

AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



SAXLINGHAM Mary wife of
Edmund Balls 1768

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GEORGIAN SOCIAL LIFE AS REVEALED IN RURAL NORFOLK CHURCHYARDS **Peter Holman**

These comments on Georgian social life in rural north Norfolk are based on visits to a large number of churchyards, the purpose of which was to record the designs on gravestones of that period, and secondly, to comment on the position and state of these places. The siting of churches within the countryside is of considerable interest because Norfolk has many churches which are not in villages. The favourite story is that villages moved away from the churches when the plague struck in the 14th. century. However, there are other reasons such as village drift, failure of local conditions to support the community, removal of village buildings by the owners of the big house in order to form a park, or the local lord building a church at a convenient distance from his house and the village.

The shape of the churchyard was also dictated by these factors. The earliest churchyards are circular and surround the site; an example of this is at East Lexham. But by the Georgian period, early churchyards had been used over and over again and graves were unmarked. Towards the end of the 17th. century wooden crosses were used and longer markers were made from supported beams running the length of the grave. These too decayed in time (This idea was revived by the Arts and

Crafts movement, and there are imitations at Westwick near Worstead, and at Braydeston near Brundall).

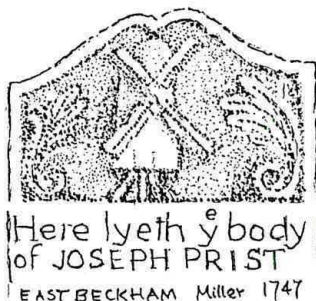
Stones with 17th. century dates are rare. They are squat, grim affairs usually sunk in the ground and decorated with crude skulls and bones. Some are double-sided with inscriptions on both sides. Stones of this period harp on death using simple emblems of coffins, skulls with crowns and foliage. These stones are often sunken with the date obscured and sited on the south side of the church near the porch.

With the turn of the century, the style in decoration becomes more cheerful with Cherubs heads and winged angels - John Betjeman's "faces of English ploughboys", and the standard of carving becomes very good. We know little about these local craftsmen, but their personal style can be traced, in certain churchyards, and others in the same area. They also dictated the choice of stone, all of which had to be imported into stoneless East Anglia. However, plenty of small ports and navigable rivers must have helped in this respect. In the early days grave stones were probably carved by local builders or stone masons employed by them, but gradually the more skilled took on no other work. Unfortunately early stones never seemed to be signed; this is a Victorian feature. In many cases the signature was low down and thus soon obscured .

The great fear of death, of hell-fire and damnation, which resulted in the macabre stones of earlier times, gave way to a more enlightened way of thinking, with the population learning more from scientific discoveries and of the wider world by exploration and great voyages. This swing in the direction of thought must have influenced many different aspects of both life and death for many people, but one must remember that not everyone buried in a churchyard had a marked grave; some families could not afford the expense of a stone, and thus many of the humbler families are not represented.

It is interesting that styles record surprising changes in status of occupation at about this time. Bricklayers occur; Michael Jackson 1789, of Blakeney, has the tools of his trade shown, but Robert Hammond 1758, of Aylmerton, who was also a bricklayer, has the conventional symbols of a serpent, skull and coffin. The thirty years

between their deaths could well reflect the change in attitude to death at this time. The bricklayer of this time was obviously a craftsman whose skills were respected. After all, the splendid Georgian architecture in the county relied a great deal on the talents of the bricklayers.

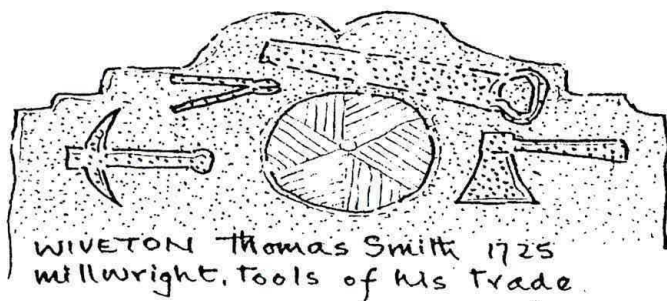


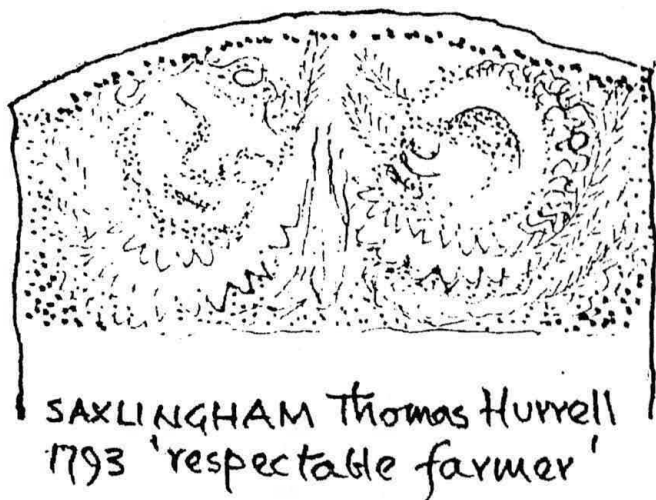
Other homely trades do occur; a carpenter at Itteringham, Edmund Proudfoot (1740), has a design showing his tools cleverly arranged. At Wiveton, Thomas Smith (1725) was a millwright who may have done work for Joseph Priest (1747) of Beckham whose postmill is depicted on his stone in great detail.

A remarkable blacksmith, Johnson Jex, (1852) is recorded at Letheringsett. He was also an inventor, watchsmith and self taught scholar. "Insensible to the voice of fame, he lived and died a scientific anchorite."

At Thorpe St. Andrew, a Norwich suburb which spread east during this period, William Barger (1776) was a gardener, - perhaps for the big new houses? Gravediggers or Sextons are not recorded as such in words, but by crossed pick and shovel on many stones.

Farmers appear quite often:- Robert Kibble (1823) at Heydon is one of several in the same family. At Langham, John Taylor (1760) is recorded as a "respectable farmer"! Would this occupation appear on





a modern gravestone? Farming was then a prosperous occupation, and these men were prominent in village life; they also employed many men compared with the farmers of today. Thatchers appear; Aylsham has one with tools including a ladder and shears, but the inscription is unreadable due to moss and lichen.

There are soldiers. At Wiveton, near Cley, James Ratcliffe spent twenty five years in the Lifeguards and was present at Waterloo. His stone depicts a deep carving of his helmet and rifle on a tomb, and faintly, in the background a church - Wiveton church? Only at Antingham has another stone been seen with the local church upon it. Antingham has two churches in the same churchyard, they are both there, on a stone to Jonas Walpole, 1810.

