AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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As the latest in the line of Society Chairmen, I realise what an illustrious line it is and that I have some hard acts to follow. Thanks must go to my immediate predecessor, Roger Polhill, for all the work he has done for the Society over the years. But I realise that it is not just the Chairman but the team who support them that make the Society. Roger has passed on to me an experienced team but two of those have indicated that they would like to stand down at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) later this year. So, we need to find replacements.

Jim Pannell said at last October's AGM that he would complete one more year as Secretary and then stand down. Sue Sharp, who joined the Committee last year, would like to take on the Secretary's role from next October. But that means we will need a new Membership Secretary!

Sheila Merriman will also be standing down in October so we will be looking for two new committee members. If you are interested in helping the Society, then please contact me to talk about these roles. I would like potential new members to attend one or two Committee meetings before October so they know what to expect and what would be expected of them. I look forward to hearing from you. **Geoff Sadler**

The Belt Lodge by **Roger Polhill**

The Belt Lodge, prettily sited at the corner of Gashouse Hill and Sir Willliams Lane, has a special place in the affection of many residents in Aylsham. Countless children have passed on the way to the Aylsham High School and chattered at the corner waiting for buses after school. Older people remember it as the "threepenny bit cottage" before the extension was built in 1968.

The Belt Lodge was built in 1826 by William and Susanna Wickes as the entrance lodge to the Belt Estate. A long driveway extended behind the cottages along Millgate to the fine house, built in 1741, by the River Bure. It is in the fashionable contemporary style known as "cottage ornée", advocated by the Picturesque Movement of the late C18 and early C19 seeking a more 'natural' way of living. Humphry Repton advocated rustic cottages in plans for Catton and Houghton from the beginning of his landscape gardening career in the late 1780s, having in mind the round reed cottage built by Robert Marsham at Stratton Strawless Hall in the 1740s. Gardening and architectural books were making use of the newly perfected aquatint process that allowed illustrations to be in sepia-tone or colour to show buildings in soft, natural-looking settings. Books such as James Randall, *Collection of Architectural Designs* (1806), Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque* (1810), John Papworth,

Hints on Ornate Gardening (1823) and John Plaw, *Ferme Ornée or Rural Improvements* (1823) were all influential. The most pertinent local influence may have been Edmund Bartell junior, a Cromer surgeon, publishing his *Hints for Picturesque Improvements in Ornamental Cottages* in 1804. He designed the root house for William Hardy junior at Letheringsett Hall in the first years of the 1800s and was later elected an amateur member of the Norwich School of Artists (Margaret Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, vol. 1, chap. 9, ined.). He particularly liked the use of oak trunks and thatch to encourage a play of light and shade. Repton's design of the new entrance lodge for the gamekeeper at Sheringham Park in 1812 was also to be 'distinguished from a common cottage by a few rude trees'. The Belt Lodge has all the hallmarks of a decorated cottage with its thatched roof, rounded walls, overhanging eaves supported by bare oak trunks, elegant gothic windows and a substantial ornate chimney, giving a very charming effect, still evident today.

Such a long and essentially superfluous private driveway was a claim to status. The tithe map of 1840 shows an avenue down the drive and in 1841 James Gregor says the garden at Belt Farm is a 'very good garden' with 'one of the best specimen trees' – a sweet chestnut – and a 20ft-high *Magnolia grandiflora* on the front of the house. In the Ordnance Survey map of 1886 the drive is bordered on both sides by ornamental planting and curves in a serpentine line around a large open field to the east. Anthea Taigel, *Town Gardens Survey: Aylsham* (1997), notes that the layout of the gardens both along the drive and to the south of the house suggests that this field formed a small parkland style landscape. The open lawn directly south of the house in 1886 was scattered with free-standing trees and a kitchen garden lay to the east. Grounds to the north-east of the house were added between 1840 and 1886, a range of glasshouses was built and an orchard laid out. When the property was put up for sale in 1894 it was described as a 'residence with grounds, conservatory, greenhouses, vinery, extensive stabling, kitchen garden and paddock…[and]…thatched entrance lodge'. The pleasure gardens included 'undulating lawn, fernery, winding walks adorned with fine old trees and handsome evergreen and flowering shrubs'.

Jane Nolan, the founder of our Society, lived at The Belt Lodge from 1980 until she died in 1997. She gives a good account of the Belt estate in the Society's book on Millgate (2006). William Wickes, a successful farmer and tanner in Blickling, bought the estate in 1814 for £9,800 (about £620,000 in modern money). It comprised about 250 acres of good farmland east of the mill and south of the River Bure up to Sir Williams Lane. It was well provided for growing barley, malting and brewing beer. William had married Susanna (or Susan as she was later called) from Crostwick in 1811 and she was involved

with the business from the outset, the driving force until the end of her life in 1857. They had four children, William Watts, Ellen, Susan Ellen and Rice, the two youngest dying young. They developed a large tannery run by William Watts, who is specifically mentioned in this role in the poor rates in 1823. He married Ellen from Burgate in Suffolk in 1835, his father died the same year and he inherited the estate in 1837. His mother continued to manage the estate while William Watts left the same year to establish a new business in Thetford as a Wine and Spirit Merchant and Brewer. He left his wife behind with his mother and acquired a new wife in Thetford under the pseudonym of Lydia Wickes. Unfortunately Lydia died, perhaps in childbirth, two years later, but William Watts' business continued to flourish. He was a Thetford Alderman in 1845 and mayor in 1848 and 1855. After his mother died in 1857 he sold up the Thetford business that included the brewery, maltings, a family house, an adjacent public house, another maltings in Wymondham and eight other public houses in Norfolk and Suffolk. He returned to re-join his wife who was still living at the Belt with his unmarried sister Ellen and three servants, to which they now added a butler. William Watts died in 1875, but his wife Ellen continued to live on at the Belt until she died in 1891, aged 74. The estate was managed by Trustees until sold to the Kerrison family of Burgh Hall in 1894.

