

# **AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**



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Correction. Volume 8, No. 8, p. 248, end of para. 3: for Shipdham read Shipden.

Cover illustration: White House farm, once Itteringham Hall, home of Robert and Lee Blanche Copeman and their family.



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Many thanks to Phil Bailey (an Australian descendant of Robert Copeman of Itteringham) and William Vaughan-Lewis for rounding off the series on the Copeman family, who had such a significant influence on Aylsham during the nineteenth century. Our imagination was directed to much earlier achievements by the most memorable excursion to the glorious Marshland churches in early July. Now we look forward to our Open Day on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, advertised on the back cover, and the beginning of a new season. We hope for a good attendance at the AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> October, which will be followed by a chance to see again the film shows from the two Open Days, “Images from Aylsham’s Past” and “Aylsham Then and Now” compiled by Derek Lyons.

The following programme has been provisionally arranged for the season.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> October. AGM followed by ‘*Aylsham in Pictures*’ by Derek Lyons.

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October. ‘*Medieval Wall Paintings*’ by Matthew Champion.

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November. ‘*Recent Metal Detector Finds*’ by Adrian Marsden.

Thursday 27 January. ‘*The Norfolk Wherry*’ by Peter Bower.

Thursday 24 February. ‘*The Reformation of East Anglia: The Material Evidence*’ by Vic Morgan.

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> March. ‘*Developments in Agriculture*’ by David Papworth.

Notices for the Autumn and Spring Courses are given on the back cover.

# Copeman – the Evolution of a Norfolk Surname

William Vaughan-Lewis

While researching the background of the Copeman family of Itteringham and Aylsham facts emerged which showed the origin and evolution of the surname was not quite as expected.

## Origins of the name

Copeman seems to be a very long established surname particularly often used in Norfolk. P. Hanks and F. Hodges in their *Dictionary of Surnames* give Copeman as an English occupational name for a merchant or trader, derived from the Middle English *Copman* and in turn from Old Norse *Kaupmaōr*. This is the equivalent also of the Old English *Cēapman*, which evolved into Chapman, courtesy of a soft ‘ch’ sound at the start of the word. The word is a compound of *Cēap* meaning barter, bargain, price or property and *mann* for man. They give the German equivalent of Copeman as *Kaufmann*; the Flemish as *Coopman* or *De Copman*; and the Dutch as *Koopman*. P.H. Reaney and R.M. Wilson in the second edition of the Reaney classic *A Dictionary of British Surnames* closely match Hanks and Hodges’ views on Copeman. Interestingly three of the four examples of medieval usage were from Norfolk and are cited below.

So Copeman was another word for Chapman, a trader. The two names evolved in parallel – neither was derived from the other, but rather from a common root. For Copeman one might expect to see early spelling variations such as Coopman and Coupman; these being simple phonetic versions of the same word before spelling gradually became standardised on Copeman. We have also found Coapeman, Coapman, Copman, Copmann, Kopman and more occur at random through the many parish registers and other documents examined. Examples of Chapmans and Copemans can be found in medieval documents in Norfolk. However, the relative profusion and widespread use across Norfolk of the Chapman name was never matched by Copeman or its possible variants.

## Early usage and variants

It became clear that there was a provable link with quite different spellings of the name which at first seemed unlikely given the phonetic

differences – Cockman, Cokeman and Cogman. But, even with this wider remit, there seem to be relatively few examples of the surname surviving in Norfolk documents from before 1500.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Copmannus Clokersuo (also just given as Copman) had given land in Mancroft in Norwich to the Abbey of St Benet of Holme by 1141–1146 (Norfolk Record Society, volumes 2 and 3; and Reaney). Eustace Fitz John Copman features in a Norfolk 1205 pipe roll and Eustace Coupman in a Norfolk pipe roll of 1230 (Reaney). The 14<sup>th</sup> century produces more references. John Cokeman from Gallow Hundred (around Fakenham) was taken to Norfolk Castle Gaol for sheep stealing in 1310. The same year Matilda, the wife of Ralph Cokeman, reported Thomas Shepherd of Weybourne for stealing Ralph's sheep. We should not blacken his name – he was acquitted! (NRS vol. 44, *Crime in East Anglia in the Fourteenth Century*).

The 1327 and 1332 lay subsidies show a very interesting cluster, particularly when taken together with the 1377–1381 Poll Tax lists. In this latter (*The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381* edited by Carolyn Fenwick), among the substantial number of Norfolk entries surviving, there are none for Copeman or Cockman and only two for Cogman, both from the same village. Sedgeford (near Heacham) in 1379 had a Stephen and a Thomas Cogman. In 1327 Sedgeford had an Andr'[ew] Cokeman and in the adjacent Southmere (near Docketing) in 1332 there was a William Cogeman. Also in 1332 nearby Anmer had a Godwin Copeman. This cluster seems to show the possibility of a degree of interchangeability in the spelling of Copeman.