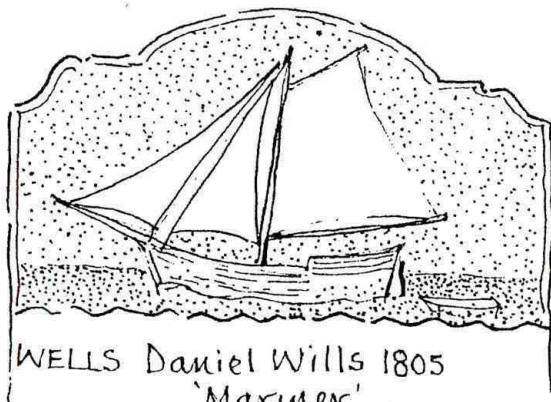
At Fulmodeston the ruined church stands in a wood which was a churchyard. Gravestones and tree trunks stand together. By the wall of the Chancel a collapsed tomb records Neil Browne 1812 (no age) a cornet in the 18th Light Dragoons. (A cornet was the fifth commissioned officer in a troop of cavalry, and carried the colours.)

In the same wood a very sad stone tells of how in one week in January 1851 Thomas and Hannah Wesby lost six children to scarlet

fever. The names and ages are recorded on the stone. Likewise at Aylsham church, on the east wall of the transept there is a long list of children of one family who died between 1771 and 1809. Nine children are listed, the oldest aged twenty. A reflection here on the medical knowledge of the time.!

There are many instances of faithful servants; these often occur near the great houses belonging to important families. At Heydon, Francis Chastney (1840) and Elizabeth his wife lived for upwards of three score years with the Bulwer family of Heydon Hall, and died possessed of several thousand pounds. At Tottenhill, Anne Smith (1841) lived as a servant for sixty years in the family of Thomas and Mary Cooper of Kings Lynn, while at Harpley, Louis Carpentier (1829) died at the age of seventy two years. He had fled to this country in 1795 from France, and entered service in the household of the Reverend Christopher Spurgeon, the Rector. Louis served his master for thirty six years. School-masters are rare. At Ormesby, one William Lucas, (1791) was master at the charity school in the parish under the directions of Charles Swindon Esq. for eighteen years. Another rarity is Richard Ruck (1800), a grocer and draper of Field Dalling.

Clergymen were normally buried within their churches, but at Heydon, Erasmus Wigget Bulwer (1828) shot himself by accident and later died. He is described as a rector, but perhaps without a living since he is buried outside the transept. The Bulwers were, and still are, the big family at Heydon.



'Mariner'
A cutter, as used in preventive service.

All along the coast, churchyards record deaths at sea. At Morston William Luce (1828) aged 22 years was drowned from a preventative boat. - A smuggling adventure? At Upper (or Old Sheringham,) Cutler Craske and his youngest son Nathaniel, aged 13 years, perished at sea in the hurricane of the 29th November 1826, within sight of home! But there are masters and captains who died in their beds. Their stones often show their fully rigged ships in great detail. One of these is the gravestone in Ormesby churchyard of Joseph Church (1811). More are to be found at Wells-next-the-Sea including Daniel Wells, (1803) master mariner, with his ship in full sail.

These reflect the activity and prosperity of the small ports and fishing villages along the coast. Happisburgh churchyard is full of deaths off the dangerous shoals nearby. The largest grave is unmarked but contains the bodies of thirty two seamen drowned when H.M.S Peggy was wrecked in 1770. (Somewhere nearby is the grave of the notorious poisoner Jonathan Balls (1846) who poisoned peoples drinks with arsenic. (One day he drank from the wrong glass!). This coastal traffic, much of which plied up and down the coast between the North-east and London was partly composed of colliers providing the capital with vast amounts of coal. Names of northern ports are to be found on some of the gravestones.

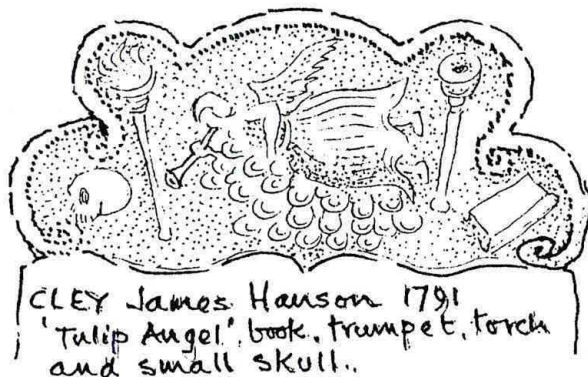
Some interesting details from this period include Martha Bush (no date) whose plain stone at Cranworth near Dereham has at the bottom the inscription - "She bought this stone in her lifetime".

On the north Norfolk coast there seems to have been trouble with dates. At Burnham Deepdale, Deborah Crow, aged 17 years, has the dates of her burial 1717- 1718. While at Brancaster, Bridget Dagleys has 1719 - 1720. The Gregorian Calendar changed in Great Britain in 1752; these dates seem too early to be affected by this. However , the year did not change until March 25th at this time . Perhaps they died during this period?

The elegance of this time is reflected in the letter-cutting of the inscriptions, which is usually of a very high standard, and the invention of the theme of the cherub, or angels heads and wings, which do not seem to be derived from bought patterns. There are sometimes elaborate biblical scenes, and the same design may be repeated with

slight variations on stones for the same family. These may extend to a dozen or more, possibly in rows (mourners must have wondered who would be next!) Here we might have a family showing the rural prosperity of a certain part of the community, in that they could afford to pay for well-carved stones with pleasant designs and well formed lettering. There is little evidence of the turbulence that existed amongst other classes - smugglers, poachers, striking labourers on the land; those would be in the unmarked graves, untended in the less ordered parts of the churchyard. On the whole these rural churchyards are pleasant quiet places with trees and birdsong where another age of elegance and turbulence can be sensed in contrast to the hustle and bustle of our own times.

[The article above was originally Peter Holman's course work for the day course "Georgian East Anglia - Economic and social history" under the tutor, Douglas Baker. Held this year at Aylsham]



DONATIONS TO THE TOWN COUNCIL ARCHIVES.

Following Jane Nolan's death in July 1997, Frank Nolan presented the bulk of Jane's papers to the society and these are now stored in the Town Archives.

Frank Nolan has very kindly donated a selection of Jane's books from her personal library to the society, and these have also been placed for safekeeping in the Town Archives. These books make a useful collection for students of Aylsham's and Norfolk's history. We are most grateful to Frank for his generosity, and the collection of books will also serve as a permanent reminder of Jane, our former Chairman.