After Ellen Wickes died the miller, Ben Cook, rented the Belt farmhouse and garden until he retired in 1907. Alfie Matthews, in a 1993 recording for the Aylsham Town Archive, recalled that his grandfather was employed by Mr Cook as a gardener and lived at The Belt Lodge. He remembered there were two rooms downstairs and two upstairs, the kitchen was a galley, the toilet was

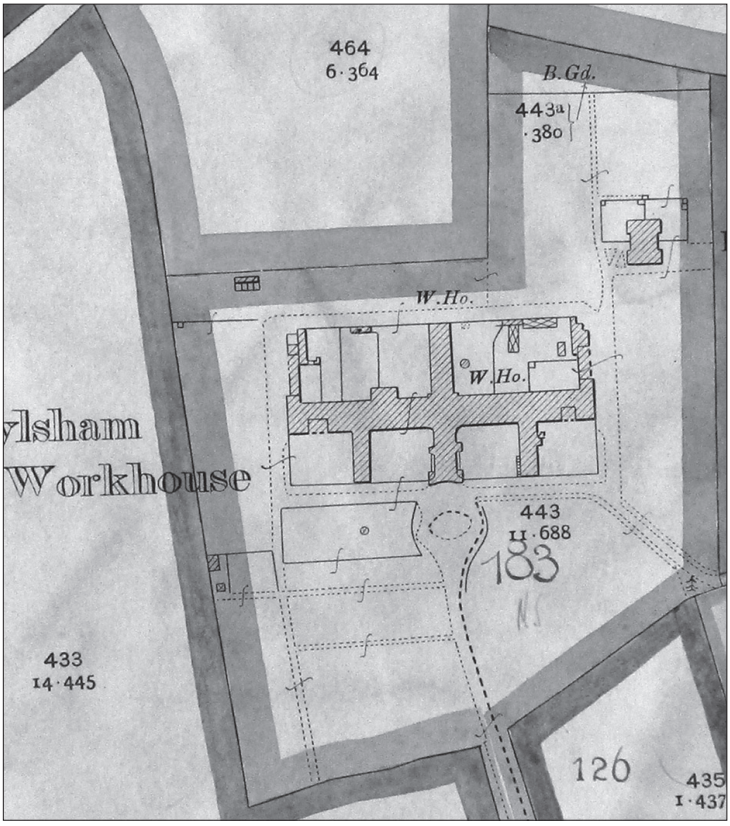
outside, there was a vegetable garden and a deep well. Asked how they all fitted in he laughed and said that families were large in those days and just lived on top of each other. After the Cooks left the Belt the big house was occupied by a number of tenants, some of whom worked for the mills, and it was not until 1916 that the Belt was occupied for a continuous period by just a few tenants. Major Harold Herbert Johnson was in the army and rented it until 1922. His wife Madge features prominently in the Purdy Family letters. Berty Neave, a local farmer, had it until 1929 and then in 1932 the Kerrisons sold the Belt house and some of the estate to the Holmans, who built a bunglow in the grounds for their own use.

In 1954 the Kerrisons sold off the field beside Sir Williams Lane to provide land for the Aylsham High School. Kyrle Wintle was appointed headmaster with the remit to oversee building the school and two staff houses adjacent to The Belt Lodge, which were later sold. Sheila Wintle still lives in the former school house on Sir Williams Lane, now known as Greenfields. She remembers Mrs Baxter living in The Belt Lodge. Edward Mace, working on Young's farm at Woodgate, lodged in the cottage as a teenager when the school was being built. At that time there was a single-storey extension with a flat roof on the east side that formed Mrs Baxter's bedroom. The front room was larger than now and included the chimney breast, with the stairs winding steeply up from the small kitchen on the south side, to give a bedroom for her three boys under the thatch and a ledge under the north eaves for Edward. The bedroom was lit by an east facing dormer window. There was a back door on the north side of the main room downstairs nearly opposite the chimney. The wash house and toilet were round the corner behind the extension.

The Belt Lodge was kept by the Holmans until 1962, when Ernest John Holman sold 'The Thatched Cottage' to Jean Emonson of Rippingall Road. She did not settle and was glad to sell it on in 1967 to the Rouall family who lived in The Lodge in Oakfield Road. Frances Rouall is well-remembered as the forceful Councillor enabling the Aylsham by-pass. She was looking for a home for her widowed mother Margaret Monkman then living in Wroxham. A grant to help build an extension was approved by the Council in October 1967 with the comment that 'the property, in its present condition, is not considered to be entirely suitable for human habitation'. Mrs Monkman lived at The Belt Lodge until near the end of her life and the Roualls arranged the sale to Frank and Jane Nolan in 1980. The Nolans were responsible for a side extension at the back in 1986 and new thatch in 1996. Barry and Susan Faircloth bought the property in 2006 and sold it to Roger and Diana Polhill in 2016 when Barry needed more space for his retirement activities.

The pauper graveyard at Sapwell Close

by **Maggie Vaughan-Lewis**



The burial ground to the north of the workhouse in 1911.

The story behind this little graveyard starts in 1847. The new poor law union of Aylsham was, rather belatedly, building the new workhouse (later St Michael's) and the vicar of Aylsham Edmund Yates was already foreseeing problems. The old pre-1834 workhouses such as those in Buxton and Oulton had served local parishes and pauper burials were normally undertaken locally. (Those who had families were taken to their home parish for burial so the number of workhouse burials were relatively few.) With the new union now serving

forty-six parishes, Yates could see that his churchyard (already filling up) would be under pressure.

On 1st October 1847 Yates, his churchwardens William Repton and John Warnes and the parish overseers John Clark and John Clover, wrote to the Board of Guardians:

> **We on behalf of inhabitants generally having heard that it is the intention of the Board to build a new workhouse in the parish beg to state that it will be impossible to offer accommodation for the burial of paupers who may die in the proposed house in the burial ground belonging to the Parish, at the same time they beg to state that they will offer any facility to the Commissioners and Guardians in finding a separate place of burial for the Union and pledge themselves to take no advantage from the fact of any position of such land being made over in perpetuity to the Church Commissioners and thereby becoming the property of the Parish in which it is situated.**

This was a clear statement of intent, apparently suggesting a piece of land of the Guardians which the church would retain rights over. The Board acknowledged the letter 're provision of a place of burial for paupers who may die in new workhouse' but no more is heard until the workhouse is completed nearly two years later.

The minutes for 19th June 1849 record that 'Notice is given by the Rev E Yates of his intention of on Tuesday July 3rd to move that steps be taken for setting apart one acre of the land purchased for the purposes of a New House for the burials of those Paupers who die in the house but whose Friends do not remove them.' On 3rd July the Board noted Yates had moved for 'appropriation of half an acre in the rear of new workhouse for a burial ground and for a hearse to be purchased – consideration be postponed a month.' Already the size of the ground had been halved. On 14th August 1849 the Board recorded that Yates had moved for 'appropriation and consecration of a quarter of an acre'. The Guardians decided to postpone their response another 3 months while obtaining the opinion of the Poor Law Commission as to whether if land was consecrated it would become public ground, ie open to use by all Aylsham inhabitants or to be retained exclusively for burial of the paupers. It is clear that both sides knew the churchyard would soon have to find new ground to continue parish burials and mistrust grew between them.

The Guardians met in the Board room at the newly opened workhouse on 2nd October 1849 and later that month inmates from Buxton and Oulton were taken to the new house. It was not long before the matter came to a head.

