

AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Volume 8 No 3

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

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Please note places for September outing and Autumn courses on back.
The AGM is on 2 October 2008.

Cover Illustration: detail from the cover of the script for the Masque of Anne Boleyn in 1938.



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SOCIETY

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Many thanks for contributions to our leading article to mark the 70th anniversary of *The Masque of Anne Boleyn* in August 1938. An exhibition is to be mounted at Blickling Hall next year to commemorate the centenary of the first production in 1909. If anyone has further memories of the 1938 event that could be included please get in touch with Derek Lyons (tel. 01263 732545).

John Pumphrey's book *About Aylsham*, based on his regular articles in the Parish Magazine 2002–2007, was published by the Society on 16 May. It has sold surprisingly quickly, much aided by the author's salesmanship, and the stock of 500 is now down to about a hundred. Members can buy at the discounted price of £9, see notice on the back cover.

The new season's speakers have been arranged provisionally as follows.

Thursday 2nd October 2008. '*The Ghosts of Blickling*' by Sheila Merriman, following the AGM

Thursday 23rd October 2008. '*Boudicca and the Iceni*' by Natasha Hutchinson

Thursday 20th November 2008. '*A Friendship Made in Oulton (George Borrow and Edward FitzGerald)*' by Clive Wilkin Jones

Thursday 22nd January 2009. '*Black Schuck*' by Peter Ransome

Thursday 26th February 2009. '*Servicemen in Wartime Photographs*' by Andrew Tatham

Thursday 26th March. '*Did the Renaissance reach East Anglia*' by Dr Vic Morgan

The Masque of Anne Boleyn

BLICKLING HALL AYLSHAM, NORFOLK.



The Masque of Anne Boleyn

(Under the Gracious Patronage of HER MAJESTY QUEEN MARY)

A PAGEANT PLAY

Written and Produced by NUGENT MONCK.

Will be Performed in the Grounds of Blickling Hall

(by kind permission of The Most Hon. The Marquess of Lothian, C.H.)

By a Company numbering several hundreds.

***On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday,
August 8th, 9th and 10th, 1938.***

TWICE DAILY at 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.

THE EVENING PERFORMANCE WILL BE FLOODLIT.

SEATS in Covered Stands, Numbered and Reserved:

Price 10/6, 7/6, 5/6, 3/6 & 2/6. Open-air Seats, Price 2/6,

Numbered and Reserved. Limited Standing Room 1/6.

TEAS AND REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE.

Car Parking under control of the Automobile Association.

Seats may now be booked from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Central Office, The Town Hall, Aylsham, Norfolk, or through Messrs. Thos. Cook & Son, Ltd., London Street, Norwich; Messrs. Howlett, The Walk, Norwich; Messrs. Rounce & Wortley, Cromer and Sheringham; Messrs. Winlove, High Street, Hunstanton

The Gardens will be open until 6-30 p.m. daily.

COME AND SEE BLICKLING HALL UNDER FLOODLIGHTS

Printed by Rounce & Wortley, Holt, Norfolk.

Colonel Thomas Woods Purdy proposed the 1938 Masque of Anne Boleyn to defray the cost of repairs to St Michael's church. He chaired a planning committee in December 1937, with Dr Alec Holman elected secretary. They obtained the patronage of Queen Mary and generous support from Lord Lothian for what was to prove the last spectacle at Blickling Hall as a private residence. Nugent Monck, who had created the original version in 1909, agreed to direct the show with a company of several hundred.



Nugent Monck

Monck was born in Shropshire in 1878, went to the Royal Academy of Music at fifteen and in 1895 transferred to the dramatic side. After a few years of acting he started a career as a stage manager, much influenced by William Poel's approach to Elizabethan theatre.

Through the Precentor of Norwich Cathedral, Rev. Rex Rynd, a fellow student when at the Royal Academy, he was invited to produce some historical tableaux at St Andrew's Hall in January 1909.

Over the next three years he not only wrote and directed the Masque of Anne Boleyn, but also produced a 'Water Frolic' at Blickling and entertainments for the Aylsham Cricket Club and the Aylsham Habitation of the Primrose League.

The 1909 production was designed to raise funds for the repair of the church tower at St Mary's, Erpingham, the living of which was held by the Rector of Blickling. The Masque was produced again in 1925 to raise funds for St Michael's school. In the interim Monck had founded the Guild of Norwich Players in 1911 and opened the Maddermarket Theatre in 1921. He became one of the most highly regarded Shakespearean producers and by 1933 had completed a cycle of all Shakespeare's plays – the only producer known to have done so. He did not retire until 1952 and still kept an interest in the theatre until the end of his life in 1958.

The masque was modelled on the format popular with Tudor royals, an elaborate pageant with drama and music, in which non-speaking parts could be taken by dignitaries, often with dancing and sometimes with a folk play intercalated – rudiments of what we still enjoy as pantomime. The script – nicely printed for everyone by 'Charles Barnwell, Market Place, Aylsham' – was in blank verse using Tudor english. The fictitious plot covers a few critical days for the future Queen of England. It starts

with the temptations of Anne, personified by twelve deadly sins and fates, before the engagement party for Anne and Sir Harry Percy. The party is



The cast

interrupted by Cardinal Wolsey and nefarious associates, who devise a trick to fool Anne into doubting Percy's fidelity. Part I ends with a mummers play of St George and the dragon. After the interval – the audience suitably refreshed by professional caterers from Kings Lynn – Sir Percy is further entrapped, the King enters, claims Anne's hand and DESTINY opens the door for the principal participants to exit.

Folly. Who plays the game, when Folly throws the dice?
It costs a pretty penny.

.....

“Love conquers all.” How shall the poets sing
When Folly conquers Love.

All the Vices Folly is King

The show was widely advertised across the country – billboards had to be hastily despatched to Sandringham after Queen Mary complained – and despite some early anxieties all the seats were taken for the six performances. Dr Holman proudly records the several innovations about which there had been some reservation – amplification had been a success, as had floodlighting for the 9 pm performances, and the Telephones (*sic* with a capital T) had been a great help to the stage hands. £2465 was

raised with a profit of £1,395 to help repoint the tower and relead the roof of St Michael's, and commemorated on a board in the bell tower. After the final performance 150 sat down for a celebratory dinner – not included in the accounts and no doubt at the expense of Lord Lothian.

