

# AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER



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Front cover: The Most Noble William Schomberg Robert, 8<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Lothian after whom Lodge No 4266 M.U.I.O.O.F. was named on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1847. The portrait is a copy of that by George Richmond, painted in 1852 and was presented to the Lodge by Honorary Brother George Wright, January 20<sup>th</sup> 1893. From the Aylsham Town Archive.

Back cover: Margaret Bird giving a talk at The King's Head, Letheringsett, for the social event on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Photo. Geoff Sadler.

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Forty Society members met for dinner at The King's Head, Letheringsett, on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March. We were treated to an amusing and interesting short talk by Margaret Bird about the site of the brewery, maltings, and pub and their connection with the Hall. In addition to the very pleasant setting, the staff presented our dinner with efficiency and good humour. A good night was had by all!

Our new year starts with the Annual General Meeting on 5 October. Please see the form for renewing your membership. Jim Pannell will be retiring from his role as Secretary and Sheila Merriman will also be standing down. Both have made a significant contribution to the running of the Society and I will say more at the AGM. In the meantime, please consider putting your name forward for the Committee. Please contact me – or one of the other Committee members – if you are not sure what would be involved and would like to find out more.

Lecture programme for the rest of 2017 has been arranged as follows.

Thursday 5 October 2017. AGM at 7 pm at Friendship Hall, followed by tea break and talk 'Norwich Market' by Frances Holmes.

Thursday 26 October, 7.30 pm, Friendship Hall, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Great Ryburgh' by Matthew Champion

Thursday 23 November, 7.30. Friendship Hall, 'Roman Roads in Norfolk' by James Albone.

The Autumn Course will be on 'The Art and Archaeology of the Birth of England A.D. 410–1066' given by Matt Champion. There will be 4 sessions on 26 September, 3, 10 and 17 October, in Pegg's Yard 2.00–3.30 pm. Please note the start time is 2.00, not 2.30 as last year. The course fee is £18 for the 4 sessions, payable at session 2.

Finally I would like to say thank you to Roger Polhill for producing a bumper edition of the Journal – pleasant reading.

## Restoration Day and Aylsham's Victorian 'Big Society' by William and Maggie Vaughan-Lewis



While researching in the relatively newly available online Norfolk newspapers it became clear that Aylsham once had a very distinctive day of celebration for its Odd Fellows friendly societies, more special than has been appreciated.<sup>1</sup> Several pubs were at the heart of the festivities held on or close to 29<sup>th</sup> May, known as Oakapple or Restoration Day which, by an act of Parliament of 1660, was declared a public holiday to celebrate the 'delayed' accession of Charles II to the throne. The local growth of the Odd Fellows societies and the scale of the celebrations were at their peak between the mid-1840s and the mid-1870s; this coincided with a period of general improvements to the appearance and social condition of the town, commented on in the trade directories of the time.<sup>2</sup> Every year in early June the newspapers wrote long articles on the events and the affairs of the Aylsham societies.<sup>3</sup> This article provides a more rounded description of the early Aylsham friendly societies (excluding the Freemasons) than has thus far appeared in print.<sup>4</sup> Tom Mollard in his article on Oakapple Day in 1991 noted William Mileham's poem of the 1860s and, more importantly, aspects of the declining years of the societies and their celebrations from 1900–14 which lie outside the focus of this article.<sup>5</sup> By the time of the 1911 National Health Insurance Act, which introduced

compulsory registration of lower paid workers into the national scheme, membership of the old societies declined rapidly and their social events fell away.

The focus of this article is on the high growth years of the Aylsham lodges founded primarily to generate sickness and funeral benefits for members and is in four parts:

1. General improvements to Aylsham, over and above the changes to provision for the poor and the new Workhouse.
2. The characteristics of the Odd Fellows movement and details on the Manchester Unity, the largest nationally and in Aylsham by the 1860s.
3. A description of the six main early lodges in Aylsham.
4. An outline of the festivities during what was for many years a major two-day holiday in Aylsham.

### **Aylsham's Big Society**

In 1864 the directory commented that 'the town has been greatly improved during the last twenty years'. While it praised the quality of the gardens and trees, it also cited the fine Market Place, bank, new Town Hall and other features. The directories throughout our period of interest noted all sorts of other physical and social improvements to the town.

A new infant national school was built in 1814 and enlarged in 1848 with a grant from the National Society. The Diocesan School for agricultural and commercial studies was established in 1846 in what is now known as Collegiate House in Hungate. The South Erpingham Association for Encouragement of Industry and Good Conduct among Servants and Labourers was founded in 1831. They gave prizes for good conduct and long service but its goal was to alter the attitudes of the employing classes towards their workforce and to encourage the spread of education. A speech reported in the *Norfolk Chronicle* of 17<sup>th</sup> October 1868 sang the Association's praises for its impact on the whole outlook of local society. Two large plots were given by William Repton and Robert Copeman by the early 1840s for allotments for the working men of the town. A Horticultural Society was founded in 1850, being noted as just one of various societies for the working classes.