On Tuesday 29th January 1850 the Board ordered that an infant daughter of Ann Hardingham, an inmate of the workhouse at Aylsham but belonging to Guestwick, 'be taken on Friday for interment in burial ground of the parish of Aylsham'. Immediately word reached Yates and Repton, who as a solicitor handled all the parish business, sent for urgent legal opinion from Doctors Commons in London.

A rather flustered sounding Dr Addams, more accustomed to taking his time before committing his thoughts to paper, wrote back on Thursday 31st supporting the parish's position. He added the caveat that as 'I am called upon for my opinion in a hurry' he'd had no chance to see if any instruction from the Poor Law Commission about burials existed. His letter arrived at the offices of Repton and Scott on Friday 1st February.

In the meantime the Vicar had called an extraordinary meeting of the parishioners on the Wednesday to discuss the urgent problem. The same day, 30th January 1850, a written notice was served on the Governor of the Workhouse, William Starters: 'in pursuance of resolution of meeting of inhabitants this day held that Edmund Yates will refuse to bury any pauper not belonging to Aylsham unless the £5 is paid. Signed Yates, Repton and Warnes churchwardens'. Another meeting appears to have been held on 31st (from the postmark) but the minute is headed 'Meeting of Parishioners held on Friday this 1st Feb 1850'. This reads:

> **The opinion of Dr Addams as to the question whether or not the Vicar is obliged to bury the body of a child dying in the Aylsham Union Workhouse at the time of such death belonging to some other parish. It was resolved that the Vicar and Churchwardens be requested to refuse the burial of such child. And that the Churchwardens be requested to write a letter to the Board of Guardians of the Aylsham Union stating to them the obligation under which the Parishioners feel to the Vicar for having brought the subject under their notice and that they wish to exonerate him from all personal responsibility in the matter and that the Parishioners are determined to use every means within their power to prevent these burials from taking place in the churchyard or any other burying ground which may hereafter be provided in the Parish for their own use.**
> **[signed] J Clover, Wm Repton, RW Parmeter, Benjamin Powell, Jn Symonds, Jn Warnes, James Bulwer, G E Tattam, W Henry Scott, Robert Elvin, Saml Parmeter**

The last phrase indicates plans for a parish extension to the churchyard

were being discussed. A copy of this resolution was sent to the Board from Repton and Warnes on 1st February. Poor William Starters, the Master of the Workhouse, had not had his order rescinded so he took the little 9 week-old body down to the church late on Friday afternoon. Repton's partner William Henry Scott recorded what happened.

> **1 Feb 1850 About 5 minutes to 4 pm Mr Wm Starters the Governor of Ayl Un W came to the west gate of the churchyard and with him a man carrying a small coffin covered with a white cloth. I went to the gate and asked him what he wanted he said he had brought a body of a child for interment. I then asked him if it had died in the Aylsham Union Workhouse he said yes I then asked him if the child belonged to the parish of Aylsham he said no. Mr W Repton the Churchwarden then came up and I told him the Governor had brought the body of a child to be buried. Mr Repton said did it belong to this parish Mr Starters said no. Mr Repton then said it shall not be buried here. Mr Yates then came up. I told him that the Governor has brought the body of a child which had died in the [workhouse] and not belonging to this parish to be buried. Mr Yates said to the Governor Well I am quite ready to bury it if you will pay me a fee of £5 first. The Governor said he was not authorised to pay more than the usual fees. Mr Yates said then I can't bury it. Mr Repton then said and as Churchwarden I refuse it on any terms. The Governor then left the churchyard gate. Mr G Tattam was present.**

Fortunately the vicar of Guestwick agreed to bury Margaret Ann the next day.

The Board of Guardians read the Resolution of the parishioners at their meeting on 5th February and the matter was elevated to the Poor Law Commission at Somerset House. They requested Yates to send in Addams's opinion which he did on 11th February. The Commissioners wrote to the Board of Guardians a week later stating the view that the workhouse 'cannot insist on burial in future [in Aylsham but] to bury in place of chargeability except for paupers dying who are chargeable to the union common fund whose bodies must be buried in parish where they die'. So the pauper problem remained and the Guardians were opposed to paying anything above normal burial fees. (Another parish requested a mere 7s 6d and was turned down.)

Burials continued at Oulton and Buxton (where the old workhouses must have had agreements) for several years. The town created its new cemetery on Norwich Road in 1855 but the workhouse paupers were still not catered for. In

The old graveyard of St Michael's workouse between Mill Close and Sapwell Close, recently tidied up. Photo courtesy of Wendy Sadler.

1856 the Guardians appointed a committee to make arrangements for obtaining consecration of a portion of the workhouse land to be used as a burial ground for interment of paupers dying in the house. (Chairman, and Messrs Barker, Ireland, Howlett, Barber, Blake and Leamon.) First consent had to be obtained from the Poor Law Commissioners to use part of the ground.

The Commission asked for a plan of the ground attached to the workhouse showing the space the Guardians propose to appropriate as a Burial Ground, with its position with respect to the workhouse and its distance from it. Within a couple of weeks the plan was presented and Mr Starters was paid 10s for drawing it up. Next the Commission requested the Medical Officer's opinion as to the eligibility of site of the contemplated burial ground.

By now it was April 1857 and the committee had to be re-elected to continue their brief but the Commission approved the use of the piece of ground. The Committee recommended the burial ground be fenced in and an Iron gate hung and that Mr Kitson be asked for the necessary steps for consecration. In May Mr Kitson, secretary to Bishop Samuel Hinds, greatly relieved the Board by agreeing that ground to be used for burials need not be conveyed to the

Ecclesiastical Commissioners but the Guardians must execute a deed of appropriation and petition for consecration and requesting an abstract of the conveyance to the guardians.

Now September, the seal was affixed to the deed of appropriation and petition for consecration. A date for the consecration was proposed by the new Bishop, John Pelham, but he then asked to meet with the Clerk of the Union, William Henry Scott. The Bishop was very concerned to hear that the union had no chapel and refused 'to allow the corpse of any pauper to be carried into any part of the workhouse for the performance of any part of the service directed to be read in a consecrated building'. He felt strongly that there should be no difference made 'in the outward respect shown in the burial of a pauper dying in the house and one dying out of the house'. He then refused to consecrate the ground until some proper Chapel was erected on it.