Titles donated:-

1. *A Bibliography of Norfolk History*. 1975, Published by U.E.A.
2. *A Bibliography of Norfolk History*. Vol. 2 1974-1988. Published by U.E.A. in 1991
3. *East Anglian Studies. Essays presented to Chris Barringer on his retirement, August 30 1995*. Edited by Adam Longcroft and Richard Joby. Published By U.E.A. 1995
(contains an essay by Julian Eve "*A study of the poor in two Norfolk parishes - Aylsham and Horsham St. Faith. 1700-1834*")
4. *Forty Norfolk Essays*, by R. W. Ketton-Cremer. 1961
5. *Norfolk Assembly*, " 1957
6. *Norfolk portraits*, " 1944
7. *The local museum; notes for amateur curators*. 22nd. ed. 1986, by Crispin Paine.
8. *Discovering timber framed buildings*, by Richard Harris. 2nd ed. 1981
9. *Discovering your old house*, by David Iredale. 2nd ed. 1980
10. *The parish church of St. Michael, Aylsham. 1380-1980*, by Jack W. M. Vyse. Reprinted 1986.
11. *The brasses, indents and lost brasses of St. Michael's, Aylsham for the revision of Mill Stephenson's list of the brasses in the British Isles*. 1926, Appendix 1938,

- searched 1983 and 1985. J. Roger Greenwood, compiler
12. "Aylsham Baptist Church; Bicentenary 1791-1991. booklet by B. Allcock
 13. Methodist church, Aylsham *A short history of the buildings 1784-1884*. Volume 1
 14. Aylsham 'Tab' Community Church, Leaflet and *The History of the Tab, 1868-1990*.
 15. Aylsham Local History Society Publications:
Aylsham in the seventeenth century. 1988
Aylsham in 1821
Millgate, Aylsham 1993
The poor in Aylsham 1700-1836. 1995
A Backward Glance "Events in Aylsham's past" 1995
 16. Thirty-fourth List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest compiled under section 54 of the Town & Country Planning Act. 1971 [Aylsham]. 1984



BLICKLING

Peter Pink

We are very lucky, we who live in and near Aylsham. We have Blickling Hall close by. A recommended book in the 1999/2000 series of classes arranged by our society and the UEA prompted me to look afresh, a closer look at Blickling. The book - *A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk, 1784*¹ - includes an account of a visit to Blickling. Despite the book's title, this part of the book was originally one of a series of letters written by a Pole, the tutor to two aristocratic young Frenchmen.

The tutor's name was Maximilien de Lazowski. He was 40 and he was accompanying Francois and Alexandre de la Rochefoucauld, 18 and 16 respectively. Their father was the duc de Liancourt, known by the name of la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, who was considered a liberal in pre-French revolutionary days, despite being close to Louis XVI. He was Grand Master of the Wardrobe at Versailles, founder of the School of Arts and Crafts at Chalons, and a well-known economist in close

touch with Arthur Young.

The first words we read are "This estate belonged to Anne Boleyn's father". From this, it could be thought we are being led straight into the conclusion that Anne Boleyn was born at Blickling. But it is not so. Lazowski goes on: "I am not sure whether Anne Boleyn was not born here". He was quite right to be unsure, to sit on the fence. What I found interesting is that the disputations between those who say YES and those who say NO is not modern.

I'm neutral because it is a very grey area. Geoffrey Boleyn, Anne's great-grandfather, certainly acquired the Blickling property, but there is no proof Anne ever went near the place. There are three Boleyns who have monumental brasses to them in the local church, dated from 1458-85, but Anne could, just as easily, have been born at Hever Castle in Kent. The life-sized carved wooden figures, one of Anne, the other of her daughter Queen Elizabeth 1, are mentioned by Lazowski. The translator notes: the carvings show the two women "in the most up to date fashion" at the time this account was written.

This shouldn't surprise us. The "modern" Pevsner² (Page 404) says of the carvings: "Of 1767, needless to say,...the two charming, life-size Rococo-Tudor figures in relief of Anne Boleyn...and Queen Elizabeth." Anne's plinth asserts she was born there. But both the birthplace and birthdate of Anne are not known. Her death is precisely dated: 19th May 1536. Executions are well recorded.

The carvings are dated as 1767, part of the major works at Blickling during the period 1765-1779. The letter was written in 1784, less than 20 years after the statues were put up. "The house was built in the time of James I" writes the Polish tutor" and thus in old style, but part of the interior has been modernised."

This summary of the actual building of Blickling is a little simplistic. Let's examine "thus in old style". Blickling is Jacobean, at least mainly Jacobean, but it has to be appreciated that the outcome was old fashioned when it was built. The "modern" Pevsner says (Page 400): "The house was built, or rather rebuilt, between 1618 and 1629. Although designed at the same time as Inigo Jones's Queen's House at Greenwich, Blickling is still entirely unaffected by the new Classical trend. It has the square corner turrets with ogee caps of Syon House (Middlesex) and Hatfield House (Hertfordshire) "

The slightly-looking backwards design in the first 30 years of the 17th Century is a puzzle, a puzzle which has exercised many minds. The "modern" Pevsner says Sir Henry Hobart elected "to utilize as much of the existing fabric as possible, probably for reasons of economy". It has been suggested there was another reason Sir Henry might prefer the older look: the Hobarts were anxious to be viewed as the established top dogs, not the new boys on the block. The family wished to spin an idea - "we are an ancient part of the landscape". In the 17th Century, that wasn't true.

Nevertheless, the family home had to show what the Hobarts wanted to be believed. Both reasons, economy and show, could be true. There is no conflict between them. Some facts, perhaps not obvious to the visitor from France and perhaps not passed on to him, was that there had been "a rectangular moated house on the site, built in the 1390s for Sir Nicholas Dagworth, to which had been added a Tudor range for Sir Thomas Boleyn" as the modern Pevsner puts it.

So the main house was built upon old foundations. It is also important to keep reminding ourselves that de Lazowski saw Blickling very soon after the house had been extensively altered. He is unaware of this, saying "The house was built in the time of James I, and thus in old style, but part of the interior has been modernised."

Strangely, Blickling, unlike other major Country Houses, has been altered and remodelled, without major changes to the overall look of the place. So the House itself would have looked much the same to the visitor of 1784 as it does today. But the park would be different. Lazowski thought Blickling's park was unusual, a place of "immense forests with patches of cultivation, and houses, bell-towers and the houses of farms that can't be seen: in these openings, nothing could be more delightful than the selection and the making of this view: it is quite unlike any view of England and makes a tremendous effect." He thought the park presented "a view of Germany".

Growth, particularly of trees, alters things. Many of the views he saw in 1784 will no longer be there. The translator/editor of this letter makes the point in a footnote that a belvedere, a sort of summer house especially designed to provide a view, described in the letter, is no longer in existence, replaced by a water-tank. This is now disused and screened by yew-trees. The view from the top is now obscured by very mature trees. Several must be 100 feet high.

Our 18th Century visitor mentions the attempt to "establish race-tracks for horses", and the building of "a house with a tower above it". "The house has a room for taking tea, and you climb up to the platform of the tower and enjoy a superb view" adds de Lazowski. The "modern" Pevsner says this building was a grandstand, constructed in 1773, a mere 11 years before our Polish observer viewed it, and it was converted to domestic use in 1857.