The Aylsham Medical Club was established in October 1838 with attorney Robert Copeman as chairman of its meetings at the school; by 1845 it had about 300 members in the Aylsham area paying small, 1s per quarter, subscriptions to get medical attention when needed (5s per year made you an honorary member!). The labouring classes earning less than 20s per week or

£12 a year were encouraged to join and subscription rates only increased modestly to include wives and children.<sup>6</sup> About 600 people were covered within a few years. It is also notable that the town's doctors, such as Richard Morton and William Saunders, were frequently the presidents in the chair at the various Aylsham Odd Fellows dinners.

On a more elevated plane perhaps, the Aylsham Choral Society for Sacred Music was founded in 1840 and met in a 'concert room' in Red Lion Street (the large room at the back of the Red Lion) and elsewhere. The Literary Institute, with about 90 members by 1864, was established in 1847 with a reading room and library which grew to 800 volumes; it hosted occasional lectures. The new Corn Hall (later Town Hall), completed in 1858, took in the Institute's library and also had a reading room open to the public where newspapers and periodicals could be found.

Town infrastructure improved. The old Bridewell, no doubt rather an eyesore and hindrance to traffic at the junction of Red Lion Street and Burgh Road, was sold off and converted to private dwellings in 1825. The town got a new police house in 1846. The Gas company was established in 1849–50. The new cemetery opened in 1855 with part set aside for dissenters, again signifying a shift in attitudes towards the large numbers of usually lower middle and working class non-conformists in the Baptist and Methodist communities. Drainage was improved. The *Norwich Mercury* of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1866 reported a new egg-shaped brick sewer connecting the areas of the Butts, Unicorn Yard, Hungate, the rookery beside the Swan Inn site and Palmers Lane to the public drain across the turnpike in a field just below the garden grounds of the Manor.

But it was not all shiny and lovely. The population of the town had soared from 1,667 in 1801 to 2,448 in the 1840s and 2,741 by the 1850s. Areas such as Hungate and Millgate had concentrations of poor working families and many who lived in great poverty in atrocious conditions. The poor law union acted as a basic safety net, with the lady visitors of the town dividing the town between them to report on the conditions and needs of the poor.<sup>7</sup> The new Workhouse, opened in 1848, was a model of its kind and served the hinterland of parishes around Aylsham, not just the town itself. Agricultural work was hard and sickness or accident could rapidly drive a family into poverty. Apart from the poorhouse there was no old age pension to fall back on unless individuals made their own arrangements. Nonetheless, many improvements were made to the lot of the labouring poor and the better-off artisan and trade families.

The Savings Bank in the Market Place had not looked back since it came into full operation in 1818. By 1845 it held deposits of about £16,500 from 540

individuals and 25 friendly and charitable societies. The saving habit was being encouraged. By 1854 there were deposits of about £22,000 from 750 individuals, 14 friendly societies and 13 charitable societies. No doubt the Odd Fellows societies kept their spare funds there.

### **The Odd Fellows movement**

The Odd Fellows friendly societies emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with some characteristics of the much earlier medieval trade guilds. By the 1820s the movement was getting into its stride but was still viewed with concern by some who feared that it was or might become linked to the social unrest in both towns and countryside. However, the reputable societies followed the enrolment or registration provisions in the Friendly Societies acts of 1829 and 1846 and gradually achieved full respectability.

By the 1860s, nationally, the two largest societies were the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Manchester Unity Friendly Society (MU) formed in 1810 and the Ancient Order of Foresters formed in 1834 from earlier Foresters societies, with 417,422 and 336,791 members respectively in 1869. A published review of the MU from 1848 to 1869 gives a very good picture of the basic economics of a healthy society and also of the emerging actuarial issues that were being recognised and tackled.<sup>8</sup> Most of the latter are familiar today as the government and pensions industry grapple with effects of increasing longevity.

The core principles of the new societies were philanthropy, reciprocity, charity and recreation. The main benefits from subscribing were the receipt of sickness pay and funeral expense payments, the latter usually available to spouses at a reduced rate. The aim was to recruit members before they were 30 years old and to keep them in for life. This enabled a capital fund to be built up while members were younger and generally healthier, against the greater demands of older age sickness and death. The MU, by the late 1860s, generally paid sickness benefit of 10s per week for the first year of illness and 5s per week thereafter. Male members had cover of £9 15s against their funeral costs and £6 3s for their wives. To secure these benefits members paid contributions of 1s 6d per month if they joined at 18, rising to 1s 11d if they joined at 30. Most joined at under or very close to 30 and Norfolk lodges were no exception. Indeed, Norfolk, after a slow start, became one of the largest counties for the MU and its lodges on average showed good age profiles and economics. The Aylsham MU lodge was of above average size for the county and for the MU as a whole (see below).

