dyball

NOTICES

Tour of Round Tower Churches in South-East Norfolk

Richard Barham will take a guided tour of the churches at Hales, Haddiscoe, Heckingham and Fritton, with their wonderful carved doorways and apses.

Wednesday 25 April, coach from Aylsham Market Place 9.45 am, returning around 5 pm

£9.50 plus contribution to lecturer and donations to churches

Contact: Ms Ann Dyball 01263 732637 or ajdyball.co.uk
to make a booking as soon as possible please.

Visit to Caistor St Edmund

It is hoped to arrange a visit to the Caistor Town Research Project on 16 August, while archaeological research is being undertaken by the University of Nottingham Department of Archaeology.

Information will be posted in the local press, on the Society's Notice Board and website: aylsham-history.co.uk when arrangements are finalised.

Contact: Ms Ann Dyball 01263 732637 or ajdyball.co.uk

Events to mark the centenary of the Great Flood and Closure of the Aylsham Navigation

The Bure Navigation Conservation Trust is organising a very special extravaganza event on Sunday 26th August to mark to the day the 100th anniversary of the Great Flood that led to the closure of the Aylsham Navigation.

The event will be centered at Coltishall, incorporating a visit by the wherry Albion, lots of canoes, entertainment and treats for the whole family. The new book to be published by the Society and video films on the Aylsham Navigation will be on sale. The Society will hold an Open Day, free of charge, on the afternoon of Sunday 16 September, with a guided tour of the staithe and Dunkirk, displays and films in the Town Hall and Heritage Centre, lecture and book launch. More information will be provided in the local press, on the Society Notice Board and on the website: aylsham-navigation.norfolkparishes.gov.uk and the Society's website at aylsham-history.co.uk.

**Autumn course:
Hidden Histories of Medieval and Tudor East Anglia**

Dr Rebecca Pinner, Tutor in Medieval and Early Modern Literature, School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia, will provides an introduction to the "hidden histories" of Medieval and Tudor Norfolk and Suffolk. The course will introduce you to topics, ideas and individuals often overlooked by "traditional" history, but whose stories are just as fascinating and important, such as groups marginalised due to gender, religion or illness, or working people whose names are often unknown to history but who nevertheless made an important impact upon it. We will also consider objects, artwork and buildings that are 'hidden' in the sense that they have been destroyed or significantly altered over time, exploring the extent to which we can rediscover their original form. The course will be based around a series of extracts from historical sources, literature and images that will be introduced each week by the tutor in an illustrated lecture, followed by the opportunity for questions and discussion

Fee c. £35. Ten sessions at the Friends' Meeting House, Peggs Yard, Aylsham, beginning Wednesday 19 September, with half-term break on 31 October.