MEMORIES OF THE MASQUE

The masque of Anne Boleyn was enacted at Blickling Hall in the summer of 1938. It was produced by Nugent Monck; the main characters were played by members of the Norwich Playhouse from the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, and the local gentry. Lady Boleyn was played by Lady Hastings, her daughter the Hon Jean Astley played Anne Boleyn. Lord Walpole (the present Lord Walpole's father) played Sir Harry Percy. Each character had an understudy. The children of St Michael's School Aylsham played the village children, local people playing adult villagers. The costumes were made at the "The Big House" on Cromer Road – then occupied by Miss Katie Gilbert.

The Performances were held over three days, with many days of rehearsals, it being the summer holidays. Nugent Monck sent his comments after every performance, some not agreed with by the villagers – the only one that I can remember was that the children seemed to band together instead of mixing with the adults, to appear as real families. In my opinion, if something exciting happened, for instance a visit from the King, the village children would rush to the front anyway.



Ray Partridge, Joyce Smith, Molly West & Valda Partridge

Queen Mary came to a matinée performance, very upright in an ivory-coloured long coat, parasol and her usual Toque-style hat. We were introduced to her if we had a speaking part. I can also remember Philip Kerr Marquis of Lothian being there.

I don't ever remember being fed there. I suppose we went down there after lunch, for the afternoon and evening. We always walked, arriving home completely safe after the evening performance. We spent days between

performances roaming the park and the hall gardens, which were not then open to the public – it was wonderful. We left our costumes at Blickling

Hall– the ladies thought that they should iron them before the Queen came, only to discover ironing showed how dirty they had become. It was then decided to leave them as they were. I expect village children managed to dirty their clothes in Tudor times, didn't they.

We were allowed to keep our costumes, and regularly played in them during the holidays, until they were worn out. The sandals were rope-soled with fabric tops, and wore out very quickly. The colour of my bonnet and gown was white and mustard yellow – some were cinnamon, brown and white. There may have been other colours, such as orange and white.

I do remember that in all that time we had not a single drop of rain.

Molly Long (née West)

I was aged six in August 1938 when the Masque took place at Blickling and hence I was too young to play any part. Two of my sisters, aged ten and thirteen did so, and I remember the excitement at the time. They put the finishing touches to their costumes at home at Mill Road, Aylsham; these were made in needlework lessons at School. They wore laced bodices and full skirts, etc, that were so attractive to us children, many of whom at that time were used to cast-offs and handmedowns stemming from a variety of donors.

It was such an exciting time for our school (I had started at age four) – and at home. I loved being allowed finally to try on the completed garments and especially the slippers (like dancing pumps) made I think from cardboard and hessian. My thirteen year old sister was very good at needlework and even as a six year old I remember being impressed by her stitching and its results. I would have loved to have taken part.

Margaret Nobbs

I was roped in to help with the horses behind the scenes. There were four of us, Billy Brett, one of the Grix boys from Burgh, my sister Nancy, then 17, and I, aged 12. There must have been eight to ten horses altogether. I remember Captain, a large Suffolk-cross shirehorse, about eighteen years old, very gentle, loaned from Manor Farm to carry King Henry VIII, played on different occasions by Captain Mee and Mr Newman. Alfred Gibbs loaned a strawberry rowan brought over by Captain Mee; then the Birkbecks from Bolwick Hall loaned a grey mare and Solo. Then there were several ponies – my own Dusky, Belinda belonging to the Sapwell

family, a black gelding, a fat pony from the Seaman family and perhaps one or two more.

They were all stabled in the Dutch-gabled barn behind the Buckinghamshire Arms. We were there for about a week before the performances to allow for rehearsals. We girls rode home in the evenings, but the two boys slept in the loft above the stables. About an hour before the horses were needed we took them over to the space behind the present day restaurant and shop east of the Hall and tied them up to a rope line. We then had to help the players mount and see that all was in order before they set off. We didn't see much of the performance, but it was such an exciting time in our young lives that none of us forgot it.

Jill Monk (née Holman)

Two pages – both aged 17 – Ben Rust and Hubert Sheringham – brown tights, short brown tunic, floppy hat:

Ben	Young Stephen doth report he saw a train wandering along the Eastward of the hill
Hubert	His Grace of York requests that you may send the fellow to the Devil as you please. He cares not if he lives or dies.

In the Mummers Play Harry Underwood (Barclays Bankclerk): “Here come the Tarkish Knight come from Tarkishland to fight”. John Pilch (Aylsham blacksmith): “Here come I little Jack with my wife and family on my back. They're some heavy and my back's wholly fosore. Here's that little bottle you sent me for”.

Robert Rust made the dragon.

Captain Mee of Brandeston Hall was Henry VIII on horse.

Hubert & Jill Sheringham

One of my earliest memories of ‘The Masque of Anne Boleyn’ was watching my father, Bob Rust, making the dragon for the Mummer's Play. He built the framework of a canvas canoe for a body, created a head with huge opening jaws and rows of sharp teeth and used electric light bulbs for the eyes. The wings were made with wire covered with old silk, which had been used to sieve flour at the mill. He then had a 12ft graduated wire coil made for the tail, so the overall length was about 20ft.

Having covered everything with canvas, he enlisted the help of Colonel

Purdy's younger daughter, Anne, to paint the creature. She was hard at work on the lawn in front of Millgate House one sunny summer afternoon



Ben Rust with his sisters Margaret and Mary



The Dragon

when there was a sudden thunderstorm. The tall sash windows of the dining room were wide open, and the dragon was rushed into the dry. Unfortunately the dining room table was never the same again, as he left a deep scratch right down the middle! He was truly magnificent when finished and my father was asked to present him to Queen Mary as she arrived for a performance.

Earlier that day I helped to decorate the Royal Box with flowers from the garden and green houses. At lunch I told my parents that I had been helping the head gardener and was surprised to learn that it was in fact the Marquis of Lothian, owner of Blickling Hall. I later plucked up courage to ask him for his autograph in the little autograph book I was using for the cast, which is now in the Aylsham Archive.

My sister Mary and I were villagers, but my brother Ben was a Page to Sir Thomas Boleyn. Rehearsals were fun if somewhat tiring as Nugent Monck expected a high standard. On one occasion he could not get the court ladies to do the Pavane to his liking and in a very loud sarcastic voice said "Ladies, if you can't do better than that you will walk out!". We lowly members of the cast felt very smug as we had been complimented on our country dancing.

Worked by two men wearing scaley tights with sharp tin clawed feet, the dragon breathed fire and brimstone during the performances and was a great success. Although he was used for other events in Norwich, I do not know what eventually happened to him. **Margaret Stuart (née Rust)**

At the age of 16 in August 1938, as one among the crowd of young and old who took part in this production, I can still picture the finale of the last evening's performance. Across the dimly lit forecourt of Blickling Hall a young lad, suitably attired as Cupid, complete with bow and arrow, makes a long run across the gravel and over the bridge crossing the moat. Arriving at the huge entrance door the silence is broken by three distinct knocks on the door and a voice calling: 'Destiny, Destiny, another waits.' When recounting this memory to Mr Tom Purdy he told me: 'My mother was Destiny.'