The MU calculated capital fund requirements on the basis of expected total number of weeks of sick pay during age bands of: 20–60 (58 weeks), 60–65

(24) and 65–70 (37). Generally payments ceased at 70, leaving the door open to debate about how extra superannuation funds could be offered to provide old age income. However, periods of higher endemic sickness and indeed mortality could take their toll on the long term health of societies. Clearly smaller local societies were more vulnerable. In Aylsham the annual reports of the MU always raised a large cheer as the newly increased capital fund was announced; everyone understood the importance of prudence and not raiding the fund for short term payouts.

### **The six main early lodges in Aylsham**

#### **AYLSHAM FRIENDLY SOCIETY**

The Aylsham Friendly Society, founded in 1787, is the second oldest so far identified in the town and is a good example of early clubs which failed, a useful cautionary tale to start with.<sup>9</sup> In 1835 this society, by then numbering 97 members (all men), was effectively bankrupt and its members all agreed that the last surviving trustee, attorney William Repton, should wind it up and pay out any remaining funds to members, with older members receiving a higher share. Although there were younger members (clusters of surnames abound suggesting whole families joined), as the average age had risen, so the growing sickness and funeral costs had eaten into available funds. The Society had been loss-making for 13 years and for the last seven it had made losses of about £60 per year. Three-quarters of members were Aylsham men, the rest largely from villages nearby. Well over half were labourers or very low skilled workmen; there was also a smattering of watermen, cordwainers, tailors, a wheelwright and a baker. Many were poor, 'in indigent circumstances', and could not afford to increase monthly contributions to maintain the viability of the Society. This was exactly the sort of under-funded society that the new wave of societies wanted to improve upon. No doubt the younger members of this society would have been very willing to sign up to a new and better thought-through fund.

The *Norwich Mercury* on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1849 had a rant about an old club in Norwich and old pub-based unenrolled clubs generally. They had no proper oversight over their funds and no ability for the magistrates to intervene in the case of malpractice or excessive withdrawals of capital. The economics were usually fragile and with the arrival of registered new friendly societies they would have atrophied.

And yet one of the two surviving early Aylsham clubs (set up before the two big national societies and the Norfolk and Norwich Unity opened lodges here,

subsequently dominating membership numbers with the support of the higher social classes) was even older and fared well.<sup>10</sup>

#### OLD ANCHOR CLUB

Newspaper coverage in 1879 explained that the Aylsham Old Anchor Club had been established more than 100 years ago. It now had just 27 members but a capital of nearly £1,300; it had clearly been set up, or reconstituted along the way, on sound lines. Since this seems to have preceded the opening of the Anchor pub in 1781, the Anchor name may well have been taken from a Society badge. Societies generally had code words to identify members (but no reports of 'interesting' handshakes). From the 1840s to 1860s the Old Anchor Club can usually be found dining at the Unicorn, no doubt then its base for regular meetings. Although it remained viable, it did not grow materially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1859 the Old Club had only 15 members (possibly including some guests) at its dinner at the Unicorn, sitting alongside the 50 or so members and guests of the Aylsham Economic. However, the Old Club was still going in the late-1860s, with apparently 32 dining (again the number probably including guests) in 1868 in the large room at the rear of the Red Lion. By the 1886 newspaper report on the societies, nobody could speak for the Old Club, suggesting that membership may have declined.

#### AYLSHAM ECONOMIC BENEFIT SOCIETY

The Aylsham Union Friendly Society (AUFSS) published its rules in 1820 (covered by Sapwell) but nothing more is heard of it. The Aylsham Union Friendly Society was explicitly for tradesmen above the level of labourer. They focused on sick pay, some funeral cover and mutual assistance in their business activities. They met every month in the Unicorn, with a committee of 11 to oversee proceedings. New members had to be under 30 and of good health. Contributions were 1s per month and sick pay could only be drawn after five years of membership. Sick pay would then be 8s per week for three months and 6s thereafter. At 63 every member would start to receive a lifetime allowance of 3s 6d per week and two guineas towards his funeral costs. Typical of other societies' rules, members could not belong to other societies. The subsequent lodges in Aylsham were set up with more resilient economics.

This seems likely to have been a precursor society to the Economic Club. The Aylsham Economic Club, as it was usually known, is said to have been founded in 1845 by six young Aylsham men, led by solicitor's clerk Daniel Frederick Roe and, like the AUFSS, always focused on tradesmen. It is possible



that the Economic and AUFS clubs, with their similar membership and common pub home, were one and the same. Indeed, in 1886, Economic Club secretary Robert Proudfoot said that the Economic dated back to 1820, rather than Starling's stated 1845.<sup>11</sup>

The other Economic 'founders' of 1845 were: Charles Clements who worked with his father in the family stationery and printing business in the Market Place; twin brothers William and James Sutton who worked in their father's tailoring and drapery business in Red Lion Street; William Starling, a basket maker in Red Lion street; and Robert Proudfoot, a journeyman carpenter in Millgate, still active in the 1880s as its secretary. In the early years they met up at the Unicorn and dined there each year on the 29<sup>th</sup> May holiday. The Aylsham Town Band, newly formed in the mid-1850s and resplendent in their scarlet and gold caps, marched and played with this club. From the late 1860s the Economic can be found dining from time to time at the Dog.