The Polish letter writer described a "Cabin ..built like a simple cottage, with straw seats, two prominent deal shelves all round the walls, furnished with all the pottery necessary for milk and tea and making a simple meal, but as plain and unadorned as you could find in the homes of the people. It is that yellowish pottery ...the English import from Flanders: it looks neat and goes well with the cabin. In front of the cabin, in an open space, some ruins have been put together, statues and urns set up and spread very effectively over a slight natural elevation."

This cabin is not there now. But Humphry Repton drew it later, when it was known as the "Ladies' Cottage" The "ruins...statues...and urns" (one of which de Lazowski says was modern in 1784 and contained the ashes of one of Lord Buckinghamshire's children with an inscription to that effect and "some perfectly chosen lines of Milton") have all gone, replaced by the mausoleum.

The visitors were too early for the pyramid. It was constructed in 1796-7. The "modern" Pevsner says it was based on the Roman tomb of Cestius, "not on anything Egyptian". Do I dare criticise Pevsner? Yes, I do. Surely, Cestius's tomb was based on Egyptian models.

I have approached this subject gingerly. It raises the temperature in some quarters. But surely, when we look at Blickling, we do have to realise it is the product of many hands. What we can marvel at is the way it has developed into a most striking, harmonious building, surrounded by a beautiful park.

We cannot, incidentally, take everything written in the past, even when observed by an obviously intelligent person, as absolute truth. Lazowski wrote: "You see from these details that this park, without any great reputation, is none the less an agreeable place".

The translator adds a footnote here "It had a great reputation with Arthur Young, who wrote fourteen years earlier in his TOUR OF

THE EASTERN COUNTIES: "This partial view of the lake...is strikingly beautiful. You will dwell on it with uncommon pleasure".

NOTES

1. "A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk, 1784", edited and translated by Norman Scarfe, the Boydell Press, Suffolk Records Society, Volume XXX.
2. "The Buildings of England, Norfolk 1: Norwich and North-East", Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, Penguin Books, 2nd edition, 1997.

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(The above is the text of Peter Pink's talk delivered at the Members Evening held on the 27th. January. Ed)

## THE COPEMAN FAMILY

Ron Peabody has been in correspondence with an Australian, Phillip Bailey, who is researching the Copeman family from which he is descended. This family comes from the Aylsham/Itteringham/Erpingham areas.

Understandably, Mr. Bailey finds it difficult checking records at such a great distance and would welcome help from any local researcher with the same interest. He writes "*. . . do you have a researcher who could check your holdings for material relevant to my interest? . . . I could send a lot of material that I cannot connect together, . . . but I feel that somebody with local historical knowledge may be able to dig out that piece of information that will join it all together.*"

Anybody interested? Information on how to contact Mr. Bailey is given below\*. As far as Erpingham goes, I can only see two Copemans who lived there between 1841 and 1891. They were Edward (aged 48) and Mary (45). They were farmers, living with two servants. There are no children mentioned. This information comes from the



1841 census. After that census return the name disappears.

Along with the letter, there are several pages of the Copeman family tree [1531-1998] which must have taken years of research to compile. All this information will be filed away in the Town Archives for future use.

Finally, Mr. Bailey enclosed copies of the will of Katherine Copeman, which out of interest, I reproduce below. Katherine Copeman, incidentally, was the widow of Robert Copeman (1740-1803) who was the Land Agent at Blickling Hall. In recent issues of the *Journal* we published a selection from his letter book which is still preserved at Blickling Hall.

\* Phillip R. Bailey, 15 Woodbury Street, North Rocks. NSW 2151. Australia  
e-mail: - pbailey@idx.com.au

## **THE WILL OF KATHERINE COPEMAN**

**(Proved at the Consistory Court, Norwich. December 1832)**

This is the last will and Testament of me, Katherine Copeman of Aylsham in the county of Norfolk, widow. Firstly, I give unto my niece, Miss Byard, and to my niece and daughter-in-law Anna Copeman, the sum of nineteen guineas each (for mourning) to be paid to them within one month after my decease. And all residue and remainder of my personal estate, of whatever nature, kind or sort the same may consist at my decease after payment of my funeral expenses, just debts and the charges of proving this my will. I give and bequeath unto my son, Robert Copeman of Aylsham aforesaid, Gentleman, whom I make, constitute and appoint sole executor . . . And lastly, I revoke all former wills by me made . [9th. April 1817]

(Signed and sealed in the presence of James Robert Copeman and John Dagless)

### **[CODICIL]**

A codicil made by me Katherine Copeman, widow, . . . which I declare and direct to be taken as part of my last will and testament

bearing the date 9th. April 1817.

I give and bequeath to each of my grandchildren Anna, Robert, George, Louise, Katherine, Thomas and Lucy Copeman the sum of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings, to be paid to them within one month next after my decease. And I direct that their several receipts under their own hands only shall, notwithstanding their minorities, be legal discharges for their respective legacies. . . . . [12th. July 1828]

*(signed in the presence of R.W.Parmeter and George Wm. Girdlestone)*

[2nd. CODICIL]

A codicil made by me, Katherine Copeman of Aylsham . . . widow . . . I wish, in case my son Robert Copeman of Aylsham aforesaid, Gentleman, shall happen to die before me, I give and bequest all my personal estate unto and equally to be divided amongst each of his children as shall be living at the time of my decease, after and subject to the payment of legacies bequeathed by my said will. And in the event of my said son so dying before me, I make and constitute and appoint Anna, his wife, Execetrix of my said last will and testament. . . . [23rd. November 1830]

*(signed in the presence of Charles Atkinson and George Roe)*

Katherine Copeman died less than two years after the second codicil was added. The will was proved on 6th. December 1832, and Robert Copeman was her sole executor.

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## SANKENCE

## Joan Turville-Petre

The name *Sankence* has seemed impenetrable, but there may be a way through. Most of the facts concerning this site exist in two documents - the first Ordnance Survey 1" map, and the Tithe Award list of Aylsham properties, with map.

O.S.1" map

*Sankins Grove*  
*Sankins Barn*

1839 Tithe Award list

*Little Sankences*  
*Sankences Grove*  
*Great Sankences*  
*Sankences Barns and yards.*

The Commissioners who first drew up the Ordnance Survey map will have taken their knowledge of local names from local people, so the name *Sankins* can be considered original. It is a regular diminutive of *Sampson*, and *Sampson's* is recorded as a farm name in Essex since the thirteenth century. The Biblical name was widely known (i.e. through a Breton saint). Variant forms were current in the eighteenth century and used in estate records; e.g. *Sanctons Grove*; *Sanctons Pighile* and *Sanctons Lane*. This appears to be a compromise form, reshaping the second syllable, as *-ton*, ( a well-known place-name suffix.) A further reduction is *Sankey's*, found in a Minute Book of 1776 and elsewhere.