On 6th October the committee met to consider the chapel to be erected on the proposed ground or elsewhere on the workhouse premises, a very expensive addition. It was decided to ask Mr Kitson for the Bishop's objection to be put in writing. Pelham's response was fully copied into the minutes on 20th October listing his dislike of separate burial grounds in parishes especially as there was now a public cemetery in Aylsham. However as it was legal and had been agreed, his only objection was the lack of a chapel. Obviously some pressure had been brought to bear because he ended by agreeing to waive this objection and consecrate the land but urged them to build a decent building or adapt a room for the purpose. The Board lost no time in arranging the consecration for 24th November at 1.00 and invited the Bishop, his officers, the ministers and churchwardens for lunch at the Black Boys.

The union death register noted against the entry for Eliza Gray a 75-year old from Aylsham on 1st December 1857: 'This was the first burial in the new ground at the House'. Burials at the 'workhouse cemetery' continued at least to 1880 and probably until the Poor Law union was abolished by the act of 1929. After that the County Council took over responsibility for hospital services, care of children and old people and out-relief. St Michael's moved into a new era.

The January issue of *Just Aylsham* reported the Town Council's plan to take over the old graveyard of the old St Michael's workhouse which lies between Mill Close and Sapwell Close. The consecrated ground which cannot be built on will be tidied up 'to create a peaceful environment'. Many people are unaware of the little ground and might be interested to know how it came into being. The current exhibition at the Aylsham Heritage Centre tells the story of St Michael's Workhouse.

Painting the Church by **Daphne Davy**

I, along with many others over the years, have often bemoaned the fact that the documentation of events is poor or nonexistent. Recently I realised that I am as guilty as any. Some years ago, several people including me painted the internal walls of Aylsham Parish church. I have written my memories, and some of the others involved have amended and extended these.

Graham Kirk was a churchwarden from 1995 to 2002, and this definitely took place during his tenure. No one can get closer than this, although the church accounts might narrow the time down. The Vicar at that time was Bob Branson, and the parishioners involved (in alphabetical order) were Daphne and Rex Davy (me and my husband), James and Nancy McCosh, Dee and Mervyn Peart, and Betty and Jack Stevens. Pat Howe was also involved sometimes.

I am not certain whether the initiative came from the vicar – Bob Branson – but he was very supportive. Rex thinks that it was Graham, Rex and I who started it, with the others joining later. Nancy thinks that James joined before her, and Dee thinks she and Mervyn were the next. Betty and Jack are now (2016) dead, so cannot comment.

The redecoration was necessary because of the deterioration due to age, plus in some areas a "modern" type of emulsion paint had been applied over the traditional lime wash. Over time, this would have pulled off the original covering.

The decision was taken to do the work in-house. This was partly due to cost, but also because getting in external contractors would require parts of the church to be unavailable for use, causing disruption to services and other events.

It was very difficult to find out about the necessary products and procedures. Graham had a colleague – Lloyd Heffer – who worked for a sister company,

and who had expertise in the matter. He came to Aylsham, met Graham in the church, and gave advice. He explained preparation requirements and limewash options, as he had previously supplied products and expertise for use in ecclesiastical buildings in the Ely diocese.

A breathable product had recently been developed, and was available. It was, however, quite expensive, and the cost would have been prohibitive for such a large area of the church. It was decided to use quick lime, then to slake it to produce limewash. Most was bought from Hendry's, of Foulsham.

Anyone who has had anything to do with limewash will know what a difficult material it is. When used as a type of paint, it is thinned with water, when it becomes virtually colourless; only turning opaque white when it dries. It takes at least three coats to cover a wall. When used as mortar, to fill cracks and chips, it is mixed with fine sand and straw, but still needs several applications. We did not need to do this, but if used outside it needs to be made waterproof by the addition of oil instead of water. When you add the water, the lime bubbles as it is slaked.

We bought the lime wash in large (perhaps 25 litre?) buckets from Hendry's in Foulsham. I cannot remember how many containers we bought, but I think we got through at least one container per bay. This would mean at least 20 containers were probably used.

In order to reach the height of the walls, we bought a scaffolding tower. This was six foot by six foot horizontally, and 20 foot high. Each level consisted of two identical sections, which were placed facing each other. The two sections which formed the next level were on the other two sides of the square, and were put together with male and female connections. Each level was around two foot six inches high, and we had eight of them. There were diagonal cross members to stabilise and brace the tower. At the top we put wooden boards to act as a floor. The top was reached by ladder, and I think that this already belonged to the church. This edifice had to be put up and taken down every time we used it. At that time, all of us except the Stevens worked. Rex was self employed, and sometimes did some work by himself, but otherwise this was something that I suppose we did evenings, weekends, maybe holidays. I cannot now remember how long this took in elapsed time.

We aimed to do one coat of one bay every session. First any major patches of "blown" plaster had to be taken off. This was quite easy. Any flaky places had to be rubbed down. Cracks, chips, replacement of blown plaster needed the application of lime mortar, which then needed to dry. The limewash was made up in buckets, and all of us got to work. I think that in general Rex did the mortaring, James Mervyn and Rex did the painting from the higher levels of the tower, Jack did the middle levels, and Betty, Dee and I did the areas

accessible from floor level. As I recall, everyone except the top three got very stained, and even they did not escape entirely.

We used very large, coarse brushes, perhaps 8 inches across. I assume that these were bought from the same place as the limewash itself, and that they were specialist brushes. I am not certain what they were made of, but I'm certain that they would have been a natural fibre. I imagine that the costs and dates are recorded in the church archives.

Each of us coped with the messiness in different ways. As I recall, Rex and I just used old, scruffy clothes, and a shower and hairwash at the end. Jack arrived in pristine overalls each time, presumably scrubbed clean by Betty. I don't remember how the others managed.

We went first round the outer walls, starting just east of the porch door. We used (a lot of) sheets to protect the floor.

Having finished the (inside of) the exterior walls, we did the interior walls. These walls consist mostly of the surfaces above the pillars and arches of the nave and chancel. We used ladders to reach these, as the scaffolding could not be used where there were pews.

One worry was the chancel arch. There was a huge spiderweb, which Dee was very worried about, but even this was eventually sorted.

The wall above the great east window in the sanctuary was difficult to reach. We erected the scaffolding tower, with a set of steps on the top. Rex went up there, armed with a paint brush on the end of a six foot pole. While he did this, I knelt in the chancel pews, praying. In those days there were no mobile phones, but obviously God was listening.