The club soon grew to about 30 members and then seems to have stabilised, with only four new young members being taken in over the next 60 years. In 1868 it had 31 members, some nine being honorary, making total contributions that year of about £27 (2s per month each, or a little less, depending on the arrangements for honorary members), with interest on mortgage loans bringing total income to £46. Sick pay of £9 10s had been paid out that year to three members, suggesting perhaps each had about 6 weeks off work at say 10s per week sick pay. Running expenses at marginally over £1 were typically low; they did not have to make any contribution to regional and national costs that were a modest feature of the bigger societies. Accumulated capital was £401, with about £350 of that loaned out at about the standard 4-5% on mortgages. By 1886 membership was down to 19 and by 1891 it was 16. The 1891 report shows it made some returns of capital to members in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. When disbanded in 1906 about £28 each was paid out to the surviving members (Starling does not say how many members remained at wind-up).

#### LOYAL MARQUIS OF LOTHIAN LODGE OF THE MANCHESTER UNITY INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS

The Marquis of Lothian Lodge of the MU, number 4266 and initially based at the Black Boys, was founded in Aylsham in August 1847 and by 25<sup>th</sup> December that year it was noted in the paper that it already had 30 members. Prime movers were Aylsham butcher James Sands, baker and confectioner Richard Laxen and basket maker James Watson. By June 1848 the lodge was marching with Jackson's Brass Band in the annual festivities and dining in a 'commodious tent' in New Inn yard. In the June 1849 press report Laxen was described as

‘indefatigable’. From the early 1850s the lodge had senior local landowners to chair their annual meeting, adding considerably to the status of this particular society; Sir Henry Durrant Bt of Scottow Hall did the honours several times.

By 1856 the lodge met every fourth Friday at the New Inn in Red Lion Street, hosted by publican Dick Feek.<sup>12</sup> There were then 63 members and the Norwich district, in which Aylsham fell, had 51 lodges with 4,710 members. The Secretary to the district was Samuel Daynes of 51 St Stephen Street, clearly a man of great influence and common sense from the many newspaper articles mentioning him and his reports to the lodge.

In 1858 the Lothian lodge reported 82 members and receipts in the year of £137. £80 had been paid to sick members and, after modest other disbursements, total capital had grown to £425. Five more were added the next year and by then over two-thirds of members were under 30. The lodge was on a good trajectory. Ten years later there were 170 members, with an average age still only of 31, and capital had grown to £1,420. Growth continued and in 1872 the lodge reported 218 members and capital of £2,130. They had paid out nearly £100 that year to their sick and were determined in their speeches about the importance of not paying out spare funds to members. By this time a Royal Commission on Friendly Societies was sitting and the MU expected to be given a clean bill of health. In 1873 the press reported that Norfolk lodges of the MU had been far-sighted from the 1840s in setting higher than average contributions and so had never faced the long-term deficit problems that faced some societies around the country. It is likely that this contribution stance was adopted by the lodges of other societies locally. The whole sector was strong in Aylsham and continued to grow. The Friendly Societies Act of 1875, with its provisions for stricter registration and evaluation of assets, held no problems for our societies.

#### THE NORFOLK AND NORWICH UNITY OF ODD FELLOWS

The Loyal Friendship lodge was founded in Aylsham, based at the Red Lion, in February 1852. By its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1867 it had grown to 120 members, by quite a margin the second largest in the area. However, interestingly, its capital had only grown to £461, suggesting either somewhat modest contribution rates or higher levels of sick pay among their members. The 1868 report shows low sick pay but only about £100 income for the year; contributions per member seem to have been modest. Nonetheless, the lodge thrived and no doubt those attending its annual dinners, usually at the Star in the 1870s, would have been satisfied with their achievements.

## THE ANCIENT ORDER OF FORESTERS 'COURT PRIDE'

Lodge number 3448 of this large national society was founded in Aylsham in August 1860, based in its early years at the Red Lion. Its late start locally meant that it remained modest in size, with capital of just £270 in 1868. However, perhaps in part because of its addition of a 'Juveniles' club, the 1870s were a growth period for the lodge and by 1879 it boasted 320 full members with an average age of 30 and a further 50 juveniles. Capital had grown healthily to £3,600. That year they dined in the 'new lodge room' at the New Inn and so the building beside Blofield Loke became known as Foresters Hall.

### Celebrations

Oakapple or Restoration Day had been a holiday for two centuries but it turns out that the celebrations in Aylsham were hugely different in scale to those elsewhere and this explains the high level of newspaper interest every year. In 1874 the *Mercury* reported that 'Aylsham seems to be somewhat singular in its observance of the 29<sup>th</sup> of May: for in other parts of the county general holiday is made only at Whitsuntide'. The two weekdays of holiday in late May or early June took over Aylsham completely.