The 1938 programme (like the 1925 programme which Mr Purdy lent me) would have shown the names of those who played the parts in which the Masque personified twelve in all, among them Destiny, Ambition, Selfishness, Covetousness.

Another picture comes up on my memory screen, of seeing Her Majesty Queen Mary from her front seat on the grandstand erected on the grass overlooking the courtyard of Blickling Hall, peering at us all through her 'pair of eye-glasses held by a long handle' as the dictionary describes a lorgnette.

Also at the afternoon's performance attended by Queen Mary the Pageant's chairman Col Purdy was given an important part. Attired in a real old-time shepherd's smock, his task was to make a speech thanking Queen Mary on behalf of all concerned for her patronage. His son Tom tells me that his father had taken pains to check the accuracy of the pronunciation of the words of his address. Which he duly delivered – in Broad Norfolk!

[From "About Aylsham", p. 108 (2008)]

John Pumphrey



Bill Cox

My father, Bill Cox, then a teenager played a violin at the masque. Afterwards he found himself in the Long Gallery at the hall being thanked by the Marquess of Lothian, who asked him if there was anything there that he wanted as a thank you. He laughingly pointed to the grand piano and the Marquess just said "We'll have to see what we can do".

He thought no more about it and a few weeks later a three-quarter grand turned up at his parent's house in Silvergate. The piano is still with the family.

[From “Oral History at Blickling Hall”, on the internet courtesy BBC Norfolk website]

Cheryl Parkes

SOCIETY NEWS

Peter Holman†



Members will know that Peter Holman who had been our chairman and vice chairman for fourteen years died on Wednesday 4th June and was interred in the Quaker Burial Ground at the Gildencroft in Norwich on Friday 13th June. It is always after a member or an acquaintance has gone, that the details of their lives begin to unfold, a pre-Aylsham life and a slightly different history is revealed.

Peter Thomas Donald Holman was born at Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, in 1923 and described his name as like “riding downstairs on a bicycle”. His father had inherited a small farm, but by 1926 the family moved to North Yorkshire where Peter attended the Harrogate Art School for two years. He then joined the navy and after being de-mobbed spent the next three years at Leeds Art School which he left with an Art Teacher’s Diploma and the NDD, which was the art diploma of the time. A few years later he met Biddy, they married in 1954 and soon after they both joined the Society of Friends. Five years later, then with two sons, they moved first to Maidstone and then to Charing where a third son was born. By this time Peter had become the Head of the Art Department in a school which grew

from 250 pupils to 1,000. The rapid growth of pupils was due to the London overspill at Ashford and so in addition to running the Art department he was also the head of one of the houses in the school and it was there he became interested in maps and also where he started drawing maps.

In 1971 Peter was appointed Head of the Art Department at the Friends' School at Great Ayton and in 1974 he became the Head of Art at Leven Hall which is the senior part of Ayton and from where he retired in 1982. Afterwards the family moved to Wensleydale and then Peter with his interest in drawing and maps started to produce the "Prospects of Wensleydale" maps, a series of maps which also described the view up and down the dale where they lived. In 1984 the family moved to Norwich and for two and a half years he became the warden of the Goat Lane Meeting House.

After his second retirement he and Biddy moved to Aylsham and in 1987 Peter joined the Aylsham Local History Society and around the same time the Aylsham Association. In the Aylsham Association Newsletter he regularly contributed pieces about Aylsham, comments on the buildings, paintwork, walls, litter on the Recreation Ground and of another shop which had been turned into an office, all of them written under the name of Mr Halmays, but his longest contact was with the Local History Society. Jane Nolan had become the chairman in 1988 and three years later Peter became the vice chairman and continued as such until Jane died in 1997 when he became the chairman. In 2004 because of his failing eyesight he retired from the position of chairman and for a short while continued as vice chairman, but eventually left the Committee in 2006 and only occasionally attended meetings.

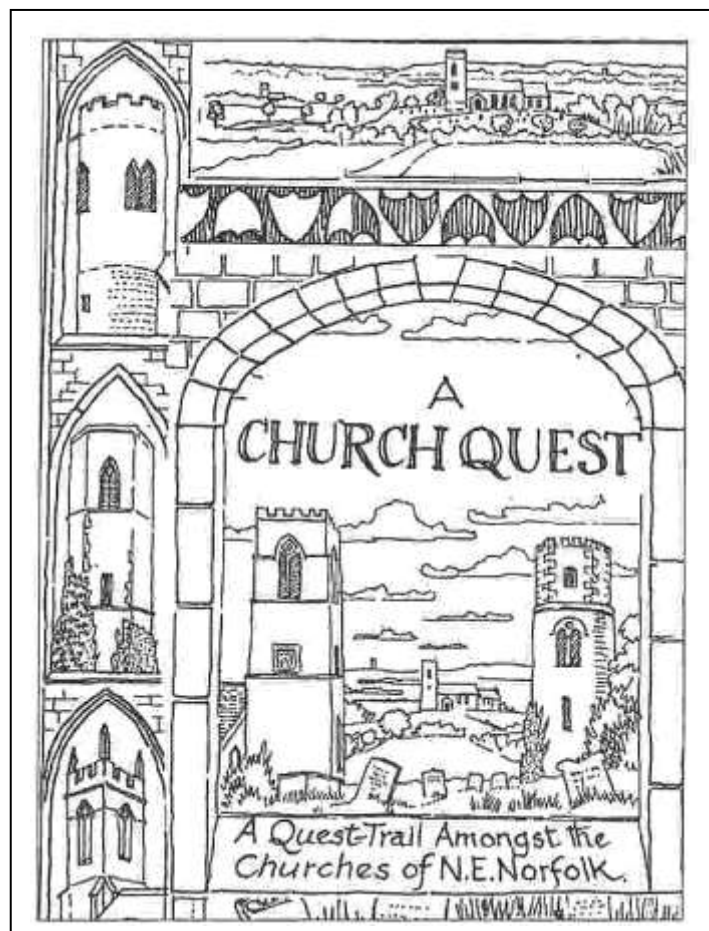
One of the great pleasures during the summer which I well remember were the Mystery Tours which Peter organized. The first was in 1991 and others followed on an irregular basis until 2000. He delighted in maintaining the mystery element in the tours and so we all boarded a coach in the market place and set off on a convoluted route around Norfolk. The only person who knew where the tour was going was Peter and, just before we started, the driver. Between them they took us round an eclectic range of sites which reminded one member of Chesterton's poem "the night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head". One of Peter's interests were churches and tomb stones and eventually became his book "Six High and Lonely Churches" which the Society published in 1999. He also contributed the chapter on "The Bure Navigation 1779-

1912” in “A Backwards Glance”, the publication that resulted from the show in the Town Hall celebrating the Society’s first ten years. Ten years later Peter organized another display, but this time with a collection of boards using a mixture of words and pictures highlighting events in the Society’s 20 years of life. His drawings illustrated the first and second edition of “Millgate” and the cover for both editions was adapted from the large map of Aylsham which was both drawn and illustrated by him.

