

# **AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**



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Cover:

*Oxnead Bridge from downstream, showing the effect that building up the banks had on field drainage: the dykes can no longer empty into the river.  
photo Margaret Bird 2011*

# AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## JOURNAL AND NEWSLETTER



Volume 12

No. 4

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In this issue, Margaret Bird describes how Aylsham's gain from the opening of the navigation in 1779 was Coltishall's and Horstead's loss. The Rev Jack Branford opens what I hope will be a series of articles recording life in lockdown while it is still fresh, raw even, in our minds, and Jim Pannell charts the rise and fall of hand loom weaving north of Norwich in the nineteenth century.

Reports of talks in February and March have been held over to August when there will be space to do them justice.

Here is a reminder of our coming programme of 'Spotlights on Local History'. Vic Morgan talks about Thomas Becket in Norfolk on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, and Adrian O'dell returns on 11<sup>th</sup> May to talk on How GIS (Geographical Information Systems) has changed the interpretation of prehistoric sites. On 16<sup>th</sup> May we have a trip to Wymondham and on the 24<sup>th</sup> May All aboard the Ghost train with Jamie Fox and Nigel Digby. Then on the 7<sup>th</sup> June we have a trip to Sutton Hoo and on 7<sup>th</sup> July a trip to Warham Camp south of Wells-next-the-Sea with Dr John Davies. The programme rounds off on the 30<sup>th</sup> July with a concert by Chanters Jigge: 'On Weavers Way'.

Barbara Miller, a stalwart of our talks programme over many years, died on the 1<sup>st</sup> December last year at the age of 92. A short tribute to her appears on page 108 taken from the many admiring write ups by Society members in the Journal of her talks.

Finally, an apology to Jayne Andrew. In December's Journal I mistakenly added an s to her name as author of the Article on the first ten years of the Heritage Centre.

## Hard times for Horstead and Coltishall: The opening of the Aylsham navigation in 1779, by Margaret Bird

In 1894 the Manchester Ship Canal opened. Within a few years a city 36 miles inland had become 'the third busiest port in Britain'.<sup>1</sup> A success story, it would appear. But what about the people of Liverpool, the seaport at the other end of the new waterway? The venture fostered a new enmity between the two great cities. '*They took our trade*' became the Liverpudlians' refrain almost to the present day.<sup>2</sup>

### A fresh viewpoint

This article will take a look, from a completely new angle, at a topic well known to members of the Aylsham Local History Society. You as readers may protest that nothing further, surely, can be said on the subject of the early years of the Aylsham navigation. You can, with justification, point to the authoritative, readable and superbly illustrated history of the 9¼-mile waterway produced by the society's members and Sarah Spooner of the University of East Anglia in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

However *Sail and Storm*, understandably, viewed the story from Aylsham's perspective. For the opening and early years the book relied heavily on sources held in the Aylsham Town Archive, notably the detailed minutes and other proceedings of the commissioners of the navigation. For them the Act of Parliament sanctioning the waterway in 1773 and the construction itself were huge achievements, heralding a boom time for the town, its industries and its trade. Joseph Priestley (1767–1852), a contemporary expert on canals and their uses, highlighted the benefits accruing to Aylsham and other Norfolk centres nearby such as Cawston and Reepham. Overnight these towns, formerly landlocked, found themselves able to access that universal good: cheap coal. Priestley pointed out that the whole length of the navigable Bure ran through 'one of the finest agricultural districts of which this kingdom can boast'. But, he observed, its extension actually benefited Aylsham, Cawston and Reepham more than it did those downriver. It gave them a new 'advantage'.<sup>4</sup>

Building a navigation reflected the eighteenth-century spirit of improvement, and was actively promoted by agricultural economists. More efficient bulk transport of goods by water speeded up distribution and energised a local economy. Thus commentators writing county reports for the

Board of Agriculture relied on templates which included the topic of waterborne transport: the use of canals (newly-dug waterways) and navigations (existing rivers newly improved and deepened, often with the addition of locks).

I shall suggest there is a less positive side to the story. If trade expands in one place, might it not be at the expense of another? I shall feature the Aylsham scheme's losers, and chronicle how they fared. The loss of local pre-eminence suffered by the inland ports of Horstead and Coltishall, the former joint heads of navigation, precipitated at least thirty years of economic and commercial decline. Indeed, the shift in trading relationships in this downstream area was apparent as soon as Horstead Lock opened in March 1775. As will be explained, we do not have to wait for the full opening of the waterway in October 1779 to witness new maltings and staithes springing up along the banks of the navigation, challenging Coltishall's manufacturing hegemony. Horstead and Coltishall anticipated by more than a century the predicament of canal-hit Liverpool. The scale is vastly different, but the principles underlying their shared dilemma remain the same.

We can trace the sad tale of decline in the records of the excise service, for a revenue-collecting body will be extremely sensitive to changes in production levels of dutiable goods; their authoritative reports are held in the National Archives. We can read lamentations by informed observers alerting the manorial lords of Horstead and Coltishall—King's College, Cambridge—to marked changes in fortune. We can follow local merchants' forced sales, insolvency, bankruptcy and early death in the notices placed in the weekly newspapers, the *Norfolk Chronicle* and *Norwich Mercury*.

And one woman was watching carefully as these events unfolded: the diarist Mary Hardy (1733–1809), writing daily from her riverside home south of Coltishall Church. This farming, malting and brewing family lived and worked at the very point where 'the new river' (the lockstream carrying the new navigation) met 'the old river' (the natural course of the Bure along the millstream from Horstead Watermill).

### **Loss of the status of head of navigation**

Riverside towns and villages along navigable waterways derived economic and commercial benefit from their position as inland ports. Their staithes enabled farm produce and manufactured goods such as malt and flour to be shipped downstream to the sea and subsequently transhipped for the coastal

and overseas trade. Coal and timber would come upstream, so no vessel needed to sail light.

However the prize of *head* of navigation was one not willingly surrendered, for it brought very considerable advantages.<sup>5</sup> A head of navigation is an entrepôt, a vital hub at the point penetrating deepest into the region. Goods are brought for collection and distribution in a two-way trade along the riverbank, usually necessitating the creation of canal basins to accommodate the cranes, yards, cinder ovens (for coking coal), warehouses, dykes (creeks) and other facilities required. The new settlement of Dunkirk at the far end of Aylsham's Millgate grew up following the extension of the navigable Bure to the market town.

As the surveyor to King's put it pithily in his report on the Cambridge college's Coltishall manor house in 1805: 'This was originally the head of the navigation; the new cut must have been injurious to this property.'<sup>6</sup> The navigation had then been in full operation for a quarter of a century. Forwarding the observations of William Palgrave (1745–1822), the corn and coal merchant and maltster who was the college's copyholder, Josselyn found the mercantile business had been diminished by the removal of the status of head of navigation. The value of the college property had consequently dropped.