Day one focused on celebrating the anniversaries of the friendly societies. In the morning lodges met at their usual pub, joined by a marching band; some of these bands were local but Norwich bands of good reputation came too. The lodges and bands processed through Red Lion Street and the Market Place to the church, where a service with sermon was held.<sup>13</sup> Lodge members and their guests then marched off to their lunch venues in the local pubs. The meal was followed by toasts, speeches and a report on the state of the lodge. Dancing and drinking continued into the evening when a ticket-only ball was held. From the mid-1850s the ball was held in the Town Hall, which the Lothian lodge had adopted as their dining venue of choice.

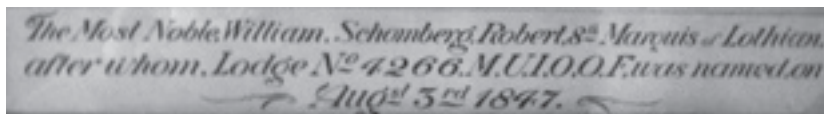
Gripes from Market Place residents, reported in the press, show that the Market Place was given over to an impromptu fair, with stalls and entertainments of all kinds. The bands played together in the afternoon in the Market Place. The pubs would have been overflowing and it is clear that the bowling greens of the Black Boys, Unicorn, Dog and later the Star, were in constant use.

Far from being quietly hung over the next day, everyone set to again! Day two saw the fair continue and a variety of sporting activities characterised the day. Starling asserts that the young men of the Economic were at the heart of the emergence of the second day's festivities in the town. They started with

rural sports on the Unicorn bowling green; Starling remembers ‘grinning through the horse collar’, ‘biting at a warm rhubarb dumpling hanging from a beam’ and ‘trying to get pennies out of a washtub’ – not so easy when the pennies were under water and only the mouth could be used. The chaps then moved on to organise pony and horse races which became quite a fixture, using grounds at Sankence and Woodgate houses in particular. Prizes drew competitors from around Norfolk and further afield. A shift to Wolterton Park was not a success and the races were restarted in Aylsham.

In 1851 the Chronicle noted that the crowds this year seemed to be far greater in number than in previous years. They reported nearly 500 attending the main ball. Rich and poor alike joined in the fun. In 1859 the Mercury reported acrobatic performances, wandering minstrels, rural sports and dancing on the bowling greens. The town was decorated with boughs, traditional for Oakapple Day, flags and streamers. And ‘some sturdy countrymen anxious to get into practice against the evil day we should be invaded had several set-tos just to keep up the excitement and amusement’. In the 1860s the stalls were moved for a time to the Butts, to preserve the niceties of the residents around the Market Place. By the late 1860s Mr High and his steam menagerie or merry-go-round was a major attraction and there was a shooting gallery among other entertainments. Comic and sentimental vocalists performed and impersonators, no doubt, made everyone chuckle. In 1869 the Marsham men had bicycle races on ‘machines of their own making’. By 1872 the pony and donkey races were called the Aylsham Derby and ran down the Norwich Road from the Dog to the Cemetery, with rural sports on a field by White Post Corner just below the gardens of the Manor. Eventually the horse racing became ever more of an event and the main feature of the second day’s fun; the papers ran detailed accounts of the runners and riders, many from out of the county, and the prizes won.

Reports of the holiday activities continued to the end of the century but gradually fell away in the years before the first War. In parallel, national arrangements were introduced for old age and sick care and the role of the societies lessened. Nonetheless, many of the friendly societies kept going and had a role in shaping a local caring society.



Legend for portrait of The 8<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Lothian on the front cover.