The land itself was nothing much. It consisted of three named plots forming a rough parallelogram of about 16 acres (Little Sankence is a fragment attached). These names suggest the needs and amenities of a middle-sized farm, but there is no reference to any living space. Altogether, the impression is given that Sankence had once been an important farming unit in some distant past. Throughout the eighteenth century the land was held by several generations of a prosperous family - the Soames. They were already tenants of the manor at the time of the Rental (c.1624)

At first sight it is reasonable to assume that Sankence is a modern "improvement" of *Sankins*, imposed in the early nineteenth century. The suffix *-ence* or *-ance* is purely French and was used to form nouns of state, quality, activity etc. e.g. *competence*; *innocence*; *entrance*; *defiance*. This suffix is a clear indicator of Frenchness. The fanciful reshaping evidently took place, but not in modern times, for a property called Sankence appears in an Aylsham Court Roll of 1573. In this entry Sankence appears as the name of a toft, a land-apportionment identified by the name of its tenant. A landholding of this kind was for



the leaders of the community. In South Elmham (on the North Suffolk border) names recorded in the late fourteenth century were still current in the sixteenth. Of course many such names fell out of use, but land is more durable than men. Whoever transformed the simple farm name *Sankins* into the Frenchified *Sankence* it was a stroke of genius.

We have to look back to the thirteenth century, when French culture still carried social status. This is a time when our local records are thin, but once *Sankence* was established as a toft name it had a prospect of lasting for some centuries. To sum up; there was a rustic form of this name and a polite one. The polite form is first recorded in 1573 and somehow survived (e.g. in the Government papers used in compiling the Tithe Award Act) until B. B. Sapwell rescued it, three hundred years later. The rustic form was in constant use in the eighteenth century, but nobody was quite sure how to spell it. What happened to this farm in the sixteenth century? When was it last occupied? These are questions not likely to be answered.

#### NOTES

1. The first one-inch Ordnance Survey map of the area has been reprinted by David & Charles. (1970), It was based on a survey made in 1816-17, and progressively revised.
2. James Wright. *A survey Map of Aylsham* 1839; published by the A.L.H.S. in 1995.
3. See P. H. Reaney *A dictionary of British surnames* Rev. ed 1976
4. P. H. Reaney. *The place names of Essex*. (1969). 23.
5. N. R. O. NRS 13683
6. See my article "*The Tofts of Aylsham Manors*" in Norfolk Archaeology.
7. Shown in an unpublished thesis by Mrs Nesta Evans.

## SOCIETY NEWS

**Cathedral Library Visit** - On 9th. March, a party of members enjoyed a visit to the Dean & Chapter library. This visit was a follow-up to the earlier talk given to members at the Friendship Club in October of last year. On this occasion, however, it was possible to see and examine the actual books themselves, instead of seeing slides of them. The visit was well attended and appeared to be enjoyed by all.

**UEA Lecture Course** - The lecture course on Georgian Norfolk has now finished and has been regarded as a great success. A new course starting in autumn has now been agreed with UEA and will be on the *Castles of East Anglia*, with Robert Lidyard as lecturer. Full details will be available in due course.

**Cringleford History Society** - this society has approached our society with a request for a tour of Aylsham to take place on 19th. July. Our society has agreed to arrange this, and Cringleford members will be led on a tour of Aylsham by Peter Holman, Peter Pink and Daphne Davy.

**Hagen/Hagon family** - Martin Hagen of 2 Belmont Road, Winscombe, North Somerset BS25 1LE who has recently joined the society is also researching his family history. He has discovered that there was a strong concentration of Hagen/Hagons during the 19th. century living in the Aylsham district and principally in and around the Millgate area. A check of our own publication, *"Millgate, Aylsham"* does not record a single mention of Hagen/Hagon, although there are references elsewhere to the name, and the name still exists locally. Mr Hagen would be pleased to hear from anyone with any information that would help him to track down his ancestors.

**Flower Festival** - There will be a 'Millennium Flower Festival' held in St. Michael's church from 14 - 16th. July, entitled "A moment in time" with many appropriate themes. Our society will be represented in the festival. Patricia Hawkins and Margaret Rowe will be arranging a display as our contribution. Perhaps I should not disclose what the theme of our contribution will be, then it might encourage members to visit the festival to find out for themselves what it is!

**Norwich Shawls** - Woad, weld and madder, retting and heckling, mercers and drapers - on Thursday, 27th. April, Helen Hoyte related to us the story of the Norwich Textile industry. Chairman of the Costume and Textile Association, a researcher of Norwich textiles, and much involved with the Norfolk Museums' collection of shawls, Helen spoke with great knowledge of her subject and with an enthusiasm which held us spellbound.

Norfolk, she told us, was early on, a fine producer of textiles; the riches earned from Aylsham linen and Worstead serge helping to pay for the immense and beautiful churches of the 13th. and 14th. centuries, for which this area is renowned. Flax and hemp grown in the fields and

water from the Bure provided the raw materials for the "agony job" of producing fabric "as fine as silk". By the 16th. century, Flemish weavers, (Strangers) arrived with their skills. Norwich "stuffs" were still being held in high regard in the 18th. century. The booms and slumps of the world of fashion, as well as competition from Scotland and France contributed to the increasing problems in the 19th. century and the eventual demise of the whole industry.

Helen showed us slides illustrating aspects of the industry - buildings, machinery people, advertisements and products - and finally described the shawls and the 'ropper' [man's scarf] which she had brought with her. We heard, with pride, that the Paisley pattern originated in Norwich, but where was our business acumen when we allowed it to be taken away and exploited with such success in faraway Scotland? Nevertheless, it was good to hear that so individual were the local designs and colours, particularly the 'Norwich Red', that identification of a product as deriving from Norfolk never carries any doubt. One felt that many of us would be keen to follow up Helen's invitation to visit Carrow hall in Norwich, to see and hear more on this fascinating subject.

**Ian and Susan McManus**

**VOUGHT family** - Mrs. Diana Holmes, 10 Carstairs Road, Darlington W.A. 6070 Australia, who is tracing her mother's family, has written for help. Mrs Holmes's grandfather was Edward Vought, born in Cawston in 1857. Edward's brother and sister's births were registered in Aylsham, so there appears to be a local connection. It is possible that the children spent some time in the Union workhouse at Aylsham until the re-marriage of their mother to a George Baldwin. Mrs Holmes is also interested to learn more about a Mary Ann(e) Vought, who died, aged 77, on 17th. January 1943, possibly in the Union workhouse. I understand all the relevant archives that might help are in the Norfolk Record Office, but there appear to be some gaps covering part of the period. Any one with any local knowledge would be most welcome.

(Mrs. Holmes e-mail address is: [drholmes@telstra.easymail.com.au](mailto:drholmes@telstra.easymail.com.au))

**Congratulations** - must be recorded to Derek Lyons who, as reported in the last issue of the *Journal*, has re-photographed the original collection of pictures of Aylsham, taken for the Aylsham Association in the 1970s. These originals, which we listed in the last issue, were



showing signs of wear, and Derek's efforts have given them a new lease of life. There was an exhibition in the Town Hall on Saturday [May 13th.] of these prints, which was well attended, and included some "then and now" comparisons. Derek's efforts are acknowledged by the Aylsham Association when he was awarded a certificate in recognition of his work.