A similar devaluation was suffered across the river at the other former head of navigation - Horstead Watermill and the manor house Hallbergh (now Horstead House) immediately downstream on the 'old river' (*Figure 1*). John Josselyn junior made this penetrating judgment in his report to King's in 1802:

The last Cut [the Aylsham navigation] injures this property, as the trade used to stop here; but it is now extended to Aylsham. There are a coal wharf, lime-kiln, etc on the premises. A part of Mill Meadow is taken by the navigation . . .<sup>7</sup>

As already pointed out, the settlements furthest upriver did best of all as inland ports as they formed the deepest point in the hinterland. We can see this benefit in action in 1815 over the transport of bricks to Sheringham Bower, the pretty villa at the centre of the Sheringham Park project overseen by Humphry Repton. The proud new owner Abbot Upcher (1784–1819), when commissioning fine white facing bricks for his house, turned to the Wroxham builder and brickyard owner John Green.



*Fig 1. Horstead Mill from downstream in the early 20th century, with the wherry Widgeon lying alongside: the former basin at the head of navigation. Norfolk Wherry Trust*

This was the contractor who had taken over from John Smith in 1779 as engineer to the navigation; he had also helped build the new waterway. But Upcher did not send his wagons to Wroxham. The bricks were carried by water to Aylsham and thence overland to Sheringham Park.<sup>8</sup> Previously the wharfinger at Coltishall might well have handled such a job. And the nearby public house at Coltishall would have gained the custom of the thirsty men and wagon horses.

Contemporaries were keenly alive to the advantages of upriver hubs. As early as 1776, only one year after the opening of Horstead Lock, William Palgrave (1718–80), of Coltishall Manor House, uncle to the younger merchant whom we have met already, seized the opportunity to build a maltings upstream of the lock. The building, or its successor, still stands near the main road on the Horstead bank and is clearly visible from Coltishall Bridge. We can trace such developments in parish ratebooks, which form valuable sources for tracking commercial properties. Palgrave's new 'malting office' first appears in the Horstead church ratebook for October 1776; he both owned and worked it. He also extended his malting empire by acquiring



a maltings at either Buxton or, more probably, Lamas. By 1779 he was working eight maltings on the Upper Bure, in addition to his principal occupation as a corn and coal merchant at Coltishall and Great Yarmouth.<sup>9</sup>

When we examine Robert Corby's 1811 map of King's College properties at Horstead and Coltishall we can witness the damage inflicted on the downstream parts of the villages. All the former support structures for the canal basin at Horstead Watermill have gone, apart from those required by the miller for his trade such as his granary. The riverside scene is extraordinarily quiet.<sup>10</sup> The 'injuries' identified by Josselyn had taken their toll.

### **Riparian owners**

What were the reactions of the riparian owners? Henry Augustus Biedermann names some of them on his exquisite plan, a masterpiece of good graphic design produced by a German surveyor still in his twenties (*Figure 2*). Those *upstream* of the former head of navigation were eager to invest in the new scheme, many becoming the subscribers named in the commissioners' minutes.<sup>11</sup>

Biedermann's information, presumably supplied by Aylsham's John Adey as Clerk to the Commissioners, is not always accurate. 'John Ives, Esq.' is named on the plan as owner of the Horstead bank from the watermill upriver to Coltishall Bridge. But Ives had died in 1766. The actual landowner was his widow Rose, of Coltishall Hall; their son Chapman Ives (1758–1804), later a notable brewer, inherited the Coltishall and Horstead farm and the family's maltings and brewery on Rose's death in 1780. The labelling of the long-dead John as owner reflects the contemporary inability of some—in this instance the commissioners of the navigation—to acknowledge women's property ownership and economic activity. In fact Rose, with her steady commercial head, ran the farm and brewery competently in her fourteen years of widowhood; her husband and son lacked her financial prudence.

In the same fashion Biedermann does not name the riparian owner on the Coltishall bank immediately downstream of Upper Common (then named West Common). At the property now the Norfolk Mead Hotel, next to the Hardys' home and at the confluence of the projected lockstream with the 'old river', the owner was another widow, Margaret Smith, née Atthill. She was then living in Cambridge, keeping house for her son Joseph (1757–1822). He later became private secretary to William Pitt the Younger as Prime Minister



*Fig 2. Part of H.A. Biedermann's plan of the proposed Aylsham navigation in 1772, naming the riparian owners from below Mayton Bridge to the confluence of the millstream and lockstream at Coltishall. Aylsham Town Archive*

and also Comptroller of the Royal Mint. They were an interesting family, an ancestor being a regicide: Henry Smith's firm signature appears on Charles

I's death warrant in 1649. However Mrs Smith, as an absentee widow, does not feature on the plan.<sup>12</sup>

One person who actively supported the navigation scheme from its infancy was Margaret Smith's brother-in-law Henry Smith (1710–88), a prominent Great Hautbois attorney. The situation of his house, now known as Point House and facing the island garage near Coltishall Bridge, meant that if the navigation were extended above Horstead Watermill he could have coals brought by water literally to his back door (*Figure 3*).



*Fig 3. Point House, Great Hautbois, close to Coltishall Bridge. This was the home of the lawyer and manor court steward Henry Smith, who liaised very tardily with King's College over the proposed navigation. photo Margaret Bird 2018*

Henry Smith had an absolutely key role in facilitating the birth of the navigation; it is a role hitherto overlooked in Aylsham-based studies. He, like his father Henry before him, served as the manor court steward for King's College's manors of Horstead and Coltishall. And he played his hand with a Norfolk lawyer's guile that would have been appreciated by the letter-writing Pastons centuries earlier. He kept the college in the dark about the scheme until it was too late for any objections. All the college's permissions were

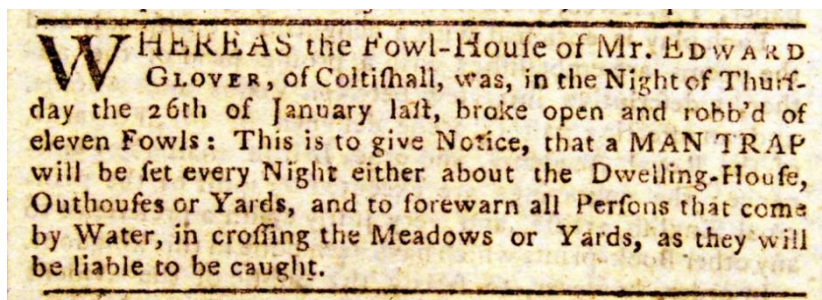
granted retrospectively, for the simple reason that they could not oppose them: the work had already been carried out. Smith not only failed to represent the interests of the college to whom he was responsible. He even ignored the interests of his sister-in-law and nephew in Cambridge. Poor Margaret Smith did not hear of the proposed navigation until the route across the college's common and part of her grounds had been staked out. Those damaged by the venture were outplayed by its backers.

Lawyer Smith, suffering this conflict of interest, ruthlessly exploited his evident good relations with the college. Only at the very end of 1773 did the bursar of King's learn of the proposed navigation; and even then the manor court steward misrepresented the effect of the scheme on the college's holdings which had been theirs since the mid-fifteenth century. In his letter of 27 December 1773, held in the college archives, Henry Smith refers to the need to 'fix a sluice' and take some land away from the college when enlarging 'a water ditch'. What he fails to mention is that the proposed so-called sluice is in fact a deep lock for cargo-carrying craft. Also the meadow drain is to be transformed into a canal: the lockstream. Smith loftily announces to the bursar: 'The affair is of such little consequence, that the Commissioners [of the navigation] do not in the least doubt of their [the Provost and Fellows of King's] free consent.' He gives the bursar less than a week to ponder and discuss the idea—during the university vacation!<sup>13</sup> Smith's high-handedness may in part have been fostered by his brother John's position as head of Caius College, Cambridge and Vice-Chancellor of the university.