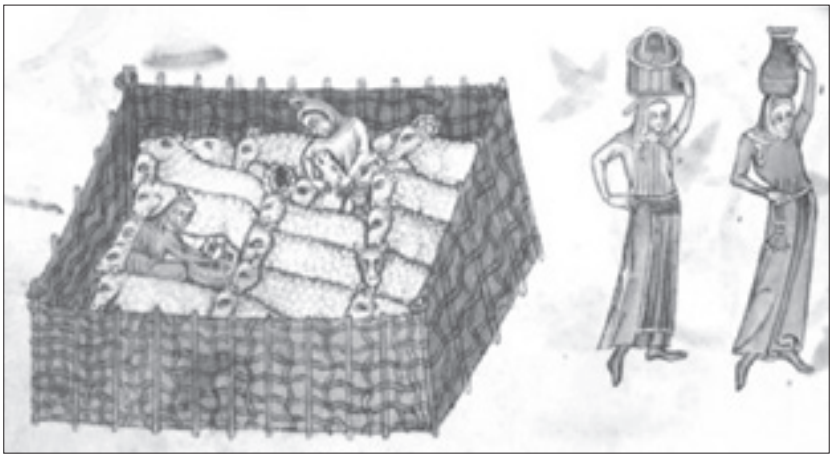
One wall that we couldn't do was the chancel wall behind the organ. We tried everything we could think of to reach it, scaffolding, ladders, brushes on (very) long poles, levitation, but nothing worked. I hoped that while the organ is away being refurbished (second half 2016) someone might do it, as I imagine it has not been done since the organ was installed in that position (1900?). Unfortunately, the organ framework was left in place, so this is still inaccessible.

Having finished the walls, we painted some of the wood. Not the wood supporting the ringing chamber, which still has traces of medieval paint, nor the roof. Mostly, it was the wood in the porch, plus the doors. We used an evil smelling, dark brown goo. I assume that this, too, was the mandatory stuff for churches.

I have shown this to the surviving members of the crew, and corrected and extended it in the light of their comments.

After the West End was completed, a professional painter painted what needed it. Things had moved on, and the paint he used, although still basically breathable, was much easier to apply.

The History of Wool in Norfolk – a talk by Roger Arguile



Roger opened his talk with a photograph of 'The Golden Fleece' pub in Wells. He questioned whether the name reflects the importance of sheep locally. The pub building is mainly nineteenth century. In a similar questioning vein, he moved to churches, asking whether the popular assumption that splendid Norfolk churches were built on wealth from wool can be substantiated.

We looked at some of the great churches of The Fens, and wondered whether the wealth of those times might have been based on other local resources such as salt. The great wool exporting ports are not around Norfolk. Boston in Lincolnshire exported 25% of England's wool exports alone. Looking at Norfolk churches, Roger noted that many are not splendid – for example, there are many round towers built perhaps because there was not the money available to afford dressed stone quoins.

A further point strengthened Roger's case; that Norfolk wool was seen as inferior to wool from, for example, Herefordshire and Shropshire. An illustration in the 15th century Luttrell Psalter shows sheep being milked. This supports the idea that dairy produce from sheep may have been more important than the wool. In particular, sheep cheese was an important source of protein.

There may well be a link between sheep rearing and marshland because salt marsh seems to have reduced disease in the flocks. Elsewhere, the annual casualty rate was as high as 46%. The small bridges on the marsh at Wells may

have been built originally for moving sheep. This is still evident on The Gower Peninsula.

The dung of sheep was valued as it can help make light soil more fertile, and this would explain why there were many flocks on the light soils of west Norfolk. The sheep would have fed on the remains of the harvest and then been turned on to the fallow land, or marshes, or heath. The organization on land with shared ownership was complex. However, there is no mention of wool or mutton.

The monks played a part in developing farming practice, and monastic flocks produced some of the finest wool on the Welsh borders and Yorkshire. Monastic wool-masters travelled widely to improve the breeds. They were also very good at the processing of the wool. Husbandry may have been more significant than breed.

Short wool was valued for cloth, and came principally from the Welsh border counties. Long wool was less valued, and among the counties providing long wool, was Norfolk. The fulling (shrinking) of wool was carried out with short fine wool and needed fast running water – not a feature of Norfolk. Norfolk wool is coarse long-staple and the material made was worstead. This didn't need fulling as it was strong enough without that process. However, the relative values of the two materials was stark; at one time it was 40 shillings for wool cloth and only 16 shillings and eight pence for worstead.

The great centres of the wool trade where the wool merchants thrived and grew wealthy were midland towns such as Stamford, Leicester and Coventry. The merchants owned the wool, employed the workers and exercised controls. Calais had a particular role in the trade. It became the last centre of English power in France and, in order to finance the garrison there, all wool exported from England had to pass through Calais where it was taxed. This resulted in a dramatic decline in trade.

Norfolk wool fell into the hands of wool-bloggers, who controlled the whole process and delivered the wool to spinners. Hucksters passed the spun wool to weavers. Quality was poorly controlled and worstead particularly suffered as a result. Weavers worked at their looms part-time, and tended to work in east Norfolk. In time, the new Strangers from the Low Countries brought their expertise. They knew how to make good cloth, and the story of wool in Norfolk changed again.

Roger was warmly thanked for standing in at short notice, and his talk was well-supported by another good attendance.

Jim Pannell

Bessingham: The Story of a Norfolk Estate, 1766–1970

by Jonathan Spurrell Reviewed by Edmund Perry

Bessingham is a small village roughly 8 miles NW of Aylsham and 5 miles SW of Cromer, with the same name as the local Estate. This study is the result of many years of painstaking research by the author, who accessed a large collection of legal and manorial documents, family letters, maps, drawings, photographs and printed works as well as interviews with recent residents. It attempts to blend two distinct historical perspectives:

(a) the Estate and its activities; the farms and agriculture; the church and education; the village, its inhabitants and workers; local events and celebrations.

(b) the Spurrell Family itself: the author's colourful and somewhat eccentric relatives, their interests and activities.

The first suffers from the lack of records. A short introduction provides information about the geographical context, Iceni, Roman and Anglo Saxon remains, with its name based on a tribe known as Basa's people plus a mention in the Doomsday Book. However, there's very little reference to the five hundred years before the late 18th century except that the manor was acquired by the Pastons and later by the Anson family. Few names and details are given about village families, their occupations and lifestyle, until the late 19th century when much more information was accessible from Census Records and documents at the Norfolk Record Office. Details about St Mary's Church, local education, farming and labourers' wages plus general village life is woven into the main text rather than given separate chapters. The author admits the impossibility of writing an account of Bessingham and its inhabitants without exploring the wider context of the locality where for about 200 years the land was owned and managed as a single entity and most of the dwellings were tied cottages with villagers working on the Estate. To this end he treats the Estate and the village as the same thing and these terms are used interchangeably throughout the book.