## Sources

1. The British Newspaper Archive is a subscription site with reasonable character recognition that is at its best when doing exact searches of a word or phrase, within the selection option for 'Norfolk newspapers only'. This is available at Norfolk Libraries' terminals on production of a Library Card; this is not the same as the previous 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Newspapers site.
2. ALHS, *Aylsham Directories 1793–1837, 2004*
3. *Norwich Mercury, Norfolk Chronicle, Norfolk News, Thetford & Watton Times*. Particularly good examples are: *News* 8<sup>th</sup> June 1850; *News* 7<sup>th</sup> June 1851; *Chronicle* 14<sup>th</sup> June 1851; *Mercury* 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1854; *Mercury* 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1855; *Chronicle* 6<sup>th</sup> June 1857; *News* 5<sup>th</sup> June 1858; *Mercury* 4<sup>th</sup> June 1859; *Chronicle* 1<sup>st</sup> June 1861; *Chronicle* 9<sup>th</sup> June 1863; *Chronicle and News* 6<sup>th</sup> June 1868; *Mercury* 5<sup>th</sup> June 1869; *Mercury* 1<sup>st</sup> June 1872; *Mercury* 31<sup>st</sup> May 1873; *Mercury* 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1874; *Mercury* 5<sup>th</sup> June 1875; *Chronicle* 31<sup>st</sup> May 1879; all three main papers for 5<sup>th</sup> June 1886; *Thetford & Watton Times* 17<sup>th</sup> January 1891. Since this site is now so accessible this article has not given the precise details of every article used.
4. Dr J Sapwell, *A History of Aylsham*, 1960; good on the early years and foundation dates of Aylsham lodges, including the 1820 rules of the Aylsham Club. See RG Garnett, *Cooperation and the Owenite Socialist Communities 1825–45*, 1972 & F Podmore, *Robert Owen a Biography* Vol 2, 1906, p. 582; Elizabeth Gale, *Aylsham Inns and Public Houses ...*, 2001 has a short mention in the New Inn section; Lloyd Mills ALHS Journal Vol 8 No 7, December 2009, *Aylsham Oddfellows' Roll of Honour* has a brief summary with a transcription of the war dead of the Marquis of Lothian Lodge. This article also notes in passing the 1829 rules of the Royal Clarence Lodge meeting at the Star Inn, but this was a freemasonry lodge and rather different in aims and character than the societies featured in this article; *Starling's Memoirs*, cited below, which is helpful on the Economic Club but needs to be treated with care as he is not always accurate.
5. ALHS Journal Vol 3 No 4, 1991, *Oakapple Day*
6. ALHS Journal, Vol 3 No 1, March 1991, *Aylsham Friendly Societies*, PW Monckton Copeman; this includes the front page of the rules of the Medical Club.
7. NRO, MC 382/199–200, 1856–1862. These are full of detail on Hungate, Millgate and Dunkirk areas.
8. FGP Neison, *The Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows*, 1869; it can be read in full online.
9. Town Archive item no. 292; this is the wind-up deed. Counterpart in NRO, AYL 841. We have ignored the Aylsham Ladies Penny Club rules of 1816 as being a charity rather than a significant friendly society - NRO, MC 115/52, 585x7.
10. The directories rarely mention any details of the friendly societies or the celebrations; the main source for this section is the newspapers.
11. WF Starling, *Memories of Aylsham 1851–1937*, ALHS 2000. William Starling's book of reminiscences is taken to be a reasonable source on the beginning of the Aylsham Economic Club, since his father was one of the founders. The first explicit mention of the club in the newspapers seems to have been in the 1850 report.
12. H Ratcliffe, *A List of the Lodges Composing the Independent Order of Odd-Fellows Manchester Unity Friendly Society*, 1856; it can be read in full online.
13. The church service was prescribed in the church calendar and only formally removed as an obligation by letters patent of Queen Victoria in 1869, at the same time that the 29<sup>th</sup> May was formally removed by Parliament as a national holiday.

## Ethel Tipple

by Sue Sharpe and Roger Polhill



Photo. Courtesy Archant/EDP Library

North, south, east, west, whichever way you enter Aylsham, Ethel Tipple will have had a hand in what you see.

**From the north:** She held out for the allotments on the old Cromer road, not to be built on.

**From the south:** She stood out for the building of social housing on one side of the plot of land bought for the building of a new junior school (Bure Valley School).

**From the (north) east:** On the Banningham Road, on 21 January 1960. "Mrs Tipple considered that, in view of advances being made in other places, in asking for light industry, further representation should be made to the Planning Authority for some light industry to be provided in Aylsham....."

**From the east:** The siting of Aegel House, the old people's home on Burgh Road and the secondary school on Sir Williams Lane are due to her persuasive powers. The landowner on Burgh Road said "*I wouldn't sell it to anyone else, but you are a good woman.*"

**From the west:** When she was elected to the Guardians' Committee for the old Aylsham Workhouse, Ethel was appalled to discover that elderly women were shut up in the airless attics. She instigated the 'Sunshine Ward' for them to spend their final years.

She was a founder member of The Friendship Club meeting in the Hall on the Cawston Road. "*I've never met anyone else like her. She was a warm person who really cared about the problems facing old people. She wasn't one for clever speeches. She quietly got on with the job and beavered away at the things that were important.*" From Dr Ian Gibson, who campaigned with her for provision for the elderly.

Ethel Tipple was born in 1905 in Surrey, but her parents moved to Norfolk when she was three months old. Ethel might have been expected to go into service as her parents had and she did work for a time in a shop in Aldborough, but her life changed when she married an Aylsham man Fred Tipple and moved into a cottage in Cawston Road. Fred supported Ethel in her work for the 'common people'. He looked after the children and stayed supportively in the background.

She was the first woman to serve on Aylsham Parish Council co-opted to one of the two vacancies on the Council in 1943. She immediately championed the view that no one in Aylsham should go to the Norwich office for their ration books and that the District Council should arrange for distribution to be done by parishes. By 1944 she got herself into the inner circle by referring to the difficulty in dealing with correspondence that the Parish Council received between the quarterly meetings. She moved that a small Committee of 5 members be appointed to deal with such contingencies. After discussion

at the next meeting a General Purposes Committee was set up, of which she was a member, and this became a permanent feature of the Council. Over the next few years she also took an active role on the Allotments Sub-Committee, improving the public conveniences by increasing the caretaker's salary and hours of attendance, providing post boxes for public housing and decrying the very unsatisfactory condition of Aylsham Church School, particularly as regarded lavatory and washing accommodation and proposed a strongly worded letter be sent to the Norfolk Education Committee.