Margaret Smith's property was an early casualty of the navigation. Her tenants Edward and Sarah Glover at today's Norfolk Mead Hotel had evidently enjoyed the seclusion of their riverside property and had few commercial interests, unlike most of the riverside residents. As soon as the lockstream was dug the Glovers suffered predations by wherry-men and keelmen as 'persons that come by water'. Edward Glover announced in the Norwich paper that he would set a man-trap in his grounds to preserve his chickens (*Figure 4*).

Going against the upstream majority, one riparian owner took a stand firmly against the navigation from the start. Like the Glovers, the owner of Horstead Hall in the north of the parish had little commercial bent and mourned the loss of privacy resulting from the succession of keels and wherries that would sail up the waterway. The pithy views of Mr Batcheler (d.1789 aged 52) were

noted by the commissioners as early as 15 December 1772: ‘Thomas John Batcheler Esq. of Horstead objects to the whole Navigation.’<sup>14</sup> His fears were to prove justified.



*Fig 4. Unfortunate consequences for the property now known as the Norfolk Mead Hotel downstream of Coltishall Lock. The hen houses are broken into and robbed by ‘persons that come by water’. Norwich Mercury, 11 Feb. 1775: Norfolk Heritage Centre*

The Rector of Horstead and Coltishall, the Kingsman Dr Charles Grape, was appalled by the loss of income to his old college occasioned by the extension of the navigable river. The scheme had been ‘to the prejudice of the trade of Horstead Mill . . . and to the great damage of T.J. Batcheler’s meadows and royalty from Colteshall to Meyton Bridge, the land being frequently flooded and the fish and swans disturbed or stolen’.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mounting problems**

As well as the thefts, the rector singled out the fate of Horstead Watermill and of the former arable fields bordering the navigation. By November 1778 the miller John Colls found himself short of water to power his mill, there being insufficient flow along the navigation. High-water and low-water marks had to be erected on the upper gate posts at Coltishall Lock by agreement.<sup>16</sup>

We are used today to seeing pastures and meadows along the Horstead bank from the watermill to upstream of Coltishall Bridge (see cover picture). William H. Stibbons (1908–97), a resident of Coltishall all his long life, told me in 1989 and 1990 that he had never known them otherwise. But in the years before the navigation opened these were productive *arable* fields, farmed by William Hardy: the Mill Piece, Mill Close, Sergeant Piece and

Sergeant Close of his wife's diary. Dr Grape's protests to King's College tell us what was happening. The lack of efficient drainage once the banks had been raised to improve water flow meant that an extensive network of field drains could no longer flow into the river. Spoil from deepening the waterway was almost certainly used to form the embankments. The field drains became blocked, and by 1791 the former barley and wheat fields had been transformed into waterlogged pasture.<sup>17</sup>

Further, there was seepage from the navigation into the riverside fields, exacerbating the problem. Diversion of the excess water through an arch under 'Coltishall Causeway' (the raised road leading from the Recruiting Sergeant to Coltishall Bridge) failed to solve the problem.<sup>18</sup>

As with the later North Walsham and Dilham Canal, there was not water enough at times on the waterway to support unfettered navigation by vessels. But the keelmen and wherrymen had to cope with even greater barriers to safe passage. These fiercely independent men had been accustomed all their working lives to complete freedom of movement on the Bure and other tidal rivers of the Broads, all free from toll apart from the stretch Geldeston to Bungay on the Waveney. As we know from Mary Hardy's diary, night-sailing was common even in midwinter. Now, under the regulations of the Aylsham navigation, the skippers were prevented from passing through Horstead Lock at night, the gates being locked to enforce the measure from soon after the lock's opening. Not a whit deterred, the infuriated men would merely break the gates to get through.<sup>19</sup> To add to the skippers' frustrations, delays ensued when they had to winkle out someone to collect the toll.<sup>20</sup>

### **Land–water interface: the King's Head Staithe**

Coltishall was unusual as a head of navigation in having no canal basin. Instead it had a very extensive series of riverside staithe along its banks. These included John and Thomas Browne's maltings and brewery complex at what later became the Anchor Hotel in Anchor Street (then Lowgate), the busy King's Head Staithe where the Rising Sun now stands, the massive private staithe belonging to King's College at the Manor House, and the private staithe serving Margaret Smith's house and the Hardys' maltings and brewery where the 'new river' would join the old Bure in 1775.

The layout of the Manor House Staithe is depicted by Robert Corby on his 1811 estate map held at King's. The house itself was far from a genteel residence nestling amongst trees and shrubs. In fact it was dominated by the

large malthouse and malt-mill built right against it and running down to the river. Next to the maltings lay a large cinder yard with coking ovens, and almost adjoining the domestic premises a large timber yard is shown. An L-shaped wherry cut ran beside these two yards, enabling goods to be loaded and unloaded easily. Cinders, or coke, provided the fuel for malting, as coked coal did not taint the grain. Granaries and a coal yard completed the picture.<sup>21</sup>

As there was no widening of the river in the form of a canal basin the use of wherry cuts enabled vessels to lie safely without narrowing the main river; the Hardys and the Glovers at Mrs Smith's also had purpose-built dykes for vessels. It is likely that Joseph Browne's staithe at the King's Head used the mouth of the Tunstead stream beside Lower Common (then Newgate Common) as a wherry dyke. This was an extremely busy coaling wharf, the hard-pressed Browne belonging to the brewing dynasty in Anchor Street and serving as a coal merchant and wharfinger as well as innkeeper of the King's Head.



*Fig 5. The former King's Head Staithe at Coltishall: an important hub for this once busy inland port. photo Christopher Bird 2004*

But poor Joseph Browne died aged 49 or 50 in March 1780, less than six months after the full opening of the new waterway to Aylsham. He is a

significant figure in Mary Hardy's daily diary entries, immersed in the village's enterprises and acting as host of a wide range of business and parish meetings. In the diarist's phrase he died with 'his affairs desperate' (without hope): there was little prospect of recovery of sums owed or of repaying creditors (*Figure 5*).<sup>22</sup> The brewer Chapman Ives of Coltishall Hall swiftly seized the opportunity to purchase this prime inn.<sup>23</sup>

### **Economic decline**

The Coltishall churchwardens' account book chronicles extraordinarily rapid changes as fortunes rose and, more frequently, fell. The Browne, Ives, Fiddy, Palgrave, Wells and Hawes families, engaged variously in farming, malting, brewing, staithe provision and general mercantile activity, suffered periods of decline. Most shed their assets over time to try to stay afloat, malthouses and public houses being the first to be traded with a hopeful buyer.<sup>24</sup>

Over at Horstead the miller John Colls found his watermill outclassed by newly expanded Buxton Watermill. Three years after the opening of the new waterway through Buxton the upriver mill was 'capable of performing more work than any other in this part of the kingdom'. Also it was 'excellently well situated for a foreign trade' from its 'communication by water with the port of Great Yarmouth'.<sup>25</sup> This second point would have been Horstead's boast until 1779. It was a story repeated across the country, as when Bawtry in the West Riding faltered through the opening of the Chesterfield Canal in 1777.