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## DIARY DATES

### DRAGON HALL

Visit arranged on 5th. July. This is for a limited number of members, so please read the enclosed sheet and fill in the attached slip and return same to Jean McChesney, 6 St. Michael's Close, Aylsham.NR11 6HA by June 26th at the latest.

Below is a selection of diary dates listed in the March-September Diary published by the Federation of Norfolk Historical and Archæological Organisations. It is only a selection and includes those which might appeal to our members and which are close enough to Aylsham to be easy to get to.

#### June 2000

Saturday 10th. *Through the keyhole; study of vernacular architecture through documentary sources.* by Adam Longcroft and John Wilson. U.E.A. Day School. (at Wensum Lodge?)

Wednesday 14th. *Norwich over the water;* Evening tour of Colegate, by Barbara Miller. (WEA)

Saturday 24th. *Fields, hedges and boundaries in East Anglia; their development and historical significance.* by Tom Williamson. U.E.A. Day School (at Wensum Lodge?)

Monday 26th. *Gems from the Norfolk Record Office,* by Barbara Miller, John Alban and others. (WEA)

#### July 2000

Thursday 6th. *From soles to souls,* by Charles Lewis.

[NIAS]

- Sunday 9th. Garden Open Day 2-5pm. Teas [PGPT]  
 Fri-Sun. 14-16th. July - Flower festival in St. Michael's church  
see in Society News for details  
 Saturday 15th. *Blakeney Haven, geophysical surveys*  
 by Peter Carnell. Blakeney Village Hall [BAHS]  
 Saturday 15th. *Where did you get that hat?* by Brian Turner [RIIS]

### September 2000

- Sunday 3rd. Garden Open Day 2-5pm. Teas  
*National Gardens Scheme* [PGPT]  
 Thursday 7th. *Garden Machinery*, by Ken Algar [NIAS]  
 Friday 8th. *How we used to live . 1850-1950.* by Peter Larter [FHS/N]  
 Saturday 9th. *Dressing the actor*, by Jenny Alden RSC [RIIS]

### KEY

- [BAHS] = Blakeney Area Historical Society; meets at the Methodist Chapel at 7.30pm  
 [FHS/N] = Family History Society, Norwich; meets at the Assembly House, Norwich at 7.30pm  
 [NIAS] = Norfolk Industrial Archaeological Society; meets at Charing Cross Centre, 17-19 St. John Maddermarket, Norwich at 7.30pm  
 [PGPT] = Plantation Garden Preservation Trust. Details from G. Mason, 58 College Road. Norwich.  
 [RIIS] = Richard III Society; Meets at Princes St. Chapel. 2.30pm.

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## LADY ORFORD

In the last issue of the *Journal* we reprinted the account, taken from a contemporary newspaper, of the death of the last Earl of Orford. This occurred in the 1930s, and with the death of Lord Orford, the earldom became extinct, although the title of Baron Walpole still continues.

The account in the *Journal* sparked off some interest, and looking back through the newspaper cuttings which contained the report of the earl's death, I find that there is also an account of the death and funeral of the earl's first wife, formerly Miss Louise Melissa Corbin, of New York. This report is reprinted below, and the two reports taken together record the end of the line of Orford.

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## SUDDEN DEATH OF THE COUNTESS OF ORFORD

We regret to announce the death of the Countess of Orford which took place yesterday afternoon with appalling suddenness at Wolterton Park, one of the three houses which the Earl of Orford possesses in Norfolk. The news of Her Ladyship's decease, which was wholly unexpected, had last night spread something like consternation in the neighbourhood of the hall, and especially in Aylsham, the nearest town, for she was well known there and exceedingly liked.

Lady Orford, in company with her daughter, Lady Dorothy Walpole, had spent several weeks abroad this last winter for the benefit of her health, and latterly she had been staying at her town house, 36 Bruton Street. London. She motored to Wolterton about ten days ago. Since then she had been ailing somewhat, and she had rarely, if ever, gone beyond the confines of the Park, but no one appears to have regarded her condition as a subject for alarm. Yesterday afternoon she was intending to go out for a motor ride, and the car was actually at the door awaiting her instructions.

In preparation for this little outing she had gone to her room to dress, in the presence of her ladysmaid and Lady Dorothy, when she was seized with some acute illness, and fell rapidly into a state of collapse. This was at about half past three. The car was at once sent to Aylsham, about five miles away, to fetch Dr. Morton, and he promptly returned in it, but by that time, about four o'clock, death had already taken place. Lord Orford being in London, a telegram was sent to him



asking him to come home immediately. The arrangements were, as far as we could learn of them in Aylsham last night, that Dr. Morton should meet him on the arrival of the mail train at Norwich at two o'clock this morning, and break the news to him before his return to the hall.

Lady Orford who was of American birth and extraction, was a Miss Louise Melissa Corbin of New York, the daughter of Mr. D. C. Corbin, a well known railway magnate, and she was wedded to the Earl of Orford in 1888. She was about 48 years of age. The only issue of the marriage is Lady Dorothy, who is nineteen years of age, and was presented at Court two years ago. The deceased Countess, who possessed great wealth in her own right, was accustomed to move about freely in Wolterton, and the people of Aylsham, where she was a constant visitor among the tradespeople, speak of her in terms of the warmest regard.

At Wolterton, both she and Lady Dorothy have interested themselves greatly in the schools and the affairs of the estate. Before coming to Wolterton, she and Lord Orford lived at Mannington Hall, a beautiful old moated house, also in the Erpingham district. The house at Wolterton, they enlarged and modernised at great cost. Lady Orford, on several occasions had distributed the prizes at the Aylsham & District Industrial Exhibition. She had a pleasant platform manner, and when occasion arose she could speak well and effectively. She was present at the exhibition held there a few weeks ago, but did not take any prominent part in the proceedings.

Two years ago, she was President of the Aylsham Habitation of the Primrose League, in which position she has been succeeded by the Hon. Mrs. Harbord of Gunton. A meeting of the habitation should have been held in Aylsham last night. The Conservative candidate, Mr. Douglas King, was announced to be present, together with Mr. Turing Mackenzie, and a dramatic entertainment was to have closed the proceedings. The news of Lady Orford's decease having reached the town, a committee meeting was hurriedly called, while the audience was actually assembling, and it was resolved to postpone the meeting *sine die*.

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## FUNERAL OF COUNTESS OF ORFORD.