The only other Copeman or similar in 1327/1332 across Norfolk was Rob- Cokeman in Wells in 1332 – he could be linked to the Gallow based sheep stealer above (1327 and 1332 references from Tim Hawes: *Norfolk Historical Aids 14, 17 and 23*). Of course these sources have incomplete coverage of the county and cannot be taken as definite evidence of absence of the use of the name Copeman. But at least they show that it was very unusual by comparison to the frequently used and widely spread Chapman.

There was a Norfolk Inquisition post mortem dated to the period 1427–1432 for William Cokeman (Tim Hawes cites IPM volume 23, number 121). But there seem to be virtually no Copemans or variants documented until the late fifteenth century. Local wills and administrations (NCC and ANW/ANF) show few survivals before 1500: just Richard Cogman of Woodbridge, Suffolk (NRO, NCC administration 1462, Brosyard 23) and Maud Cockman of Worsted St Mary (NRO, NCC administration 1456, Brosyard 12/13).

No doubt more extensive searching at the Norfolk Record Office would find more examples, but the point is made: Copeman was not a widely used surname through the later middle ages in Norfolk, despite its East Anglian origins and subsequent bias.

Is that bias still demonstrable? Yes. The ‘Surname Profiler’ of use of surnames in Great Britain in the 1881 census for Copeman shows an extraordinary skew to Norfolk. The Norwich area in particular had 11.68 times the GB average frequency for the name. Beyond Norfolk there was slightly above average frequency in the greater Wash area, including west Norfolk; and some frequency in parts of central Essex and two small spots in London. The rest of Great Britain shows no colour on the map at all – there were no other hot spots for the name. By 1881 the name was fundamentally a Norfolk oriented one, implying that its origins were there too.

Interestingly a search of the The National Archive’s PCC wills database shows no incidence of any of the variations of the name up to 1600 for any part of the country. Again, this is not a conclusive finding but at least it supports the relative scarcity of the name. Even looking into the 16<sup>th</sup> century for Copeman/Cockman/Cogman in Norfolk relatively few incidences of the name appear. For example, the Norwich land gable and poor rate assessments of the 1570s have no occurrence of any version. Likewise there was none among the Norwich City officers of the early modern period (NRS volumes 40, 43 and 52).

### **Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century usage**

Despite this earlier scarcity the name suddenly becomes very visible from about 1600 in two distinct Norfolk clusters. The first is around South Walsham and in due course evolves into the Copemans of Hemsby Hall and later the grocer/newspaper family of Norwich. Norfolk Genealogy volume 13 has the detailed tree for this cluster, which can only be traced back to 1628. The second, earlier one, is around Themelthorpe and seems to be entirely unrelated to the Norwich family. The Aylsham and Itteringham Copemans stem from this much larger cluster. We have found nothing published on this complicated cluster of Copeman families. For example, Walter Rye in his *Norfolk Families* writes little on the Copeman name and gives brief notes only on the Aylsham and Hemsby/Norwich families and a passing reference to Robert the hatter and hosier and 18<sup>th</sup> century Copemans in Coltishall. Francis Blomefield contains no references to the name in the villages of interest to us, apart from a single reference to William Cockman rector of

Sparham in 1569. While Burke's *Landed Gentry* covers later generations of the Aylsham family their origins are not given. Visit [www.Itteringham.com](http://www.Itteringham.com) for our extensive research and detailed family tree for this line.

Although we have not checked all the administrations, thirteen of the fifteen or so Copeman/Cokeman wills proved in the Norfolk courts in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be shown to be linked to one or other of these clusters, as can all the four PCC wills of the seventeenth century for Copemans in Norfolk (all Themelthorpe related). The other two relate to areas nearby and may yet be linked to the known lines. The only other PCC wills with names even remotely similar are for a tiny cluster of four Cookmans in Dorset and Devon between 1617 and 1657 – clearly unrelated.

Similarly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century most surviving wills for Copemans in Norfolk can be connected with the Themelthorpe and Hemsby/Norwich lines. Of the rest, most are from parishes close enough to Themelthorpe potentially to be minor lines of this cluster. Some of the Norwich Copemans might well turn out to be minor members of the Themelthorpe clan.

### **The Copemans of Themelthorpe**

Despite the fundamentally different spelling, the Themelthorpe based cluster stems from John Cockman the elder who died in Themelthorpe in 1572 leaving a will (NRO, ANW will 1570–1572, no 173). He is clearly given as Cockman in the will, as are his five sons. Two of his sons leave wills – Robert as Cokeman (NRO, ANW will 1612, no 117/160), Thomas as Copeman (NRO, ANW will 1616, no 58). Themelthorpe, Foulsham, Foxley and Bawdeswell families flow from these two men and their descendants, with all subsequent wills giving their name as Copeman.

Why are we so sure then that the 17<sup>th</sup> century variations in fact emerged from Cokeman/Cockman rather than Copeman? The wills, registers and manorial court records that do survive present a compelling case. The Archdeacon's Transcript for Themelthorpe for 1601 clearly names Robert Copeman and Thomas Copeman as church wardens. Yet the returns for 1602, 03, 06, 07 and 08 show seven different entries with Cok(e)man (or occasionally just possibly Cob(e)man) and no Copemans. More entries intermittently through to 1633 show a mixture of Copeman, Cock(e)man and Cokeman. The many references to Thomas the elder

and Thomas the younger and their wives' names fit exactly with what we know about the family structure from their Copeman wills.