The story of just one man who fell victim to the Aylsham navigation is told by Mary Hardy. The former draper at Coltishall, George Boorne (d.1807 aged 67), became a timber merchant in about 1775 and formed a partnership with the former White Horse innkeeper Thomas Neve a year later. Boorne, as Bourne, appears in the commissioners' minutes as a contractor to the navigation, supplying wood for the locks. But payment for his work was very tardy, causing the partners to endure severe illiquidity. Matters became so alarming that the brewer William Hardy, by no means a man flush with money, had to underwrite the pair for £1000 in 1779 and urge their creditors not to press for payment. It was a long and sorry tale, resulting in the partners' sudden stoppage and in debts which Boorne was still paying off twenty years later. The commissioners' inability to pay him for work completed almost certainly lay at the heart of his problems. On 20 September 1775 they resolved that Boorne be paid only £100 'in part of £333 4s 11d' due to him



for oak timber. Not until 6 April 1778 did Boorne receive full payment, with 5 per cent interest from 1775.<sup>26</sup>

In 1780, just after the full opening of the waterway, Coltishall had as many as eleven malthouses in a village with an 1801 population of 601. By 1792 this impressive figure had dropped to seven. Upstream maltings at Buxton or Lamas and especially at Aylsham had undermined Coltishall's manufacturing hegemony.<sup>27</sup> And by 1801 the village's three breweries had become one under the pressure to survive. The Hardys may well have chosen to move to Letheringsett, near Holt, in 1781 as they saw the writing on the wall for Coltishall. Merger talks between Browne's brewery and Wells's, managed by William Hardy at today's Holly Lodge, were conducted as early as 1778 and 1780 but came to nothing.<sup>28</sup>

The Great Yarmouth register of shipping tells us of shifts in waterborne trade on the Broads. It was maintained 1795–98 under the government's short-lived scheme to protect men working the inland waterways from impressment in the Royal Navy at a time of national crisis. For instance, the skipper of the 40-ton keel *Trial*, home berth Panxworth at the west end of South Walsham Inner Broad on the Bure, logged his vessel's principal trading route as between Aylsham and Great Yarmouth. Before 1779 *Trial's* customary passage would have been between Horstead or Coltishall and Yarmouth. Similarly the 36-ton wherry *Olive Branch*, home berth Horning, plied Aylsham–Yarmouth where previously the vessel would have gone no further upstream than Horstead and Coltishall. Other wherries carrying goods for transshipment at Great Yarmouth for the coastal and overseas trade had quickly made Aylsham their home berth.<sup>29</sup>

### **Social cohesion**

One of the most remarkable features of this tale is the lack of social unrest over these shifts in fortune. The Horstead and Coltishall area shows itself as a society at ease with itself. Other places had riots when navigable waterways were extended upriver, for workers in the redundant canal basins and in related overland distribution lost their jobs. This time all assaults appear to have been verbal, notably as reported to King's College. The commissioners' minutes, local newspapers and Mary Hardy in her diary all fail to report any violence against promoters of the upstart navigation or over the loss of existing jobs. We have heard Horstead's squire, the rector and the Suffolk-based valuer, employing the clear, forceful language of the time, use terms

such as ‘great injury’, ‘great damage’, ‘to the prejudice of trade’ and ‘injurious to this property’.

Social harmony was not so apparent elsewhere. When the Kennet navigation with its eighteen locks extended the navigable waterway from Reading upstream to Newbury in 1721 violent opposition ensued: ‘The mayor of Reading even took gangs of his townsmen out to destroy the locks as they were being built.’<sup>30</sup> A century later, and nearer home, the North Walsham and Dilham Canal faced vigorous opposition. Under this scheme the River Ant was to be made navigable upstream of Wayford Bridge and Dilham Staithe. Robert Malster recounts the reactions of the injured parties:

There were sufficient people in the adjoining parishes of Dilham and Worstead whose livelihoods seem to have depended on the trade through this staithe [at Dilham] for there to be spirited opposition to the canal proposal.<sup>31</sup>

#### **‘Several trades have discontinued working in Coltishall’**

The harm caused to Coltishall’s manufacturing base was very real and is measurable in the precisely worded records of the excise service. The mid-eighteenth century had seen malting and brewing expand greatly at Coltishall and its immediate area. It was John Repton (d.1775 aged 61, and father of Humphry) who as the senior officer in Norwich Excise Collection, covering the eastern half of Norfolk and north Suffolk, promoted Coltishall to an excise district in 1758 to help his officers cope with the increased burdens of gauging the commodities and collecting excise duty. However in 1789, ten years after the opening of the navigation, Coltishall was partially demoted in excise terms. And in 1808 the Excise Commissioners in the City of London downgraded Coltishall to just two rides and removed its hard-won district status. They spelled out the reason: ‘Several trades have discontinued working in Coltishall Division and . . . there being no malt made for exportation therein . . .’<sup>32</sup>

Patterns of trade and manufacturing shifted again during the nineteenth century. Commercial brewing on a significant scale ended in Coltishall in 1841 following the death of Robert Hawes; Horstead had never been a brewing village. Malting gradually picked up, and Coltishall became known as a predominantly malting and boat-building parish, as others have recorded. But the glory days up to 1779 were never to be repeated, even when the two villages resumed their old status of head of navigation following the floods of August 1912 and the smashing of the locks on the navigation. Distribution

by rail and road represented the future. Tourists revelled in what the guidebooks described as a sleepy, picturesque backwater—even if the residents did not recognise that picture of their home patch. And Lower Common today can look as busy as it did in Joseph Browne’s time, with car parks overflowing, all moorings fully taken and visitors pouring onto the attractive green. The wheel of fortune keeps turning.

*Author’s note: Some of this material was used in an illustrated talk given by Margaret Bird and hosted by the Bure Navigation Conservation Trust at Horstead Tithe Barn on 23 September 2021.*

## Notes

1. ‘The Manchester Ship Canal’, <<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/The-Manchester-Ship-Canal/>>, accessed 8 May 2021. The canal is actually a navigation (an improved waterway, as opposed to a new cut), as it follows the original course of the Mersey and Irwell.
2. My husband, born in Liverpool in 1945 and raised there, vividly recalls the lament from his childhood: ‘As a tot I was taught “They took our trade.” ’ Containerisation in the 1970s restored the old shipping patterns, and the tidal Mersey became once more supreme.
3. S. Spooner, ed., *Sail and Storm: The Aylsham navigation* (Aylsham Local History Society, 2012).
4. J. Priestley, *Historical Account of the Navigable Rivers, Canals, and Railways, throughout Great Britain* (David & Charles Reprints, Newton Abbot, 1969; 1st pub. 1831), p. 109.
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11. The riparian owners from whom the Commissioners bought land in 1773 are named in S. Spooner, ed, *Sail and Storm*, p. 18.
12. The Ives and Smith families make prominent appearances in all four volumes of Margaret Bird's *Mary Hardy and her World* and also in her edition of the full text of Mary Hardy's Coltishall diary (M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy 1773–1809* (4 volumes, Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2013): Diary 1: Public house and waterway). Mary Hardy and her husband William met H.A. Biedermann and his English wife Mary at the White Horse, Great Hautbois, in 1778 (Diary 1, p. 288, 20 August 1778). Manorial customary law, which rejected coverture (the subsuming of women within the person of their husbands), always acknowledged women's rights as property-owners. Wives, for instance, would make wills recognised in manor courts and devise their copyhold property while still married.
13. King's College: KCAR/6/2/38/9, COL/517. Smith affixes his own sketch map of the lockstream running from the old course of the Bure and cutting across the college's common land. The map is reproduced in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, Volume 4, p. 79.
14. Aylsham Town Archive: 499, Box 132, Commissioners' minute book 1772–1811.
15. Revd Dr Grape's undated remarks are transcribed in Percy Millican's valuable study, *A History of Horstead and Stanninghall, Norfolk* (Norwich,

1937), p. 9. Colteshall, also Couteshall, are old manorial spellings; Meyton is Mayton Bridge, in the north of Horstead parish.