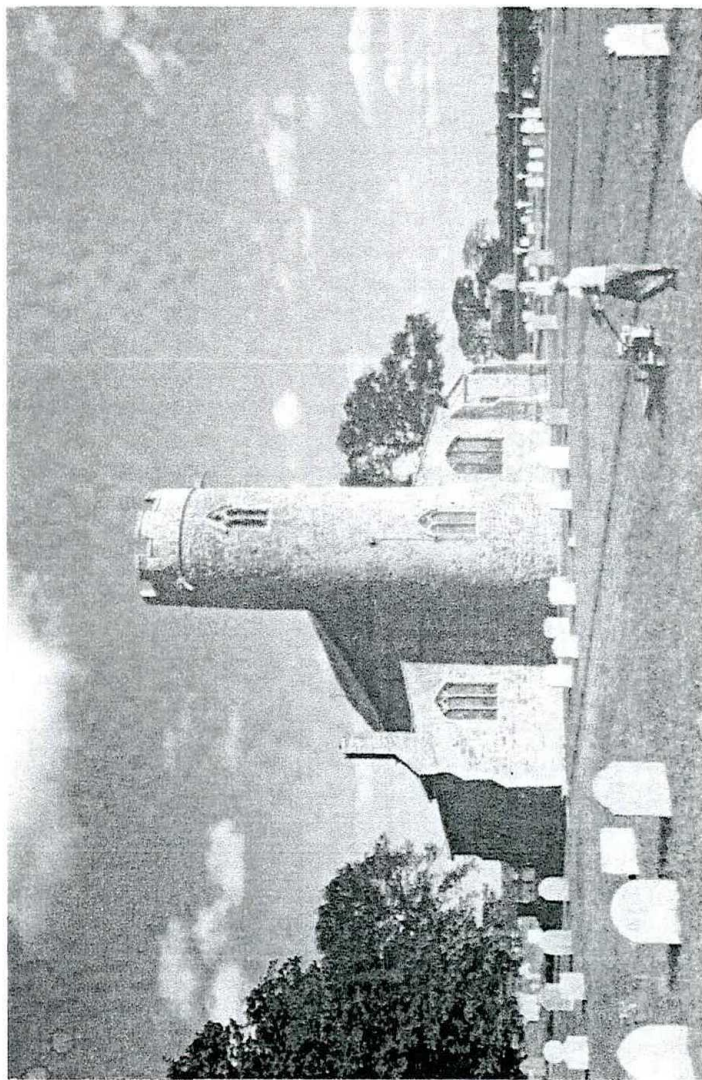
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With simple ceremonial, the remains of the late Countess of Orford were, on Saturday afternoon, interred in Wickmere churchyard beside the grave of Her Ladyship's little boy, Horatio Corbin Walpole, who died in 1893 in his third year. Wickmere is a quiet, picturesque village, about a mile removed from Wolterton Park, one of the three Norfolk houses of Lord Orford, and in the welfare of its people, especially the children, the deceased Countess showed a very kindly interest.

Both here and in Aylsham her charm of manner and generous disposition will be greatly missed. The principal mourners consisted of her husband, Lord Orford, her daughter, Lady Dorothy Walpole, and the female servants. It was a few minutes in advance of three, when the hearse and two carriages containing Lord Orford, Lady Dorothy and the servants, drew up at the church gate at Wickmere, where, to meet the body, were the choir with the choirmaster, Mr. Blott, at its head and the officiating clergy, consisting of the rector, the Rev. W. Hildyard; the Rev. M. Kaufmann; the Rev. H. C. H. Johnson, and the Rev. W. B. Hemsworth. A little in front of the choir and clergy, stood one of the male indoor servants from Wolterton, bearing on a crimson velvet cushion, the coronet of the departed countess.

On removal from the hearse, the coffin, which was of plain oak with brass furniture and shield simply inscribed, was placed upon a wheel bier. Many beautiful wreaths rested on the lid, and also a simple one of primroses, which was later to be lowered with the coffin. It came from the Wickmere schoolchildren, and had the inscription, "*From the children of her school*" The procession, in its progress along the path to the church porch passed between two lines of the village school children, all of whom held bunches of primroses. The children were under the charge of Mrs. Blott and Miss Howlett.

In the churchyard were gathered many people from the district. The opening sentences of the Burial Service were recited and the procession moved forward. Among the gathering who followed the body into church were Sir Alfred Jodrell, Sir Reginald Beauchamp, Rear-Admiral Charles Windham. . . .*[the report continues with a longish list*



*Wickmere church and the churchyard in which the Countess of Orford was buried*



*of other mourners]* . . . The body was taken out of the church through a small door on the left of the chancel; this door being only opened on the occasion of an Orford funeral. The bearers were drawn from employees on the Wolterton estate and consisted of Messrs. W. Williamson, J. Slipper, R. Page, J. Gray, J. Baxter, S. Gray, W. Phipp, and S. Newstead. As the body, which was contained in a leaden shell inside the plain oak coffin, was being borne to the grave, the organist of Aylsham Parish church, Mr. F. Hill, played "*O rest in the Lord*," While the concluding part of the funeral service was being read the countess's coronet was placed upon the coffin with the floral token from the Wickmere schoolchildren. At the moment the body was about to be lowered into the grave, the insignia of earthly rank was lifted away, while the simple primrose wreath from the school children was left upon the lid. The grave, which was a new one, was thickly embedded at the sides with moss and primroses, the work of the estate head gardener, Mr. S. G. Gray. The funeral arrangements were carried out by Mr. J. H. Tuddenham of Aylsham. . . .

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## FAIRS AND FETES

Many Norfolk villages put on fairs or fetes, from time to time. Some are occasional, one-off events, others are a regular annual feature. The annual fair at Worstead, for instance, (which began as a means of raising funds for the church restoration) is now famous throughout the county and beyond. Much closer to home is the village of Aldborough which has a long history of fairs, and each year holds an annual fair in aid of various charities, and these fairs go from strength to strength every year. Aldborough, perhaps, is lucky with its magnificent village green providing a perfect stage for all sorts of events.

One of my favourite sources of material for the *Journal* comes from trawling through the newscuttings and scrap books which we are fortunate to possess in the Town Archives. The newspaper article below, which appeared in the Eastern Daily Press of 22nd. July 1937, is one such gem. It reports at great length on one particular pageant

which was presented on the village green at Aldborough on 21st/22nd July 1937. This was not especially designed to raise funds for charity, but was a celebration of the 21st. anniversary of the Women's Institute movement in England. It was not just a local affair, but was intended as the W.I. celebration for the whole county. Photographs show that a reconstructed Dickensian village street was erected across the village green, and it looks quite impressive. Unfortunately, the 1930s quality of newspaper photographs makes it difficult to reproduce here. If we think we are good at arranging village fairs, then read on and see what they could do nearly seventy years ago:-

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## **MR PICKWICK GETS WET**

### **DICKENS PAGEANT ON ALDBOROUGH GREEN**

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#### **EFFECTIVE SCENES DESPITE RAIN**

#### **FAMOUS CHARACTERS COME TO LIFE**

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Mr. Pickwick, with Mr. Tupman, the Wardles, and other people of his acquaintance, was yesterday soaked to the skin when he stepped down from the bookshelf and made merry on Aldborough Green. Today the party will pay another visit to the village when they hope they will be favoured by better weather.