Many members will know Peter was also a member of the Aylsham Quakers. Originally they were a small group who first met at the Belt Lodge, but as the membership increased there was a need for more suitable and settled premises and he became involved in searching for an appropriate building which ended when they eventually purchased the Peggs Yard Meeting House. It was inevitable that Peter was one of the committee who was responsible for the organization of the building.

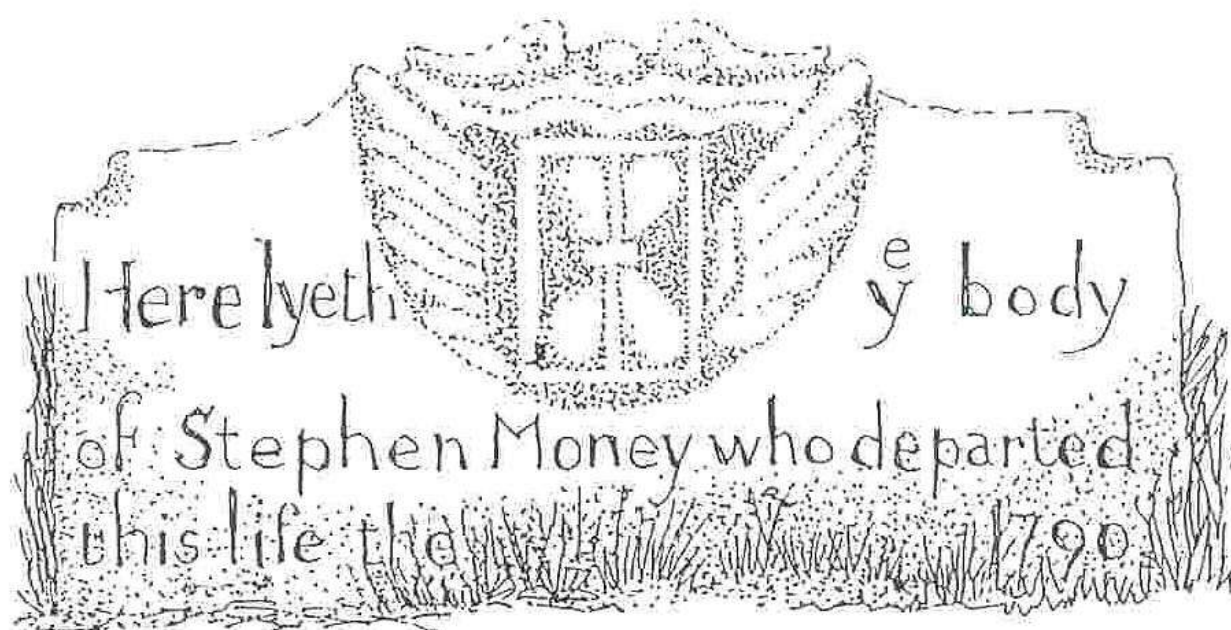
Peter’s passing marks one less of the generation whose interest in the past gave rise to this Society. I hope the enthusiasm and curiosity that he was a part of will continue into the future.

Geoff Gale



A Peter Holman brainteaser – this one from ALHS Journal 6: 65 (2000).

As a token of our appreciation of Peter's scholarship, curiosity and sensibility we reproduce below pages 13 and 17 from his book *Six High and Lonely Churches* (1997).

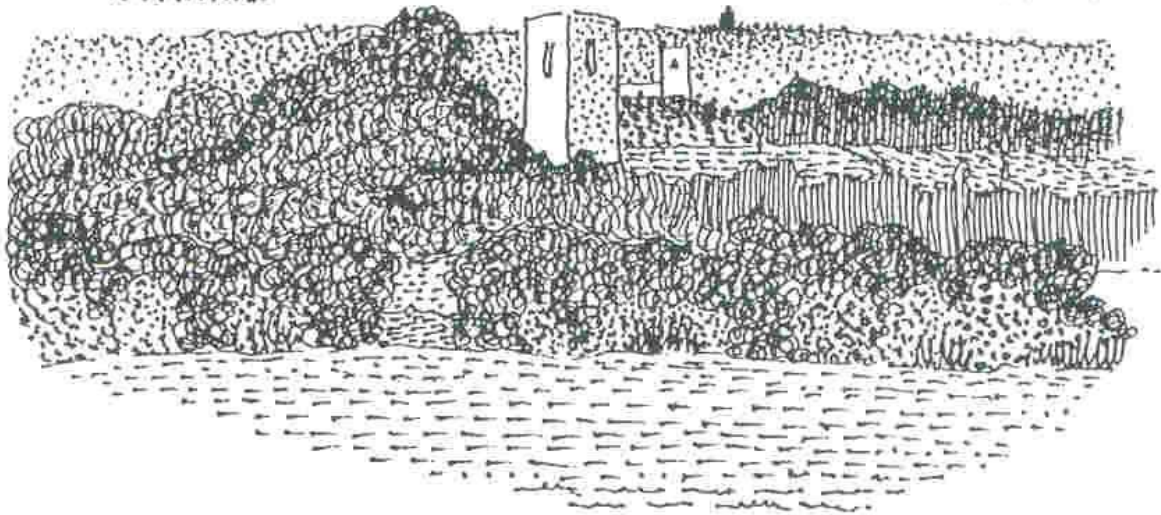


THE WINGED HOURGLASS

The Winged Hourglass is a distinct design on gravestones found in North East Norfolk and mainly near the coast. The hourglass represents the passage of time, and as such is fairly frequent on gravestones. The addition of wings indicates the flight of time and life. The interesting thing is that this design was in use in a limited area during the eighteenth century. The earliest designs include a skull, often crudely portrayed. Some designs have a wavy line beneath the top scrolls; some have a series of arches instead. The true design is within a semi-circular recess, with the upper parts standing above the top of the stone. The wording starts high on the stone and is spaced on either side of the central design.