16. Aylsham Town Archive: 499, Box 132, 3 November 1778. Silt was being carried down to Colls's mill and the waterway already needed dredging by 7 December 1779.

17. King's College: KCAR/6/2/087/14, HOR/18, Letter of 27 June 1791 sent in high dudgeon by Dr Grape to the college head, the Provost of King's. The rector, a redoubtable champion of his college, declared himself to be fighting 'under the banner of King Henry the VIth'.

18. The 1790 legal agreement trying to solve the drainage problems is quoted in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, Volume 4, pp. 100–1.

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21. A detail from Corby's map showing the range of Manor House outbuildings as well as the staithe complex is pictured in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*, Volume 4, p. 136.

22. M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*, Diary 1, pp. 368–9, 15 March, 17–20 March 1780.

23. In fact Browne's creditors were paid a dividend of 2s 6d in the pound (12½%) (*Norwich Mercury*, 22 April 1780, 17 February 1781). Chapman Ives was to suffer bankruptcies in 1796 and 1804, but his undoing cannot be laid at the door of the navigation. He over-extended himself by rapid expansion and converting his Anchor Street brewery to steam.

24. NRO: PD 598/37, Coltishall churchwardens' account book 1776–1830.

25. *Norfolk Chronicle*, 7 December 1782.

26. Boorne and Neve's sorry tale is recounted in M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*, Diary 1; detailed index entries chart their fall. Boorne's treatment by the commissioners of the navigation is chronicled in their minute book held in Box 36 (Aylsham Town Archive).

27. NRO: PD 598/37, Coltishall churchwardens' account book, entries for 1780 and 1792.

28. M. Bird, ed., *The Diary of Mary Hardy*, Diary 1, pp. 300, 378 and 384, 22 November 1778, 28 May and 15 July 1780.

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31. R. Malster, *The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads* (Phillimore, Chichester, 2003), p. 96.
32. The National Archives: Public Record Office: CUST 47/222, p. 59, 21 June 1758; CUST 47/219, pp. 119–20, 4 Oct. 1757; CUST 47/363, pp. 69–71, 13 January 1789; CUST 47/365, pp. 44 onwards, 3 Apr. 1789; CUST 47/457, pp. 88–9, 24 March 1808. ‘Exportation’ refers to goods passing through a seaport for the coastal and overseas trade. In William Hardy’s and Chapman Ives’s time at Coltishall a good deal of their malt and beer had been shipped to London and further afield.

## **Hope, Prayer and Care: Reflections on the Early Days of the Pandemic in Aylsham by the Rev Jack Branford**

Aylsham Parochial Church Council met for its usual regular meeting on the same evening that social distancing measures were first announced on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The date had been chosen, quite coincidentally, months before and it would be the last time any of us would meet in person for quite some time. That evening we discussed the potentially huge pastoral implications that COVID-19 was likely to have on our church family, the wider community of Aylsham, and the surrounding villages. We decided to do something straight away.

### **Aylsham Coronavirus Community Helpline**

The morning after, we began a series of conversations with various community organisations in the town - Aylsham Town Council, Aylsham Care Trust, Aylsham Community First Responders, Aylsham Churches Together – each group recognised the need to act now and already had a network of volunteers they could call upon. That very afternoon we launched the Aylsham Coronavirus Community Helpline.

We had the number printed in Just Aylsham which was delivered to every house in the town that week, as well as spreading the word online. We encouraged those who were self-isolating to ring the helpline if they needed: a friendly phone call, mail posted, urgent food, medicine supplies or anything else.

The number received well over a thousand calls during the first national lockdown which resulted in the delivery of hundreds of prescriptions, food shops and Foodbank parcels. We have also received a small but steady number of pastoral calls to the line: from those who just need a chat, to those needing help getting to the hospital to have a baby!

One self-isolating resident responded: “Thank you so much. It is so good to know someone is there for us.”

### **Pioneering Foodbank Deliveries**

It quickly became clear through speaking to our local schools that one of the main developing needs in our community was that families were struggling for food, partly because of the sudden closure of schools and then, through the subsequent delay of the government’s food voucher scheme. We took the decision - with the wonderful people at Cromer Foodbank - to pioneer

Foodbank deliveries in North Norfolk through the helpline; a scheme that was used a great deal, particularly in the first few weeks of lockdown.

### **From phone box to food box**



***Blickling Community Larder. Photo courtesy Aylsham Parish Church***

We felt that we could do more, and the church had purchased the old red phone box in Blickling a few months before to use as some sort of community facility. We came up with the idea of converting the phone box into a Community

Larder. We contacted our friends at Blickling Hall who were happy to build some shelves and provide the larder with fresh produce from their gardens.

The project was launched online, inviting anyone in our parishes to take what they need or donate what they could. The Community Larder seems to have been received very well – our social media posts ‘went viral’, being shared hundreds of times, reaching tens of thousands of people. More importantly, the facility was well used. Every few days the entire contents of the larder changed through the constant flurry of donations and withdrawals.

One resident said, “Thank you to the minds that brought it together; it’s a fantastic idea, such a good re-purposing, and perfectly placed at the junction of community, church and National Trust. The rhubarb has been much appreciated in my house: rhubarb crumble and a rhubarb and custard tart!”

An enthusiastic response from another local resident was: “Oh my goodness that’s like a dream come true! Not for me but for hope for humanity-led communities. Aylsham Parish Church is the real deal.”



## **Practical care for the congregation**

As well as caring for the wider community, there were of course many changes to the way we operated as a worship community. Firstly, we encouraged everybody in the congregation to contact at least one other person from the church community on a regular basis. This led to some wonderful friendships developing over the phone and I remember hearing lots of lovely feedback from people who are having deep conversations and building great relationships. It was particularly lovely to see the heart-warming pastoral instincts of our congregation for those who are unwell.

## **Prayer and worship – online**

With churches all over the world, our services also had to go online during the first national lockdown. We broadcast a service every Sunday morning on our Facebook page and website - something which continues to this day.

The first national lockdown saw a great deal of interest in Online Church. Typically twice as many people were participating in our online worship in comparison to the numbers we saw in church before the pandemic on a Sunday morning.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing about online worship, however, is the way it allows those who could not usually get to church to join in with worship. We always sought to be a truly inclusive church and in some important ways, the move online has made this more possible. It was a great encouragement to know that our local nursing homes were joining in with our Sunday morning worship during that first lockdown and I have heard stories of several other people who would find in-person Sunday worship a struggle through a mental or physical disability but are now able to join in with the worship of Aylsham Parish Church from their own homes.