The occasion of yesterday's visit was, of course, the Dickens Pageant arranged to commemorate the 21st. anniversary of the Women's Institute movement in this country. Two or three thousand people came from the four quarters of the county to see the fun. Many of them left before the first performance ended because of the rain, which fell continuously during the afternoon. The performers, however, carried through the full programme. The show was excellent both in conception and production, and everyone responsible for it deserves high praise.

It was appropriate that the Women's Institute movement should

seek in Dickens, inspiration for their celebration. He, probably more than any other English novelist, succeeded in presenting a true picture of the life of everyday people; their joys, their sorrows, their weaknesses and their virtues. And in these latter years it can be said that no organisation has shown a keener appreciation of the needs and the aspirations of our country women than the Institute movement.

The inaugurator of the pageant was Mrs. F McMahon, whose idea was readily accepted by the Federation. With that genius which is peculiarly theirs, the institutes have succeeded in making the pageant more an amusement. To complete a pageant, they said, you must have a street of shops built in the style of the Dickensian period. Having got the shops they wanted something with which to stock them. That was an easy matter, and then, of course, the goods looked so attractive that people who visited the pageant could not resist buying, and so filling the coffers of the movement.

The street, in addition to its pecuniary value, is an asset from the artistic point of view. The Old Curiosity Shop is there, and all the neighbouring establishments are designed on similar lines, their bow windows and leaded lights producing an atmosphere that is altogether in keeping with the occasion.

One of the hostelrys in Aldborough usually bears the sign of *Red Lion*, Yesterday, it changed its name to that of the *White Horse Inn*. Between one and two o'clock there paraded before it such a company of ladies and gentlemen of quality as has not been seen at Aldborough for many a day. The women wore poke bonnets and mob caps with Victorian dresses, jabots and fichus, frills, shawls and mittens. The gentlemen wore high hats, cut-away coats and brilliant waistcoats. Many of the dresses were original models. The Dowager Lady Suffield (President of the Federation), for instance, was attired in a grey silk dress and shawl, poke bonnet of grey with white feather. She carried a tiny parasol. Miss Tillett (Hon. Secretary), too, was wearing a frock of the period with a pork pie hat - a Paris model of 1860. Lady Hastings, also in costume, wore a magnificent fuchsia shawl. Mine host of the *White Horse* (alias *Red Lion*), in costume, smoking a churchwarden, stood by the inn door and then, with his good lady, accompanied the party to a dais.

When the ladies were seated, there was a commotion in the



crowd, and who should appear on the scene but Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Tupman and a crowd of their friends.

"What. . . where?" exclaimed the Dowager Lady Suffield. "Is it possible that I have really the satisfaction of beholding Mr. Pickwick?"

Mr. Pickwick bowed low.

"Mr. Pickwick," said Lady Suffield. "I must make you promise not to stir from my side this whole day. There are hundreds of people that I must positively introduce you to."

Addressing the gathering at large, Lady Suffield said, "I must say a few words of introduction, though I am not sure it is quite seemly for a lady to speak in public (*laughter*). We are here to celebrate the 21st. anniversary of the inauguration of Women's Institutes in this country. The chief part of our programme consists of scenes from the works of the immortal Dickens. That is why we have Mr. Pickwick here. As you may know, he was ever an admirer of the female sex (*laughter*). In addition we have shops where I hope you will spend money on useful articles, and may the side-shows amuse you." (*applause*).

A Victorian posy made by Aldborough and Thurgarton Women's Institute was handed to Lady Suffield, who gracefully acknowledged it. During the opening ceremony rain began to fall, and by the time it had ended raincoats were being thrown over silken dresses, and umbrellas had taken the place of parasols. There was an interval of half an hour before the opening of the pageant. Organisers were hopeful of the weather clearing, but the sky darkened and rain fell more heavily. The pageant took place on the green in area bounded by scenery representing Victorian houses. An orchestra got together by Miss Joan Roe did its best to keep the company happy. They had played Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, and were preparing for the *Boating Song*, when the canvas roof above them collapsed, letting in cascades of water.

Then the pageant started. It consisted of ten episodes - 'The Field Day', from *Pickwick Papers*. (Reepham, Salle, Heydon and Hevingham Institutes.) 'Mr. Pickwick in the pound', from the same work. (Walsingham WI). 'The Eatanswill election' from *Pickwick Papers*, (Hellesdon and Drayton Institutes). 'Barkis is willing' from *David Copperfield*, (Mundesley), 'Stop thief' from *Oliver Twist* (Blakeney, Stiffkey Cley, Overstrand and Langham Institutes). 'The Wedding



party' from *Nicholas Nickleby* (Hingham and Hardingham Institutes). 'On the road to Gretna Green' from *The Holly Tree* (Walsingham Institute). 'The Guillotine' from *The Tale of two cities*, (Blakeney, etc. Institutes), 'Mrs. Jarley's Waxwork' from *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Coltishall Institute.) and the Finale in which all appear.

Yesterday some of the pageantry of the scenes was lost because of the rain. Any criticism of members struggling through the scenes in a downpour would obviously be unfair. It was not difficult to see, however, that given a little sun a fine spectacle would have presented itself. It is to be hoped that today the sun will shine.

The pound scene, with first the geese being driven across the green, and then horses surrounded by the North Norfolk hounds was particularly well designed. Mr. S. G. Cooke of Coltishall brought along his broadcasting van and the speeches made in London by Lady Denman and others were heard on the green. Principal helpers are:- Pageant master, Miss Sprott; supervisor of catering, Mrs. E. J. Motum; Hon. Secretary, Miss Tillett; publicity manager, Miss Rhys Davies; wardrobe mistress, Mrs. Skelton. Shops were run by the following institutes:-

|                                     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Antiques - Sandringham              | Garden produce - Hethersett |
| Baskets - Aldborough                | General - Swaffham          |
| Buns & Cakes - Aylsham              | Ices - Wells                |
| Cheap jack - Diss                   | Lavender - Salhouse         |
| Cigarettes - Roughton               | Parcels office - Erpingham  |
| Coffee stall - East Harling         | Pedlars - Hickling          |
| Dairy produce - Brooke & Poringland | Pottery - Thorpe            |
| Drapery - Worstead                  | Sweets - Knapton & Dist.    |
| Garden requisites - Brancaster      | Toys - Wymondham            |
|                                     | Wool - Ditchingham          |

All these institutes have been assisted by their neighbouring institutes and every branch in the county has helped in some way.

Queen Mary, patron of the pageant and joint president (with Queen Elizabeth) of Sandringham WI sent six articles for Sandringham's antiques stall.

*Sadly, I shall never know if the second day was warm and sunny and made up for all the misery of the first day. Ed.*