The second perspective provides a wealth of information about the Bessingham branch of the Spurrell family (a name possibly derived from Sporle, a village near Swaffham) an offshoot of Norwich and Thurgarton ancestors who intermarried with the Bacon family. The relatively small Bessingham Estate, called The Wood, was bought by John Spurrell in 1766 after his elder brother William 'White Wig' inherited the family estate at Thurgarton. William lived until 1807 but never married so left this estate to his brother's eldest son, William. John married an Elizabeth Flaxman and died in

1803, leaving Bessingham to his third son John Spurrell (1779–1837), who married Elizabeth Joy. John made his living from growing barley and malting it to send to breweries in London and used the proceeds to build a new manor house of flint and brick, with a thatched roof and he founded the present village. Two of his brothers, James and Charles, ended up working for the London brewers, Barclay Perkins & Co. John had an elder son Flaxman Spurrell who became a surgeon and amateur archaeologist in Kent, but the younger son Daniel (1817–1906) inherited the estate along with large amounts of money and property from both his parents and their relatives. This enabled him to expand and diversify into mixed farming keeping horses, bullocks and sheep. By the 1870s he owned 300 acres in Bessingham Village, and built a new, three-storied Manor House before leaving the Estate to his youngest son, Edmund Denham Spurrell (1858–1952) a noted eccentric. The stories about the latter's pet brown bear, erratic driving and flying at the age of 91 are enjoyable reading. Between them Daniel and Denham managed the Estate for a total of 117 years.

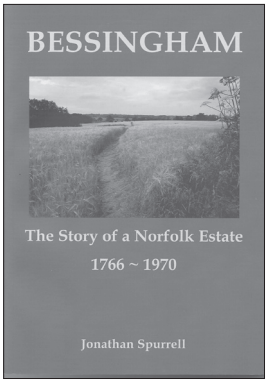
The Spurrell descent is quite convoluted with lots of biographical details concerning the upbringing, education and achievements of family members, many of whom were laid to rest in St Mary's churchyard. Reading required constant reference to the abridged Family Tree at the beginning of the book. It would have been easier if each chapter included its own extended line diagram to show the spouses and siblings under discussion. Indeed the title might well have been The Spurrells of Bessingham as the family constitutes the author's main emphasis and the reader is left wanting and waiting for more details about them.

The agricultural depression from 1870 onwards caused wages, rents, production and rural employment to fall. Bessingham estate suffered decline but survived. This period up to the end of WWII is well covered using a variety of resources including the local press, Council Minutes, Census records and the Bessingham labour account books. In 1952 Denham passed away aged 94 without issue and bequeathed the Estate to his nephew, Ronald Hitchcock, a man nearing 70, who had spent most of his life overseas. He found Bessingham an inconvenience and it is said that he only appeared once a year to collect rents, etc. He failed to maintain empty cottages which were boarded up and opposed modernisation such as electricity and mains drainage.The estate rapidly declined, its population falling from 124 to 50. When Ronald died in 1970 the Eastern Daily Press referred to it as a 'ghost village'. The 555 acres estate was split up into four farms and auctioned off. The Manor House and 52 acres was bought by Robert Gamble from Yorkshire and his glamorous Swedish wife and painter, Mary L'Anson. They lavishly decorated the Manor

House, but rather neglected the rest of the parkland which was gradually sold off. After Mary died the house began to collapse, lead was stolen from the roof and water damage forced Robert to move into a caravan and then back to his native Yorkshire.

In 2009 English Heritage refused listed status for the Manor House, which was put up for auction, but failed to reach the reserve of £640,000. A developer stepped in and plans were approved to demolish the existing building and replace it with a new pastiche manor house set in 4.5 acres of landscaped gardens, although no buyers could be found. In March 2013 it was bought by William and Dawn Hickey who began restoration.They followed the original 19th century architectural drawings, used traditional building methods and recycled materials from the existing house. After 17 months it reopened as self-catering holiday accommodation.

The author hopes this book will appeal not only to people who have personal connections with Bessingham, but also to anyone interested in the history of Norfolk. To this end photographs and maps are essential in understanding references to people, property and the landscape. The fourteen pages of colour photographs at the centre of the book are excellent, mainly family portraits, or pictures of the church and cottages. However, some of the other black & white pictures are indistinct and would have benefitted from being larger and darker. The same is true of the Enclosure, Tithe and Ordnance survey maps where farm buildings, cottages, field and road names are difficult to decipher. Despite this the text is well illustrated, and clearly printed with a good set of Notes, a useful Bibliography and Index. Altogether a worthwhile read and a welcome addition to the growing number of books about Norfolk villages and the former estates of local gentry.



Paperback, 8″ × 9″– 216 pp published by the author 2016 and available from Barnwells in Aylsham.

Bessingham History Project
Anyone with photographs, manuscripts or stories relating to Bessingham and the people who live or lived there is invited to get in touch – so that an even fuller picture can be put together of the village over the centuries.

Looking back by **Olive Skoyles**

Maypole dancing in the school ground. Photo by Joseph Dester early 1900s.

These recollections, written in 1980, were contributed by Mrs Olive Skoyles, a former teacher at Aylsham School (now St Michael's Nursery and Infant School). Mrs Skoyles came to Aylsham in 1907. Reproduced from Aylsham Local History Society Journal 1: 31–35, 52–55 and 121–124 (1985–1986).

Our Family came to Aylsham from Lowestoft in 1907. We travelled in a steam train which in those days was a great thrill for children and adults. A change had to be made in Norwich and the slower, but no less exciting, branch line train, brought us to Wroxham, through Coltishall and Buxton to the Great Eastern Station at the southern end of Aylsham.

Here we were met by my father who had ordered the "Station Fly" to carry us and our luggage about half a mile up the Norwich Road to a house and shop next door to the Dog Hotel on Dog Hill. Alas, they are no longer there! They were demolished to make way for modern shops.

Our shop was opened as a cycle and accessories emporium, with gramophones complete with large horns, and records as a side line. There were oil lamps and carbide lamps, cycle clips for trousers, pumps, saddle-bags and carriers among the bicycles for people of all ages. Country people were just beginning to realize the advantages of being mobile on two slender wheels. My father (Arthur J. Dazeley) fashioned my first cycle from a larger frame, and when I was about five, taught me to ride it on roads comparatively

free of traffic. To be able to meet and safely pass a horse-drawn vehicle was considered a great achievement. Later, many of my friends learned to ride on that little "bike" and it brought my father much business.

At five years old I was taken to the 'Church' School as it was known then and entered the Infant Class 1 under Mrs Dester, the wife of the chemist, who occupied the shop in the Market Place which is still used for the same type of business though been altered considerably [now the Indian restaurant]. The babies class at that time had a separate room in which the seats were arranged in tiers like a stairway! The highest one was about level with the teacher's head. Why tiny tots were expected to climb up and sit on those hard uncomfortable "perches" is beyond comprehension!