“Thank you to everyone who contributes to these lovely services,” responded one local resident. “I can’t usually get to church and it’s so moving to be with you and all the work involved is so much appreciated.”

As the months drew on during the first lockdown, many of our usual church activities also moved online; some of this was other video content like our APCM review of the year, Collect Worship/Assemblies for our local schools and children’s craft activities. Much of our online content also revolved around Zoom, which proved to be a useful tool for online coffee mornings, Bible study groups, and even PCC meetings.

We did experience our fair share of technical difficulties along the way. The broadband speeds in our old church house in Holman Road were not great and it wasn't terribly easy to produce worship in a Curate's house, with no study and two small children but God is good and has honoured whatever we have been able to do.

### **Prayer and worship – by post/email**

We also posted out prayer resources and sermons so we could be as inclusive as possible, making sure those who did not have access to the internet could share in our worship from their own homes.

Our reflective prayer and silent prayer group time also continued through posted resources. With people simultaneously joining in with times of meditative prayer wherever they were.

### **Symbols of hope**

Theologically the church is, by definition, a people of hope. Perhaps, the most important role Aylsham Parish Church tried to play throughout the difficult early days of the pandemic was to bring a little bit of joy and hope to our community. We attempted to do this in lots of little ways: by giving out Easter Eggs and free family craft packs to brighten the lives of young families in our town; by lighting candles of hope in our windows on a Sunday evening; by ringing the church bell when praying for our community so that people know that they were not alone and that they were prayed for; by illuminating the church tower in blue to thank our key workers; by giving chocolates and lovely knitted creations to volunteers and others in our communities who are making such a difference at this time.

One local Mum of three who received one of our craft packs said: "Thank you so much this has made our week."

These may only be small, symbolic things, but as a church community built around sharing bread and wine, we knew small symbols of hope could make a big difference.

*The Rev Jack Branford is the Chaplain at Gresham School Holt and was Curate at Aylsham Parish Church from 2016 to 2020*

## **The Victorian Textile Industry in the Aylsham area, by Jim Pannell**

Since living in Aylsham, I have been interested in references to the textile industry. I understand this to be the presence of hand loom weavers who worked from home as a cottage industry. They wove worsted, silk, cotton, and later horsehair and crepe, and bombazines and challis (4) which were fabric blends. There were also many working in support of weavers: combers, spinners, dyers, bobbin fillers, draw boys. Their produce, or 'pieces', were sold on to merchants who were largely based in Norwich which, for centuries, was a pre-eminent textiles centre in England. The local distribution of weavers can be gleaned from 1851 which was the year of the second full (i.e. listing everyone's names) national census, carried out subsequently every ten years.

Note that the census data should not be taken exactly. The enumeration districts varied, the writing is Victorian copperplate, defaced and very faded in some places and, as we shall see later, the information given was selective.

### **Numbers of textile workers in the Aylsham area, 1851:**

Aylsham	2	Banningham	1
Blickling	0	Brampton & Oxnead	
Burgh-next-Aylsham	0	Buxton	29
Calthorpe Wickmere & Wolterton	0	Cawston	1
Coltishall	0	Erpingham	1
Great Hautbois	0	Hevingham	71
Horsford	0	Horsham St Faith	40
Ingworth	0	Itteringham & Oulton	0
Lamas & Hautbois Parva	2	Marsham	75
North Walsham	2	Reepham	0
Tuttington	0		

The absence of textile workers in some places may reflect that there never was any textile working there, or that there was once textile work and it had gone.

Four areas stand out with the numbers of textile workers: Marsham, Buxton, Hevingham and Horsham St. Faith.

Looked at over a longer period in the table below, In the case of Horsham St. Faith, the 1891 census reveals an entry for ‘the manager of horsehair factory’. This suggests that a mechanised centre was established there which accounts for the large number of weavers of horsehair. If this was the case, it is possible that the horsehair weavers in Hevingham in 1891 and 1901 were travelling to work in the factory.

**Numbers of textile workers:**

year	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Marsham	30	75	20	12	4	1	0
Buxton	2	29	2	1	2	0	0
Hevingham	4	71	51	23	6	17*	23*
Horsham St Faith	20	40	99	100	77	50*	62*

\*All weavers in horsehair

The reasons for the numbers of textile workers in certain villages lie in the centuries prior to this study, but there are one or two questions arising from the census material pertaining to Buxton, Marsham and Hevingham:

**Firstly, did the textile workers in those villages work communally?**

In Marsham in 1841 the majority of textile workers lived along the main street which is now Old Norwich Road running parallel to the newer Norwich turnpike road. This is unsurprising since most of the Marsham dwellings were on this road. There were a few workers living at Little London (west of Marsham) and Rodgate (opposite High Street). By 1851, the textile worker population had significantly expanded, and they dwelt in Rodgate, Cambridge (North of the Cawston Road), Cranes Lane, Fengate, Little London, and Turnpike Road (Norwich Road). Perhaps new workers moved in towards the periphery of the village to find accommodation and did not cluster.

However, the distribution of workers in Hevingham is different and remarkable. There were several in Town Street (now The Street), Low Street (now Low Lane), Halls Corner and Brick Kiln Road, but a concentration of some 60 textile workers lived on Westgate and Buxton Heath to the west of Hevingham village. The workforce comprised cotton and silk weavers and bobbin fillers. The head of the house is often shown as the weaver with daughters being the bobbin fillers whilst sons generally became broom makers or labourers.

The workers in Buxton lived outside the village centre on Lion Road (which leads out to Cawston Road), Back Street (now Back Lane which leads towards the Heath), and the Heath itself. There were no workers on Mill Street or around the Church which might be regarded as more prosperous areas.

Why would the textile workers elect to live outside the village centres? Perhaps the use of the equipment involved noise possibly late at night - a weaver in 1850 typically worked a 16 hour day in summer and 14.5 hours in winter (2). Perhaps they just preferred to be together with shared employment interests. Or maybe the property out of the village centres was less expensive to buy / rent. The restrictions of the guilds and government taxation may have been factors. Was there a non-conformist element?

**Secondly, what happened between 1841 and 1851 that resulted in a significant rise in the numbers of textile workers?**

Norwich was a centre of production for fine textile products. The 18<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as the golden age of Norwich weaving (2). Wool was brought to Norwich from Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. It was combed and then carted to spinners and weavers within a rough radius of 20 miles from Norwich (2). Master weavers set up the looms for increasingly complex colours and patterns. The weavers sold their cloth to merchants who amassed great wealth in Norwich.

Foreign wars, American independence and cheaper production in Lancashire threatened the East Anglian weavers (2), but in the Norwich area the well-established skills of the weavers were applied to the new market for shawl-making. So pre-eminent in this field was Norwich that the shawls were known around the world as 'Norwich shawls'. Huge orders came from the East India Company which brought wealth to the weavers who wove the silk for the shawls (2). Nearly all the weavers in the area were weavers of silk at

this time. This is reflected in the census material in the table above where the increase in textile worker numbers from 1841 to 1851 can be seen. Five Norwich merchants displayed shawls at the Great Exhibition of 1851. They were popular and expensive - c £770 in today's money (6) - and worn by Queen Victoria. Whereas in 1840 the workers were described simply as 'weaver', in 1851 most workers were 'hand-loom weaver (silk)'. However, the newly developed Jacquard looms required overhead punch cards to enable the weaving of complex patterned shawls. These larger looms did not fit into cottages and were resisted (6). The process of setting up the loom for increasingly complex patterns required the expertise of master weavers which was more efficient with power looms (2).