The churchyard at Briningham contains eight stones with this design, the earliest dating from 1692, the most recent is 1818. These are the earliest and latest of all the stones found, which number about 50 in 30 churchyards. Their popularity peaked about 1720. Where did the stones come from? Perhaps imported by sea as blanks? There are other later variations on the theme, better cut, in better stone. The originals are in brown stone, and of no great height, and are unmistakable in their similarity. Where did this design originate from?

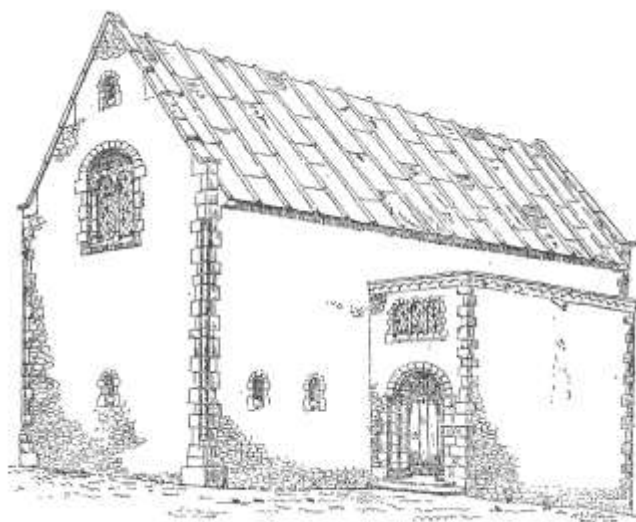
LEY LINES



Ley lines are indicated on several of the maps, though the idea behind them is often disputed. The idea of aligning certain ancient features was put forward in a book by Alfred Watkins, called *The Old Straight Track*, published in 1925. He included in his alignments oddities such as mounds, ponds, notches on the skyline and other features. Some ley lines are visual and can be seen across the countryside. However, using a straight edge on a map produces even stranger results, mainly because our landscape is so crowded and has been in use for so long. Using church sites only reveals many 'churches only' ley lines in Norfolk, probably because churches are thick on the ground in the county. Lines of three or four churches are common, but there is a ley line of seven churches running from Beeston Regis to Happisburgh, which is of fair accuracy.

A visual line can be seen from the Suffield to Antingham road one mile east of Suffield, at grid reference 245325 when the towers of Suffield, Banningham and Aylsham fall into line. Problems arise as to when and how these lines were created, if they are man-made. The idea of building Christian churches on pagan sites pushes the origins even further back into a different landscape - perhaps a more open landscape and of beacon fires on hilltops in the mists of time.

THE JEWS OF MEDIEVAL NORWICH – A talk by Barbara Miller

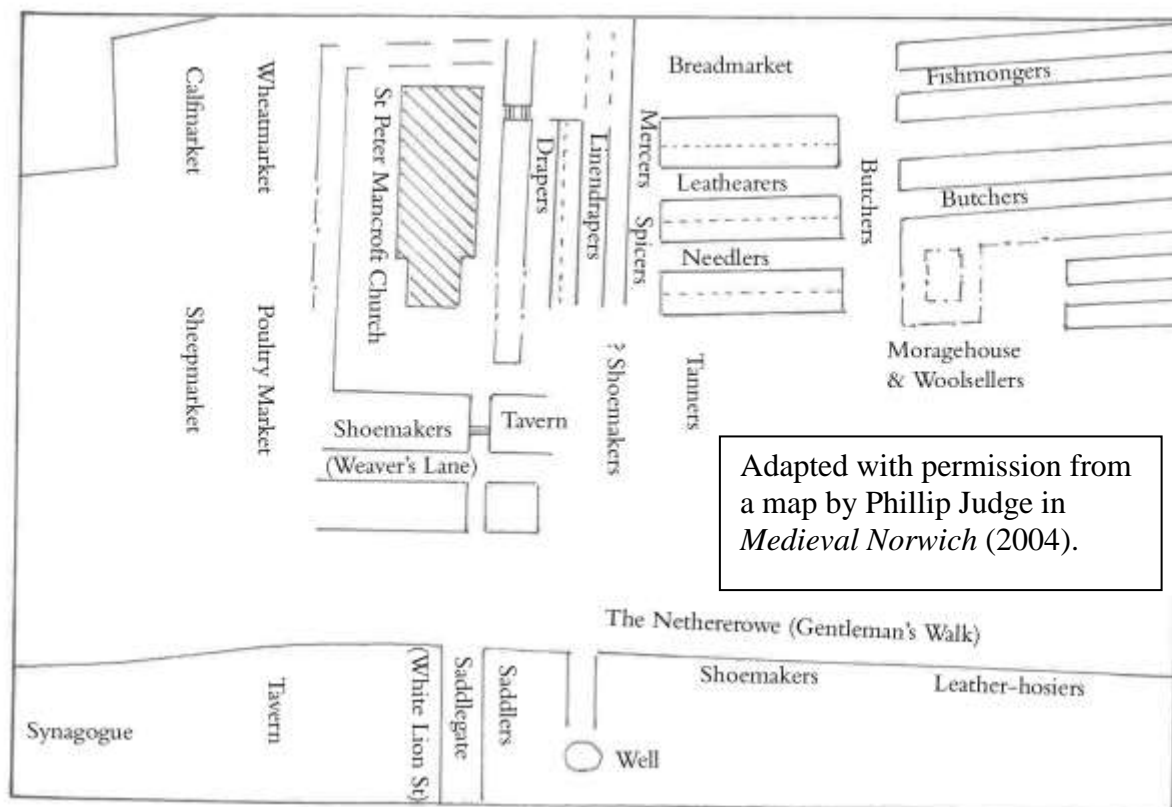


Jurnet's House, c. 1190. Reconstruction by Ernest A. Kent, reproduced with permission of the Jewish Historical Society from *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*.

We know that Barbara Miller has a huge knowledge of Norwich and the communities who have contributed to its development. The Jews of Norwich were one such and seem to have arrived after the Conquest and were to prove useful as money lenders to the king and the aristocracy. Since lending money at interest was regarded as usury it was forbidden to Christians. Thus giving an opening to the Jews of the only area they could exert some influence.

What interested Barbara Miller was that so many of the surviving documents and deeds in Hebrew and in Latin originated in Norwich. There were communities in county towns where there was a king's representative as the king provided protection to a people often in need of it. Some Jews became very wealthy, like Aaron of Lincoln who, from lending to royalty and the clergy, had considerable influence in Jewish and Christian affairs. Since Norwich was a provincial capital, an ecclesiastical centre and was becoming an important port and trading centre, it is not surprising to find Jews here providing the banking services needed for trade to flourish. Although the city was developing the Jews' tenure was never secure. In turbulent times they were always under threat of attack. In most towns they settled near markets and the castle, their refuge. In Norwich they were centred on Saddlegate and the Haymarket, close to the castle. Although few in numbers they were important, but the bulk of the wealth was held by a few families, no doubt attracting envious eyes.