The older classes were all on one level but still in long desks and seats. Boys and girls were segregated, and all school rooms were heated with just a single coke fire, and in winter most of the pupils and staff had to wear their coats. Lighting was at first by oil lamps which gradually gave way to gas, and, again in winter, it was almost dark before we dismissed, and some children had to walk quite long distances. We were fortunate living in the town, where we had to just cross the Market Place, through the Church yard and down the school lane.

Twice a year, in March and September, crossing the Market Place became much more exciting. "The Fair" would set up round-abouts, swings, hoop-la stalls, rock stalls and various side shows, which at night would be lit by naked "naptha" lamps, and yet one does not recall any serious fires.

Living next door to the Dog Hotel became much more interesting at Fair time. Large farm horses, Suffolk Punches in particular, bedecked with ribbons in their manes and tails would be run up and down the hill in front of prospective buyers and most probably the deals were clinched over a pint in the hotel bar!

Much of the traffic of those days was horse-drawn. There was even a stage coach plying between Cromer and Norwich, usually changing horses at the Black Boys. There was also a carrier cart which operated from some of the outlying villages. My father actually started the first car-hire service in the district after we moved to larger premises in Red Lion Street, which are still being used as a garage [now rebuilt as shops]. In those years before the First World War it was possible to start a top spinning just in front of our shop, and "whip" it all the way down to the bottom of Red Lion Street without interruption.

Aylsham's first cinema was in a large marquee on the Unicorn Bowling Green. Front seats were fourpence and for this we saw Pathe Gazette News Reels, a serial, perhaps with Pearl White as the heroine, always left in a

precarious position until the next time! There were Charlie Chaplin films and one supposed to be a thriller called "The Black Box". One imagines modern youngsters of the 80's would consider it mild compared with some of their horror films

Shops in those days catered for almost everyone. There were at least three shoe shops, two flourishing butcher shops, Partridge's and Blofield's, three or four exceptionally good bakers, Laxen's, Postle's in Hungate Street, Gidding's on Church Hill and Winterborn's at 47, Cawston Road! One remembers going round to the back of the shop and seeing bread taken out of the oven on long handled shovels. The big oven was later to become my pantry!

Page's, the North Norfolk Supply Stores, was at that time considered a very up to date shop, with a grocery department, a drapery section and a small furniture and hardware section, with shoes and a "Gents" outfitting department all on the ground floor. Upstairs was the Mantle Department selling ladies and children's coats and dresses, with a special millinery section where the hats were displayed on stands of varying heights and where there were drawers full of ribbons and flowers for trimming!

Here there was, to children, especially fascinating method of paying. One paid the money to the assistant over the counter and she placed it in a small "cup" which at the pull of a cord, glided along wires strung across the shop, to a desk placed centrally. Here the cashier would remove it, stamp the bill, and if change were necessary, would enclose it all in the cup and return it to the counter from which it came. There were no computers or calculators in those days. All figure work was done by brain power, and girls and boys would leave the fifth standard of the Church School, and take up jobs such as cashiers or shop assistants and hold them for years with very little pay, compared with wages in the 80's.

Other changes? A very tall sycamore tree stood on a three-cornered grass patch where the now obsolete thatched pump stands.

All the little "yards" Rookery yard, Unicorn yard, Carr's Corner yard, with their two up, two down accommodation have all disappeared. It is difficult to imagine how, but often quite large families were reared in those hovels, as many of them were. This was in the days before World War 1. That upheaval saw many changes take place.

When council houses became the order of the day, most of those families were moved, and in nearly every case the yards were demolished and little or no trace remains.

Where there are now large building estates, we used to walk along leafy green lanes, gathering primroses in Spring, harebells, toadflax, meadowsweet and vetches in Summer; blackberries and hazel nuts in Autumn and would

enjoy a brisk walk along frosty paths in Winter. We made our own amusements, and spent many hours out of doors, not cooped up in a room with a T.V. set!

Aylsham, then, had a cricket team and football team of which they could be proud. When the Goulder family presented the Recreation Ground to the town in memory of two of their sons who were killed in the 1914–1918 war, we soon had a tennis club and a bowls club, also sports, racing, jumping (long and high) for ladies as well as men. It gave a great deal of pleasure to many people.

The old Post Office stood on the site now occupied by the International Stores [and now the Co-op]. It was very reliable then! Uniformed postmen delivered mail in the town twice a day, and cycling postmen, again in uniform, would go out to villages every day. Where the Post Office stands in the 80's there was a large ironmongery shop, Last's, where one could buy anything from nails to long ladders, paraffin and later gas mantles. The Gas House was very important in the first half of the century. When the family gradually replaced oil lamps with fixtures of gas lamps, we felt very grand.

One very great change has taken place in Aylsham. The "work-house", "spike" or, to give it the proper name, "The Poor Law Institution" has been altered almost beyond recognition and is now a very up-to-date hospital specializing in rheumatology. When it was a work-house, the corridors were dimly lit, stone paved and damp. The children who were housed there from time to time, wore calf length grey flannel dresses, and coarse calico pinafores with large blue print across the back yokes. There was one section where tramps could spend the night, and these could often be seen on the roads before the war.

Among the Aylsham "characters" "Tuddy" must surely be outstanding. He was a butcher during the war and before that had driven a horse-drawn mail cart for many years. He had many stories to tell of those days. Later, he became the verger and there were very few people in the town who did not know him.

It seems incredible that over a period of fifty years we have lost our railways, and the extensive building which has taken place has not only increased the population, but made the town a very busy Market Centre for North Norfolk.

About 1910 more excitement was to come to our family. Business had improved and my father felt there was room for expansion. Looking back, one also thinks that with three growing children the house was considered to be too small. The outcome of many talks and negotiations, which did not affect children very much, was a move to much larger premises only a few yards away.

It had been an old coaching inn known as "The Bull" and had a large archway over cobbled stones. Before we moved in, it had been used as a

Red Lion Street c. 1910. Arthur Dazeley's bicycle shop was a little further up on the right hand side, later Cooper Motors and now charity shops.

Fishmonger's shop, the small shop window being on the right of the archway. The whole shop was enlarged and renovated and a large plate glass window installed, made it very smart and business-like. It was soon filled with new bicycles for men, women and children, and accessories like pumps and clips, carbide lamps, inner tubes and tyres. A small office was constructed at one end of the shop and a doorway led to a long workshop, which had been made from stables.

There was a very long garden leading from the main street to another shorter one at the bottom. The top part was a yard with more stables and cart sheds on one side, and about halfway down three very primitive "privies". One of these was cleared out and painted and became a regular W.C. which was a term brought from Lowestoft, where they really did have water-closets! In winter we dreaded having to "go" all that distance and taking candles in lanterns was quite a hazardous task.