### **Thirdly, what happened between 1851 and 1861 that resulted in a significant reduction in the numbers of textile workers?**

Despite the relatively recent upturn in fortunes, the advantages of the north, now extending into the West Riding of Yorkshire, proved fatal, and further developments in the mechanics of power looms meant that cloth could be produced much more quickly and efficiently than by hand-loom weavers. Additionally, the demand for shawls decreased as they went out of fashion. Developments in dyeing, patterns, and printing were quickly employed in the north. By 1835 it is estimated that already four-fifths of the British worsted industry was concentrated in the West Riding.

It is unusual for the census enumerator to add personal notes to a census. However, a Mr Bliss made an exception of Marsham in 1861 as he wrote:

'The population of Marsham (not including the reformatory) is 584 showing a considerable decrease since 1851 when there were 652 inhabitants (White's Directory). In 1841 there were 694 inhabitants....Exclusive of births and deaths 165 persons have left and 44 moved in to the parish since 1851 since which time nearly 50 hand looms have been employed in weaving silk, cotton and worsted fabrics for the Norwich manufacturers at present there are not more than 4 or 5 and several persons are out of work in consequence.'

The enumerator has recorded against the names of these workers 'no employment' or 'no work'. Some of their names may be recognised as 'local' to recent times such as Grix, Smithson, Edwards, Slipper, Hunt, Blyth. The remaining workers were, on average, considerably older in age than the average in 1851 reflecting that it was no longer a trade that would support a young family. Weaving was generally a family concern and these families

perhaps knew that their hand-loom industry was rapidly and terminally waning, as we see from the census figures for the final decades of Victoria's reign. This may have had a lasting impact as the census populations of Marsham and Hevingham are little changed from 1851 to 2001, while that of nearby Aylsham had more than tripled.

The Norwich weavers discouraged merchants from paying village weavers by demanding they offer less and less money for their woven pieces. Merchants also exercised that ploy in reverse by offering the Norwich weavers less pay due to competition from the villages (5). For the sick, parish relief was pitiful. There is evidence that weavers were intimidated into not giving their names 'lest the carrier should hear of them and refuse them employment'(4). It is possible that textile workers felt the same sense of anxiety with regard to the census returns. Mr. Mitchell, Assistant Hand-Loom Commissioner, reported that in 1840 there were 80 hand looms in Marsham and 120 in Hevingham of which half were unemployed. These figures do not match the census figures. Some weavers were working part of their time as agricultural labourers (4), others may not have wished to register on the census as weavers. To further complicate, workers in Marsham sought employment in Hevingham (4). The Norwich textile scene had terminally declined and the village cottage industry, so dependent on the city, declined with it.

The local textile cottage industry is shown to have been increasingly uncertain in Victorian years, with the exception of the weaving revival around the 1840s. It is probable that weavers continued to register their occupations as weavers even though they were no longer at their looms.

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## Studying the Iron Age of Norfolk: a talk by Dr John Davies



*Silver stater showing an engraved prancing horse struck in Norfolk in the second half of the first century BC (c50BC–0), courtesy John Davies*

Despite the onset of winter weather on Thursday 25 November 2021, there was a good turnout for the talk by Dr John Davies, former Chief Curator for the Norfolk Museums Service and Keeper of Archaeology. His aim has been to reveal the lifestyle of the late prehistoric inhabitants of our area before the Romans came in the first century AD and the extent to which it differed from what is known in other parts of Britain and Europe.

The Iron Age, from about 700 BC to the advent of the Romans, is characterised by a continuity of the Bronze Age in the use of bronze, with an introduction of silver and gold for coinage and higher status objects of ornament and ritual in the century BC–AD, but with a more general use of iron for both utilitarian and cultural purposes. Iron, however, easily corrodes and the greater part from this period is damaged or lost. Iron Age people left no written record, but museum collections, especially of metalwork, together with some evidence from excavations, enable the interpretation of the range of activities, revealing a very rich and complex society – far more so than has previously been appreciated. They performed their own special rituals and used a system of symbols on objects. Their metalwork was of the highest technical quality and they used a sophisticated coinage system.

The inhabitants of northern East Anglia were essentially agricultural people, pastoral rather than cereal growers, living in comparatively simple farms without towns or even large-scale settlements. Their region, extending beyond the subsequent Roman administrative district of the Iceni, was in Norfolk, the northern part of Suffolk and north-east Cambridgeshire, but was bounded to some extent by the Fens to the west and at times the River



Waveney to the south. Compared to Wessex and to a lesser extent the south of England there is a notable paucity of earthwork enclosures often referred to as hillforts, with only five in Norfolk, and little evidence of structured chiefdoms or even weapons. Although spears and agricultural tools may have been used it is notable that only one well-preserved sword has survived. In general it seems to have been a very egalitarian society without evident hierarchical structuring.

Their round houses of wood and mud with thatched roofs are not easily detectable with aerial photography and there is a notable absence of middens. There is a lack of grave sites, suggesting that cremation might have been normal. Deposits on hills, in pits and aquatic sites may mark ritual sites. There are 60 recorded hoards carefully buried, providing much insight into their preoccupations. They include good evidence of trade with other parts of the country and an interesting connection across the North Sea to Gaul and well beyond.

The popularity of metal detecting in the last 40 years has very significantly increased the wealth of museum artefacts. Dr Davies has been keen to liaise with searchers and at least document finds even if they are not deposited in national collections. Overall there are about 2,300 objects in the collections of the Castle Museum with smaller numbers at Kings Lynn, Thetford and elsewhere, but there are also some 2,500 further finds not in museums. About two thirds of all known collections are coins.

It is very apparent that the Iceni revered personal adornments for themselves and their animals. They made special mortars to prepare cosmetics and there are numerous necklaces, brooches, dress pins and the neck rings that are especially symbolic. Enamel was often used to provide highlights. Combs for weaving are another indication of attention to personal appearance. The Snettisham Treasure includes three complete (and one partial) tubular gold torcs. Unlike any others they are hollow and very light in weight. They also seem to have been made to easily come apart. It seems that they were intended to be worn during tribal ceremonies only and stored safely at other times.

Horse related items, such as terret rings, linch pins and bridle bits, form a high proportion of ornamental status finds. Apart from the first issue all their coins in gold and silver display horses and were ranked in a sophisticated system of denominations and elaborated with symbols. They were minted locally at several sites, notably Thetford and Saham Toney, with distinctive clay moulds surviving. The first issue of coins feature a wolf. Wolves were

indigenous, but would have become rare as the forests were gradually cleared. The later coins overlapping the Roman era include the insertion of Roman letters, the meaning of which remains uncertain.

Cattle were a measure of wealth and bulls much favoured as symbols of strength, as they were all over Britain. Bronze bull's heads feature as decorations for bowls and cauldrons. Handles from tankards for drinking beer (not wine) in a ceremonial context were found at numerous sites. Another significant find is a drinking horn terminal unearthened from Needham. It is hollow, cast in copper alloy with a terminal part curved inwards to form a realistic bull's head. At the end of the period, about 60 AD, metal detecting at Crownthorpe, near Wymondham, located a large bronze bowl-like vessel containing six smaller vessels inside including a pair of drinking cups with handles decorated with Celtic style swimming ducks, the eyes enamelled. It is comparable to types used in Roman households and it had been deliberately buried. Drinking seems to have been an important part of Icenic ritual.