At a time when many people believed that the special dress of the Jews had horns and a tail it was easy for the miserable story of the killing of "St William" to be seized on especially when the church was eager to have a



shrine to attract pilgrims. The shrine never really competed with Walsingham, Bury or Ely but the accusation of the Jews, although never convicted, led to widespread accusations and terrible massacres. That in Lynn ended the community there and Bungay's Jews fled to Norwich.

Punitive laws were passed against the Jews and they lived in a climate of constant threat, protected only by the King's Sheriff. By 1308 the community had gone in circumstances that are obscure. Possibly the rise of the Lombards and banking made the Jews less needed but the endless persecution must have played a part. There is little to remind us of their presence apart from the documents, though part of Jurnet's house survives at Wensum Lodge in King Street.

Barbara Miller also mentioned at the end how she, and many of us, had Jewish refugees in her school during the war when once again the Jews were facing persecution and massacre. A sobering reminder of the fragility of tolerance.

Riona Collins

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- Lipman, V.D. (1967). *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*. Jewish Historical Society, London.
- Rawcliffe, C. & Wilson, R. (2004). *Medieval Norwich*. Hambledon & London.
- www.PJCEA – Newsletter April 2008. The Progressive Jewish Community of East Anglia [transcript of Barbara Miller's talk to the Aylsham Local History Society].

VISIT TO KING'S LYNN

25 members of the Society visited King's Lynn on Thursday 19th June 2008. We arrived at Green Quay, a restored Elizabethan warehouse, known as Marriott's Warehouse, which was converted into a Visitor Centre, with help from the Millennium Commission.

After coffee, Dr Paul Richards, a Linnet, born and bred in King's Lynn and an expert on its history, gave us a passionate and enthralling lecture, detailing the development of the town from the small settlement mentioned in 1086 in the Domesday Book, through the prosperous years of the Middle Ages and the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1, to its gradual decline, with the development of other East coast ports and the rise of Liverpool and the Atlantic route and later the building of the railways in the nineteenth century.

The original settlement, on the banks of the estuarine lake (or linn) at the mouth of the Wash was small but the large number of saltworkings was sufficiently important to be mentioned in the Domesday Book. The salt, a valuable and much-needed commodity, was already being traded with settlements further inland on the Great Ouse waterways, as well as with sailors from North European ports. The discarded waste from the saltworkings was deposited on the shoreline, so that gradually land was reclaimed and on this the town grew.

In 1095 Bishop Herbert de Losinga bought the see (which included the linn), and established a Benedictine priory and the Priory and Parish church of St. Margaret c. 1100, which brought more wealth to the town, now known as Bishop's Lynn.

There was rapid expansion in the 12th and 13th centuries and warehouses were built facing the waterfront to accommodate all the goods assembled for export: wool, corn, salt, coal, cloth and fish and for the goods imported: wine, timber, furs, pitch and tar. The Great Ouse gave access to a vast hinterland, dependent on the port. (Dr. Richards told us that stone was shipped from Yorkshire into Lynn for the building of the Cambridge colleges and taken from the port upriver by barge.)

At its height Lynn was a major Hanseatic port, a member of the association of merchants and traders, mostly from North European ports, formed in the 13th century, to protect the common economic interests of its



Hanseatic warehouses, King's Lynn.

members. By the mid 14th century, the Hanse had become a powerful corporate body, able to establish trading monopolies in NE Europe.

At the time of the Reformation the religious houses at Lynn were dissolved and the name was changed to King's Lynn. During the reign of Elizabeth I, many of the wealthy merchants rebuilt their warehouses along the riverside streets and lanes in brick. (The front of Marriott's Warehouse shows Tudor red bricks, above earlier limestone blocks.) This was the height of Lynn's prosperity.

Cereal exports dominated from the 16th century, gradually replacing the wool and cloth trade, which was no longer so lucrative. From this time a slow decline set in and although Lynn was one of the main East coast ports, it had to compete with the increasing importance of London and Liverpool. Trade with European ports was affected by the Napoleonic wars and further problems came with the building of the railways in the 1840s. The population of the town declined but gradually with industrialisation came new docks, the renewal of shipbuilding and new exports such as fertilisers.

Many of the old medieval houses and warehouses were demolished in the 1960s, when new housing was required for the 10,000 London overspill, but fortunately those that were not lost, are now being preserved and restored, as a rich inheritance of Lynn's past.

At the end of his most stimulating talk, Dr. Richards was warmly thanked by Ann Dyball on behalf of the Society members and we adjourned for lunch.

After lunch Dr. Richards led us on a guided tour of St. Margaret's House, the Priory and Parish Church of St. Margaret and Clifton House.

We went first to St. Margaret's House, adjacent to Green Quay. This was a group of Hanseatic warehouses, dating from 1475 and built around a long, narrow courtyard. They were owned by Hanseatic League merchants until 1751. The buildings have been restored and now house local government offices. We walked through the courtyard, where, in 2000, the German Ambassador unveiled a plaque commemorating the strong links between Lynn and the other ports of the Hanseatic League.

From there we crossed the road to St. Margaret's church, which was founded by Bishop Losinga at the beginning of the 12th century as a priory as well as a parish church. The earliest parts of the Norman church remaining are the foundations of the two west towers. The chancel dates back to the 13th century, with some fine sculptures and misericords. Two large monumental brasses, credited to Flemish artists working in Bruges, commemorate Adam de Walsoken (Mayor in 1334 and again in 1342) and Robert Braunche (Mayor in 1349 and 1359), who were obviously wealthy merchants of the town. The Robert Braunche brass portrays Braunche with his two wives, Letitia and Margaret and is often referred to as the Peacock brass, as the panel at the foot depicts a celebrated feast of peacocks he gave for King Edward III and Queen Philippa, when they visited Lynn in 1349. The 16th century eagle lectern once had its beak open to receive Peter's Pence (an annual tribute of one penny to be paid to the See of Rome) but when the tax was abolished by Henry VIII the beak was sealed. After the collapse of the spire during a storm in 1741, the nave was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style by Matthew Brettingham of Holkham. The rose window at the east end was restored in the 1870s and below it is G.F. Bodley's golden reredos of 1899.