Apart from this great inconvenience, we loved the spaciousness of this new home. The house part had been the hostelry, so there was one room, which had a large "built-in" dresser, and a door which was in halves! It had been the tap-room and the lower half of the door had a shelf on which the beer mugs had been placed. It was highly intriguing, and my father would not have it altered as he was very amused by it.

This little room became our living-room, and we dined, played, and on Saturday nights were bathed in front of the fire in what became a very cosy "heart" of the house.

A lager room across the passage with stone-flag floor, was made into a dining room which we used for parties, or when we had visitors. A little way down the passage, another room was carpeted, comfortably furnished with a settee and chairs covered in velvet. Book cases of bamboo occupied one corner and there was a china cabinet which contained the best china, only brought out and used on very rare occasions! A large bear-skin rug, complete with big head and glass eyes was laid in front of the fireplace, and an ornamental overmantle of mahogany was on the shelf. This was edged with a serge "frill" with bobbles on it, and these actually helped us to count! This room was, for many years, only used on "high days and holidays" such as Christmas. A young cousin who stayed with us for the first time, screamed at the top of her voice and refused to go into the room. When asked why, she replied "frighty eyes" and it took the grown-ups many days before they could convince her the "bear" was harmless!

At the end of the passage was a large open room from which the staircase ascended. In it was a very big kitchen range, with an oven in the wall on one side. From here one door opened out to the yard and a red-tiled pathway led to a wash-house which contained two coppers. Here "Mrs Willy" used to come and preside over the weekly wash, and one remembers the smell of "Sunlight" soap, and the huge clouds of steam as sheets and pillowcases, tablecloths and the family wash of clothes all went through a very vigorous routine. They emerged snowy white, were blue-rinsed, and when necessary starched, to be later hung on a line in the lower part of the garden. Quite a distance to carry heavy washing baskets!

This lower part of the garden was cultivated on one side and all the vegetables required were grown in due season. The memory of fresh cauliflowers, sprouts, cabbages, peas and beans, still remains in the late seventies, as we still believe the fresh vegetables are not only a contribution to good health, but cannot be beaten for taste and flavour.

A very large pantry-cum-store room-cum kitchen, had scrubbed wooden shelves at varying heights all round and must have meant a great deal of work for my mother. As we grew up we often had to help with the scrubbing.

Upstairs, the bedrooms were exciting. The largest one just at the head of the stairs, had two steps down to it from a fairly large landing. This became my parents' bedroom. Facing the street on the other side was a much smaller room. This had a slightly sloping floor and walls which were very uneven, but it was made cosy and comfortable and being close to the big room was allotted to my brother when he was old enough. A step down led to another passage, and four more bedrooms. Two of these were given to my sister and myself later, but when we first moved in, we shared one bed and one room, the nearest

to the parents. It was not realized at the time, but this was because of lack of furniture to put into the other room. In fact, two of them were never used as bedrooms except on one or two occasions in an emergency. Small lattice windows were in most of the rooms. The larger of the two made an excellent indoor playroom which at one period became a dolls hospital. My sister was the main brain behind this idea, and our friends brought their dolls to be "cured" (i.e. mended) by my very clever mother, who was nearly always successful in "sending them home" in better condition than when they came.

As children we enjoyed climbing about the old stable buildings in the yard. One large one in particular was very fascinating. It had once accommodated six horses, for there were three stalls each side. A large manger was at one end and above, a huge loft which had been used for storing hay. One year when paying a visit to this loft during a game of "hide and seek", we were startled to find a large barn owl in residence. He was there for several weeks, though did not become very tame. At Christmas time we were able to have lovely parties with so much space to use. My mother always arranged a beautiful tree in one corner of our big dining room and oh! the joyous times we had with our many friends. There was always a fairy at the top of the tree which my mother usually dressed in white crinkled paper (now called crepe) and tinsel, and this was always reserved for my sister, who was fascinated by dolls of all shapes and sizes. This interest has remained with her all her life.

In the year 1911 King Edward had died and George V was to be crowned. On coronation day, huge trestle tables were installed on the Market Square and all the children of the town were given tea. The father of one of my best friends gave a mug to each child. They had portraits of King George and Queen Mary, with the date, and were much prized for many years after.

In 1912 there was the excitement of the floods. For several years we had been going down to my grandparents at Lowestoft for about a fortnight of the summer holidays. On this particular occasion, one remembers the torrential rains which came in August. The streets were flooded, and when we returned home by train, at Whitlingham near the river, the water was up to the wheel-hubs.

Here in Aylsham, the river at Millgate had overflowed and the Staithe and roads surrounding were like a huge lake. People had to be rescued from bedroom windows by boat in the cottages at Mash's Row. Two men, very much the worse for drink, were swimming about fully clothed. The town was not affected, being on a higher level, but it took a long time before the areas round the river became normal.

Postmen on foot, or on bicycles, could always be seen in the town. They wore navy blue uniforms trimmed with red stripes, and brass buttons, with

cape to match. There were two strictly timed deliveries every day, and one particular postman was very amusing. He would put a letter into a letter-box, then as he walked away, would turn two or three times to make sure he had not dropped one.

Telegram delivery boys also wore the same type of uniform, and could often be seen speeding along on their bicycles. Policemen on the beat were also a familiar sight. Here again was one outstanding character. He always carried a little cane tucked under his belt, and used it to disperse gangs of boys who might be about to commit a prank! Oh for his counterpart today! Such memories of people who helped to make Aylsham the thriving little town it is today.

Early Modern Wills: a Codicil

by **Maggie Vaughan-Lewis**

Aylsham church bells

While looking at some early wills for the article we did last year, I came across a wonderful bequest. John Bettes senior was an Aylsham shoemaker but, in the will he wrote a week before he died in April 1529, he was able to leave £10 to his son and £10 to buy a sixth bell for St Michael's church. Two local men, Edmund Wyeth and his son John were to advise on the purchase of a 'trebill bell to the 5 bells in the steeple'. If they could buy 'better chepe' they were to have 6s 8d each for their labours and the rest to be spent on the frame in which the bell was to hang. Was he just a very pious man or a keen bellringer? We will never know but how useful to our understanding of the bells' history that he was so precise in making his wishes known.

And finally ...

In the same article I asked for any suggestions of the reading of a word in an inventory. It obviously stumped most of you! I was going to offer a rather unconvincing 'alaminghouse' meaning something to do with alum but Roger Polhill came up with a far more likely explanation:

Alaminghouse – presumably the wash house derived from the Scandinavian lam or lamming to hit hard with a stick fide OED.

Thank you Roger!