Boar figurines, as a representation of strength, were also used in armoury, coinage and small plinth-based ornaments. A remarkable boar about 87 mm long from the first century AD in copper alloy was metal detected at Needham in south Norfolk. It has a semi-circular notch in the right ear and a tick mark on the right shoulder that must be coded symbols. Boars with tick markings have also been found on silver coins.

The wonderful finds from Ken Hill, Snettisham, Sedgeford and Bawsey clearly indicate great wealth, important cult sites and centres for trade and pilgrimage. At the end of the period they chose not to adopt Roman material culture within their borders, perhaps to maintain their own proud identity. Compared to other parts of Britain there is a notable paucity of exotic items from the Mediterranean and no mirrors at all, but again unlike other parts of Britain more of a trade link with Germany. They continued to follow their own way in preferred seclusion as long as they could.

This report is compiled from jottings at the talk, an excellent summary provided by Dr Davies and his contributions to the *British Archaeological Report 549* (2011), cited below as a resource for further reading.

Roger Polhill

*Davies, J.A., ed. (2011). The Iron Age in Northern East Anglia. BAR British Series 549.*

## The M&GN and North Norfolk – a talk given by Nigel Digby



*Last “Leicester” passing through Aylsham North Station on last day of February 1959, probably taken by Dr Ian Allan or Frank Church. Aylsham Town Archive.*

Despite the continuation of Covid restrictions there was a very good turnout on the 27<sup>th</sup> January for Nigel Digby’s talk on the railways of north-east Norfolk, with a good number of visitors attracted by an interest in trains, also an indication perhaps that websites are spreading the word. It turned into a lovely occasion, Nigel so knowledgeable and enthusiastic, carrying all along in empathy for the age of steam – a stream of great photographs, some saved from company dissolutions at the last moment, and all analysed with skill and perception. Altogether a most memorable evening, and, moreover, Nigel has provided us with the summary of the perfectly delivered talk that follows.

After looking at the earliest means of public transportation: turnpikes, canals, we looked at the origin of the first railways in north-east Norfolk. This

began with the desire of Lord Suffield of Gunton Hall to open the district, for various reasons, with a railway line from the Great Eastern Railway in Norwich to North Walsham, Cromer and Aylsham. This was the East Norfolk Railway opened in 1877.

It should not be forgotten that people were not necessarily the most important traffic. The abiding business model was the import of cheap coal, and the export of cattle and other agricultural produce. There followed various scenes of the railway (from 1862 the GER) to Cromer and Aylsham.

But the GER were not the only players in the district. Because of GER's many junctions, crossing the County by rail was very difficult. This was where the contractors Wilkinson & Jarvis came in. By means of the Yarmouth & North Norfolk and Lynn & Fakenham Railways they were able to build a through line from Lynn to Yarmouth that ignored and competed with the GER.

When the Cromer branch of what was now the Eastern & Midlands Railway was opened in 1887, followed by the Norfolk & Suffolk Joint Railway in 1898 and 1906, a circular route around north-east Norfolk was created which this talk illustrated.

We started at Stalham, then looked at in order Honing, the Bengate Bank, North Walsham Town, Felmingham, Aylsham Town (later Aylsham North), Bluestone (for Cawston), Corpusty & Saxthorpe, Melton East Junction, Melton Constable, Melton West Junction, Holt, Weybourne, Sheringham, West Runton, Runton West Junction, the East Runton viaducts, Runton East Junction, the gasworks, and Cromer Beach, which had the advantage over the GER station (later called Cromer High) as it was right in town, not far from the beach, and High station was a mile from the town, up a steep hill!

That was all one could have expected from railway development in the area, were it not for one man. The reaction of London journalist and poet Clement Scott to the area prompted him to write "Poppyland", and the E&MR saw an opportunity in its popularity. They obtained an Act for a railway to Mundesley. This was not built until 1898, after the E&MR had become the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway in 1893.

The first part of the line to be built was from North Walsham, including all the junctions to join up the GER with the M&GN, such as Antingham Road, passing over the magnificent bridge No. 358 over the North Walsham & Dilham canal, through Paston & Knapton station, to Mundesley and its grand

station, cottages, water tank and signal box. Then beyond Mundesley past Mundesley North signal box, Trimmingham, Sidestrand Halt, Overstrand, Cromer Links Halt, the tunnel under Cromer High station, Roughton Road Junction, the link line to the GER at Cromer Junction, the footbridges for the Bond-Cabbell estate, and Newstead Lane Junction, where the line divides to join the M&GN at Runton West and Runton East Junctions.

There were lots of questions and reminiscences, and even as the hall was cleared Nigel had a cluster around him to continue the discourse and only reluctantly go home.

Roger Polhill



*M&GN Station, Aylsham, Barnwell Series. Aylsham Town Archive*

## Barbara Miller: a tribute

*Compiled by Jeremy Worth*

Barbara Miller led a long and full life, contributing immensely to the life of Norwich and its environs, Aylsham included. Her obituary in the Eastern Daily Press for December 17<sup>th</sup> 2021 records the many contributions she made to Norwich and Norfolk life in her 92 years. I will not attempt to summarise them here. Instead I give snippets from a few of the write-ups of her talks in the Journal, which demonstrate the talent she had for bringing the past to life.

She first came to give a talk to the Society in April 1997, it was to be the first of 11 visits, the last being in October 2019 when she was 90!

‘A large audience heard Mrs Miller talk on the Life of Sir James Edward Smith, the English botanist born in Norwich...It was a most enjoyable talk’ Tom Mollard. She returned to the subject in 2012 when Ann Dyball wrote ‘This was a rich and deeply satisfying evening with a lively lecture. As so often, it was apparent from the intense discussions afterwards how much Barbara Miller had stimulated the interest of her audience.’

Norwich Cathedral, February 2006. ‘A title such as this gives a lot of scope and Mrs Miller’s talk covered a huge amount, all fascinating, delivered at a good speed and without, as far as I could see, any notes at all. We had a wonderful speaker, with a marvellous subject. I look forward to another visit from Mrs Miller.’ Daphne Davy



***Barbara Miller, photo Denise Bradley, copyright Archant 2014***

The shoe industry in Norwich, November 2009. ‘Shoes, shoes, shoes – women never have enough!’ These were Barbara Miller’s opening words at the start of a fascinating talk which took us through every age right up to the present day...We are so grateful to Barbara Miller for opening our eyes to such an important part of Norwich’s history.’ Diana Polhill

Her last talk to the Society was in October 2019. ‘Barbara Miller delivered her talk on Sir Thomas Browne with her usual panache, erudition and humour...In sum, to quote Barbara: a God fearing and happy man in his life and death’. Caroline Driscoll

Back Cover:

*Top: A fashion plate from 1865 showing how shawls were worn at this time*

*Bottom: A typical Norwich shawl design*

*From 'Norwich shawls once ahead of the game! March 30<sup>th</sup> 2019 courtesy  
Norfolktalesmyths.com*