From St. Margaret's church, we walked along Queen Street, a fine row of restored Georgian-fronted houses, to Clifton House. The house was purchased recently by Simon Thurley, the chief executive of English Heritage, who has taken on the task of restoring this Grade 1 listed former merchant's house. The house had latterly been used as council offices and was in a bad state of repair. Dr. Richards, who is a friend of Simon Thurley, was allowed to take us round the house. The brick façade dates from 1708 and you enter from the street through a high doorway, with



Undercroft of Clifton House, King's Lynn.

barleysugar columns on either side into a small covered passage and garden and then into the house itself. From the hall we went first into the vaulted undercroft. This dates back to the 13th century, when it would have been right on the waterfront, so that casks of wine and other cargo could be unloaded directly into the cellar. Next we went up a sweeping staircase, also dating from 1708 and flooded by light from two deep windows, to the first floor landing. We had a glimpse of one bedroom, already restored, and of a long gallery filled with stuffed animals and birds. Work was in progress in two other large rooms to make new living and dining rooms – oak panelling and large, open fireplaces have been revealed but much remains to be done. Back downstairs we went to the kitchen area, a lofty room, already a functioning kitchen. A section of old flooring, laid with pretty, medieval Westminster tiles, has been left open to view. To complete our visit we climbed to the top of the five-storey Elizabethan tower, which is well preserved with fireplaces and wall painting in one room. From the top there is an amazing view of the river and the old heart of the town, including the old Customs House, an elegant



Tower, Clifton House, King's Lynn.

building of 1683. It was easy to imagine the merchant owner of the house climbing up to scan the horizon to see if his ship was coming in.

After our visit to Clifton House we returned to the Green Quay café for refreshment before our journey home. Everyone agreed that we had spent a fascinating day in King's Lynn, seeing treasures of whose existence many were unaware. Regrettably there was not time for most to visit the Lynn Museum, with its new Seahenge Gallery or True's Yard Fishing Heritage Museum, which is housed in two restored fishermen's cottages or to visit The Walks, a recently restored old town park and walk, which includes the 15th century Red Mount Chapel and Grey Friars Franciscan tower.

Many thanks are due to Ann Dyball for arranging such a wonderful day: we hope it may be possible to arrange a second visit, as there is obviously so much more of interest to see and learn about the history of King's Lynn.

Carol Humphreys

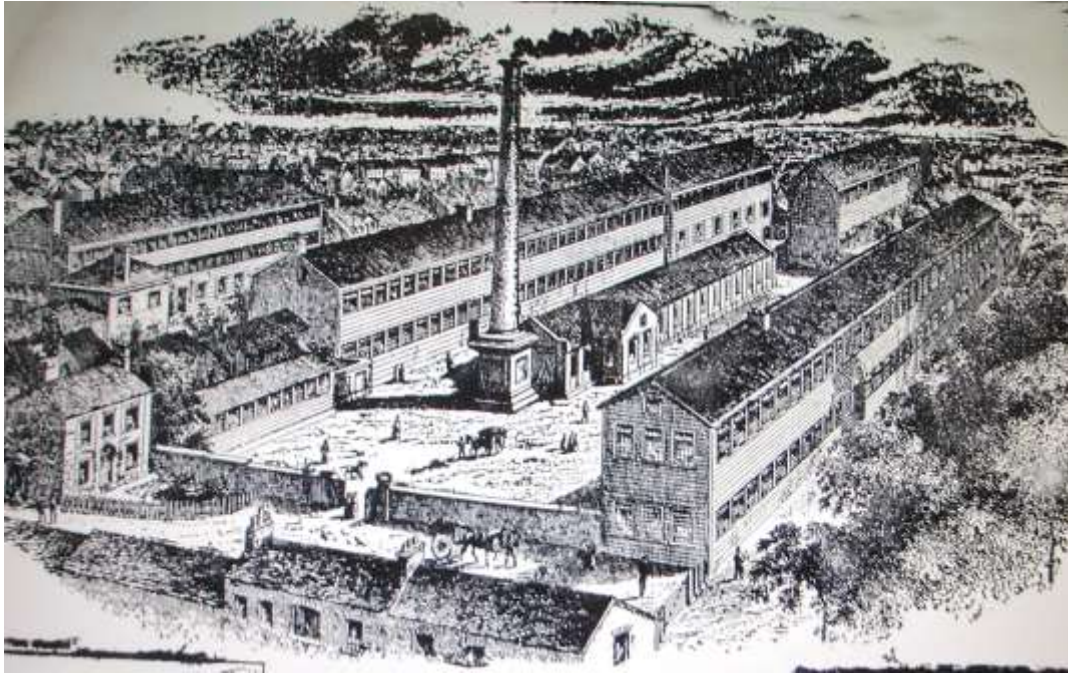
Further reading

Jenkins, S. (2000). *England's Thousand Best Churches*. Penguin.

Pevsner, N. & Wilson, B. (2002). *The Buildings of England. Norfolk 2, North West and South*. Yale University Press.

Richards, P. (2006). *King's Lynn*. Phillimore.

VISIT TO BRAINTREE DISTRICT MUSEUM AND THE WARNER TEXTILE ARCHIVE



The New Mills, opened by Warner & Sons in 1877.

On 23 July 2008, a fine Summer day, 20 members and friends of the Society took an early coach to Braintree to explore its textile heritage. We arrived at the Braintree District Museum on schedule at eleven. Converted in 2002 from a Victorian school, we were led through the shop and several display rooms to the educational centre at the back. Lesley Killin, the curator, greeted us with a choice of beverages from a sophisticated automatic dispenser brought down for the occasion. Seated somewhat cramped at the desks of a model Victorian school room, she introduced us to the role of the museum to demonstrate the industrial heritage of the town, with a focus on the textile companies Warner & Sons and Courtaulds, and the metal window manufacturers Crittalls.

Braintree had been at the crossroads of major trade routes from Roman times and achieved market status by the 11th century. It expanded with the cloth trade from the early 14th century and began to specialise in the manufacture of finer types of cloth brought over by Flemish weavers early in the 16th century. The trade peaked in the mid-17th century and persisted with fluctuations until superseded by factory-based manufacture further north in the last quarter of the 18th century. The skills and lower wages of the residual weavers attracted the silk industry from London that started a profitable niche market that lasted until 1971.



Warner Textile Archive, housed in part of the New Mills, Braintree.