She also served on the St Faith's and Aylsham Rural District Council, the forerunner of Broadland District Council, from 1946 to 1974, by which time she was an alderman. This despite being a Socialist in a mainly Conservative county. Unable to afford the bus fare, and having no car, she cycled from Aylsham to council meetings at Tudor Hall Norwich. When one day she arrived having ridden through a raging storm, the other councillors finally recognised they had encountered a formidable woman, who would not be daunted by them.

After the war in 1946, she stood for Norfolk County Council and beat Lord Walpole – headlines of the time read 'Housewife beats Lord.'

She worked steadily for the Workers' Education Association, attending summer schools, becoming its chairperson and insisting that education should be available to all.

She was an energetic member of the education committee and was closely involved in the governing bodies at North Walsham High School, Paston Grammar School, Aylsham Secondary School and Norwich and King's Lynn technical colleges. In King's Lynn her work was commemorated in the Ethel Tipple School for children with learning difficulties. (Now, since 2009, Churchill Park School)

In 1977, when Ethel was chairperson of the Norfolk Older People's Welfare Association (now Age Concern Norfolk), she secured the opening of a county council home for the elderly, which had been lying idle for many months due to wrangles over funding. She suggested to the council that the Association should run the home. This was The Ethel Tipple Court in Hellesdon, a service that has now moved to Grays Fair Court in New Costessey.

She was made OBE in 1971, refusing however to curtsy to the Queen!

She died in June 1991 in St Michael's Hospital, where her campaigning had begun.

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Aylsham Town Archive

*Death of a 'caring crusader' Ethel.* EDP 29 June 1991.

*Tireless crusader who won so many battles.* EDP 26 February 1996.



## Betty Gee†



Betty Gee was a key member of our Society for the better part of twenty years. Everyone was very sad when she could no longer take part in our activities for the last nine years of her life which ended peacefully on 11 April 2017. She joined the Society in 1991 and was soon much involved with the organisation, helping with visits from other societies and joining the Committee as Treasurer in 1992. After the founder chairman Jane Nolan died in 1997 and Valerie Belton resigned as Secretary, Betty was largely responsible for running the Society for a number of years as the new Chairman, Peter Holman, was very dependent on her practical skills. She was a member of the Archives Group, arranged outings and social events and also wrote numerous reports and articles for the Journal. In 2003, in the absence of any other volunteer, she took on the editorship of the Journal with her husband Peter's help, passing on the Secretary's post the next year. She and Peter ran the Journal in great style

for five years to the end of Volume 7 in 2007, 14 issues in all. She was made a Life Member in 2006 and was contributing articles to the Journal until 2008. She used her and Peter's career experience to provide a keen and knowledgeable interest in the constitution and management of the Society. The list of her publications in the Journal below is a remarkable record of her journalistic skill and the amount of time she gave to research, as well as organising lectures and outings on our behalf.

Betty Mavis Annette Taylor, later of course Betty Gee, was born in Ilford, Essex, to Bessie and James Taylor. One of her daughters, Sue Fox, has just returned from a nostalgic trip to the Shetlands to see the house where Betty's father was born. Just about 10 miles away there is a place called Mavis Grind, where the Atlantic meets the North Sea with only 100 metres separating them. Sue is convinced that is why her mum was given the name Mavis. She went to school in Ilford and then became a bilingual secretary in London. She met Peter at a local tennis club and he proposed on Waterloo bridge. He said you have until the end of the bridge to say yes or no. If no you will never see me again! Of course the answer was "Yes" and they got married on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1954. They had four children Peter, Susan, Liz and Chris, who were all brought up in Ilford. After Susan married Martyn Fox (the auctioneer) they moved up to Aylsham where they have lived since 1988. Betty retrained to teach secretarial skills. She and Peter have eight grandchildren. The four local ones, Mark, Andrew, Jamie and Beth would often call in on their way home from Aylsham High School.

Betty was very much involved with the Mardler, the talking newspaper for the blind and became a monthly secretary. She was a keen member of the bowls club, a hobby which she shared with Peter for many years. She loved her involvement with the local history society. She coped well with changing technology, but her daughter Sue well remembers once, soon after she got a computer, she lost everything she had just typed. A rather panicky phone call asked if Sue could get it back. She had pressed control, alt, delete and so it had all gone. Of course the old typewriters wouldn't delete it!

The family was very sad but glad that after many years of alzheimers, she is finally at peace.