George Courtauld, the great grandson of Huguenot refugees, was apprenticed as a silk-throwster at Spitalfields in 1775. George's business in Braintree eventually failed, but his son Samuel set up factories in Braintree and Bocking from 1816, expanding production over the next decades, particularly of mourning crape, until he was able to build in 1859 a three-storey mill with winding, throwing and power weaving. Daniel Walters, another silk manufacturer, leased Courtauld's first redundant mill in 1822 and specialised in fine silks and velvets chiefly as furniture fabrics. Around 1840 the introduction of jacquard machines allowed production of figured fabrics and the firm became one of the chief makers of furniture silks in the country. The 'New Mills', opened in 1877, comprised two long weaving sheds, a shorter one, a dyehouse and workshop, but much of the work was still done by hand at home.

Towards the end of the century changes in fashion brought a slump in trade and Walters was taken over by Warner and Sons from London. They persisted with handlooms and the production of quality silks, specialising in figured velvets. Powerweaving was reintroduced in 1918 and furniture fabrics became the chief product until the firm was eventually forced out of the market in 1971. Courtaulds survived the late C19 depression by diversifying into manmade fibres. Engineering companies, notably Crittalls windows, expanded in the first half of the 20th century, but by the 1980s manufacturing had virtually disappeared from the town. Its

prosperity now depends on service industries, including Freeport, an adjacent shopping village, and its role as a commuter town.

Following this introduction we looked at the “Threads of Time” and other exhibits in the Museum and visited the shop. After lunch in the Herb Garden, adjacent to the Museum, and other nearby cafés we assembled at 2 o’clock to see the Warner Textile Archive a short walk away. This is located in a small part of the New Mills, the two long weaving sheds that have survived as residential and business premises.

The Archive comprises the working collection used by Warner & Sons until the factory closed in 1971 and then transferred to Milton Keynes as a working collection. When it came up for sale earlier this decade the Braintree District Museum Trust raised funds for its purchase in 2004 and fortuitously acquired space in the New Mills, with a display area, storage in compactor units and workroom. It has some 60,000 textile samples, 10,000 works of art, with thousands of samples of wallpapers, photographs, printing blocks and loom patterns. The company kept meticulous records of all their own work and of contemporary designs. The collection now represents a marvellous resource for designers, students and historians. Ann Wise, the curator, gave us an introduction behind the scenes in the storeroom with an extensive display of illustrative samples, including the cloth of gold made for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 and other royal occasions up to the coronation of 1953. We were then free to look at samples housed in the display room and see several videos, including an interesting film, made just before the factory closed, showing all the processes of preparing, dyeing, weaving and finishing silk fabric using hand looms. The operations had scarcely changed in a century and it was amazing to see the skill and speed with which the complex work was undertaken. Health and safety clearly did not figure greatly and at points the film allowed the full noise of the shop to be heard – and that was quite deafening.

We missed Liz Gale to tell us a little more about the history of hand weaving and we were somewhat overcome with the quantity of fabrics to see, but the outing counts as another of the great successes assiduously arranged for us by Ann Dyball.

Roger Polhill

A History of Textile Design from the 14th Century. The Warner Archive, Braintree.

Baker, M. (2000). The Book of Braintree & Bocking. Baron, Buckingham.

Essinger, J. (2004). Jacquard’s Web. Oxford University Press.

Gale, E. (1978). From Fibres to Fabrics. Mills & Boon.

Postscript. Some of the visitors to the Warners Archive at Braintree on the 23rd July may have expected an explanation of both the Jacquard Loom and how the samples of weaving we saw originated. A great many of the upholstery and furnishing fabrics began life on a hand operated loom as a series of experiments which we saw in the Archive. The process of designing fabrics through to the ending on a Jacquard loom is too complicated to explain in the Journal. So I will bring some design samples of fabrics for the Jacquard Loom, point paper, Jacquard cards and illustration of the loom and how it works together with some samples of Jacquard silk weaving and these will be on display at the AGM on the 2nd of October.

Liz Gale

Social Evening, April 2008

This years social evening held on the 24th April, began for most members in Aylsham market place when we boarded a coach which first took the party to St Andrew's Church on the Gunton Estate. We were met at the church by Elmer Thaxton who, with the aid of a collection of photographs from Kit Martin, illustrated the Hall as it had become by 1980 when he came to the estate. They showed the considerable remodelling and adaptation he had undertaken to bring the hall back into use. Elmer who is an architect and lives in the hall explained how the main hall and the outbuildings had been converted into a number of very different apartments by Kit Martin without noticeably changing the appearance of the buildings. By comparing the early 18C drawings to the later aerial photographs it was possible to see the layout of the building. It was also possible to see the size of Gunton Hall when it was last used by the Suffields, because so much of it is behind that main classical frontage.

St Andrew's Church, which had been designed by Robert Adam in 1767, is hidden amongst the trees and "looks less like a place of worship than a perfect classical garden temple". It is the only building in Norfolk designed by Robert Adam. It had deteriorated over the years but has now been restored with a grant from the Church Conservation Trust to its classical garden temple state.

The party then moved on to Elderton Lodge Hotel and the Lillie Langtry connection amongst others, and where we also enjoyed the evening, ending with the ride back to the market place. My thanks to Kit Martin and Elmer Thaxton for their presentation of Gunton Hall history and the Adams temple.

Geoff Gale

NOTICES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be in the Friendship Hall at 7.00 pm on Thursday 2 October, followed by a talk on “The Ghosts of Blickling Hall” by Sheila Merriman.

SUMMER VISITS

Thursday 18 September: afternoon visit to Barningham Hall, by kind permission of Mr & Mrs Thomas Courtauld. Hall and grounds with lake, Garibaldi Cottage and church. £9.00, including coach, which leaves Aylsham Market Place at 2.10 pm.

Places still available. Contact: Ann Dyball 01263 732637 preferably before end of August or Geoff Gale 2–15 September 01263 734252

COURSES IN AYLSHAM – AUTUMN 2008

Norwich, the Story of a Fine City: tutor – Charles Lewis
History of Norwich with the focus on evidence surviving in the buildings and cityscape.
10 × 1½ hours at 2 pm, beginning Wednesday 17 September. £35.

WEA. Italy on Film: tutor – Jo Statham
How Italian Society, history, culture, regionality and issues of identity have been represented in Italian cinema. We shall watch and discuss extracts from a film each week, using titles from 1945 to 1987.
8 × 2 hours at 2 pm, beginning Tuesday 23 September. £43.
Everyone welcome

Contact: Ann Dyball 01263 732637 or from 2–15 September Geoff Gale 01263 734252.

ABOUT AYLSHAM

About Aylsham by John Pumphrey. 112 pp. Aylsham Local History Society. Published May 2008.
£9 to members. Available from Geoff Gale or Roger Polhill and at the AGM. Stock now limited!