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## Stuart Wilson†



Stuart Wilson, who died on 24 February 2017, was the inspiration and driving force behind the formation of the Bure Navigation Conservation Trust (BNCT) in 2011, designed to care for and enhance the river walk by the River Bure from Aylsham to Coltishall. The year before, in September 2010, he chaired a meeting in the Aylsham Town Hall to discuss plans to commemorate to the day the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Aylsham Navigation after the great flood of 26 August 1912. This meeting instigated the Aylsham Navigation Project with BNCT, the Aylsham Local History Society and the Centre for East Anglian Studies at UEA. Under the direction of Dr Sarah Spooner a small research group of our Society worked with her and Jon Gregory to publish *Sail and Storm*, the definitive history of the Navigation that Stuart had

envisaged, in time for the Commemorative Event on the staithe at Coltishall on 26 August 2012. The extravaganza incorporated a visit by the wherry *Albion*, lots of canoes paddled by children from Aylsham Bridge, book signing, entertainment and treats for a great crowd of people. The project also inspired several articles for the Journal and an official launch of the book by the Society in Aylsham on 16 September, with an exhibition, films and a talk by Professor Tom Williamson, now Patron of BNCT.

Stuart Wilson was born on 29 August 1954, the first son of Lambert, a police officer, and his wife Pamela. He was brought up in police houses in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and schooled at Banbury Comprehensive. He suffered ill health and spent a lot of time in hospital as a small boy. Asthma, breathing problems and eczema were a constant trial in his life. He was always keen on public transport, trams, trains, buses and later waterways. He took himself off on long journeys and kept all the tickets. From the age of 17 he was a keen motorcyclist and developed a love of vintage cars.

After several jobs with delivery lorries he went to Teacher Training College and in 1975 joined HM Customs & Excise. He was posted to London, Nottingham, East Midland Airport and latterly to East Anglia. He was a very supportive Union man both as a student and at work. He had four sons from his marriage to Barbara in 1975, one of whom died in infancy. He was distressed when the marriage broke down, but in May 1997 he married Susan, took up old interests, settled in Brampton and contributed much to community life. He was an active member of the Parish Council, an avid political campaigner, debater of current affairs and the author of *Makey Mysteries* (written in a house surrounded by cats). His health continued to deteriorate and retirement in 2013 gave him more time for these interests and family life.

From the inception of BNCT in June 2011 and the first public meeting at Alby Horseshoes on 6 July that year Stuart devoted much time to the enterprise. He became skilled at internet communication and his civil service career provided the expertise for setting up the Trust, its constitution and management of a loyal team, all of whom greatly miss his knowledge and enthusiasm. The Trust has done much to help the stewardship of the riverside paths, wrestle with conflicting interests, and promote support through talks, videos, school projects, an embroidery by the W.I. in the Aylsham Heritage Centre and information boards on history and wildlife conservation. *River Writes* (2016), a celebration of the Upper Bure Valley and the Aylsham Navigation in stories and poetry, was the result of a competition run by the Trust. A projected footpath over the Bure from Bure Meadows to Dunkirk will be supplied with information boards at either end and forms part of a lasting memorial to Stuart's great legacy.

## Discovering Norfolk's Human Ancestors: a talk by Martin Warren

Martin is primarily a geologist who has worked in Norfolk for more than 30 years with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service. What he didn't mention, but is on his website [www.norfolk.org.uk](http://www.norfolk.org.uk) is that he's not only published several books on geology but also started a microbrewery in Cromer.

He began the talk by taking a broad look at evolution and climate change. Over the last 65 million years it has got colder, especially in the last 2 million years. This is generally referred to as the Ice Age or, more correctly, the Pleistocene ice age. The Pleistocene era is defined as from 1.8 million years ago, lasting until 11,700 years ago. About 450,000 years ago a wobble in the climate between warm and cold gave rise to the Anglian ice age. At this time the ice sheet reached to what is now north London.

Climate changes are caused by changes in earth's orbit and have always been happening. Reverses in the earth's polarity have also affected the climate. However, an increase in carbon dioxide measurements at the South Pole suggests there is probably a human contribution exacerbating climate change as this measurement has been increasing since the Industrial Revolution.

Between ice ages, when the temperature is relatively higher, the sea level rises. Professor Bryony Coles has examined the archaeology of 'Doggerland' which now lies under the North Sea. Its highest point is the submerged Dogger Bank where prehistoric artefacts are occasionally found by fishermen and geologists. Professor Vince Gaffney et al. used exploration data from oil and gas companies to produce a 3D map of the area. At the height of the last Ice Age Doggerland was dry. It stretched between the present east coast of Britain and the present coasts of the Netherlands, Denmark and north Germany. Doggerland was mainly marshy but had small hills, lakes and river systems. As the ice sheets retreated and the sea levels rose, the North Sea encroached on the land, eventually separating the British Peninsula from the mainland. As the water levels rose, the inhabitants left the area. Doggerland is currently under threat from industrial encroachment, e.g. pipelines and wind farms.

In Britain, humans have died out at least seven times due to climate and environmental change. Dating of archaeological remains considers: evidence of beetles assessed by the palaeoentomologist Russell Coope, a leading expert on the study of fossil insects; vertebrate archaeozoology examined by Simon Parfitt, the Principal Research Assistant at UCL Institute of Archaeology;