It is only when we turn to the surviving court books of the manors of Themelthorpe and Foulsham, run by the same steward and using the same books for both, that we can be sure that all these references are to the same family: the Copemans (NRO, Rye MSS 53 and 54). Records survive for intermittent years from 1598. The courts in 1598 and 1599 show Robert and Thomas Cokeman and then Robert and Thomas Cockeman attending (or excusing themselves) as jurors. Another court at the end of 1599 shows them as Robert and Thomas Copeman and this spelling is repeated for a few more courts. Then in 1603 the clerk returns to Cokeman for a number of years. At no court were there both Copemans and Cokemans. Well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Copeman family lands are frequently referred to as 'lands sometime John Cockeman'. The names were being used interchangeably.

The Foulsham court records also show interchangeability between Cokeman and Copeman. Indeed the clerk strongly, but not exclusively, favoured the use of Cokeman at a time when all the people he referred to were starting to use Copeman and when that name takes over in parish register entries and wills. The steward was concerned to use names that would show, without ambivalence, continuity of linkage of specific lands to specific people back over a span of years. So his use of the old spelling continued well beyond the family's own use of it.

The same thing happened with the branch of the family that moved to Knapton. Richard, one of the sons of Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe (d 1616), moved to Knapton where he died in 1610 (no registers available, but his administration survives as Copeman – NRO, ANF administration 1609–1610, no 78). He may have moved there because his wife was of Knapton and inherited lands there – but we have yet to identify her maiden name. By his wife Elizabeth (subsequently she remarried and left a will as Elizabeth Allen – NRO, NCC will 1625, Belward 408) he had sons William and Thomas. William came into lands that his father had inherited in Themelthorpe. The Themelthorpe court book even recites the deed involved. William later died without issue leaving the lands to his brother (NRO, ANF will 1647, no 170), where they can be tracked in the Copeman family in the wills of Thomas's son and grandsons.

This sequence of events can be tracked in the Knapton court books (particularly: NRO, MS 20994, 47C6). There are multiple references during the reign of James I to Richard, Elizabeth and William Copeman. But by 1626 in a detailed reference back to her will, Elizabeth is written



as ~~Cockman~~ crossed out with Allen written above in exactly the same hand and ink. The paragraph quotes her will, referring to her Copeman sons and goes on to cite her previous husband as Richard Cockman. A court of 1628, in a single paragraph, refers to Thomas Cokeman and William Copeman inheriting lands from their mother Elizabeth Allen. Another such usage referring to the brothers with these different spellings in the same paragraph occurs two years later. There can be no doubt that Cock(e)man and Copeman were interchangeable for this family at this stage and that Copeman gradually became the accepted usage for the whole family.

### **Wood Dalling or Themelthorpe origins?**

Further support for the Cock(e)man origin of the name comes from Wood Dalling – adjacent to Themelthorpe. A will for John Copeman of Wood Dalling survives from 1581. From his and Themelthorpe will dates and next generation will contents, we know he cannot be directly linked to the family of John Copeman d 1572. But it seems highly likely that there was a link in an earlier generation – perhaps they shared a common grandfather. Unfortunately no registers for Wood Dalling survive before 1653 and the ATs are very patchy from 1600 onwards and have no helpful content.

But a number of wills and deed references show that there had been a Cokeman/Copeman family there for many years. Geoffrey Cokeman of Wood Dalling made a will in 1506, proved in 1507 (NRO, NCC will 1506, 422 Ryxe). The main references are to his sons John and Robert. These first names, together with Thomas, dominate the Themelthorpe clan less than a century later. We have also spotted deed references for sales of land in Wood Dalling by Thomas Cokeman of Wood Dalling in 1469 and 1474/5; and John Cokeman of Wood Dalling in 1493/4 (NRO, NRS 17888 and 17922, 41C4; MS 12475, 30C7).

While not a complete run, the 16<sup>th</sup> and late 15<sup>th</sup> century manorial document survival for Wood Dalling is quite good. A John Cokeman was in Hollewod Hall manor in the late 1470s and early 1480s (NRO, NRS 11154, 25E6). A John Cokeman was present continuously from 1490–1491 to 1508–1509 in Dalling Hall manor (NRO, NRS 11155, 25E6); and in 1482–1483 and 1492–1493 he was in Hollewod Hall manor (NRO, NRS 11154, 25E6). But then there is no sign of any Cokeman or Copeman until John Cokeman, possibly the next generation, in Dalling Hall manor in 1522–1523 (NRO, NRS 11151 and 11158, 25E6).

There then seems to be a long gap in these manors with no Cokemans/Copemans present, until in 1571 in Hollewod Hall manor we find ‘John-Copman Cockman’ – the earliest yet example of a steward using both names for the same man. The court entries continue thereafter as John Cokeman and it becomes clear that this is the John Copeman of Wood Dalling d 1581. He is recorded as dead in 1582 and his wife Elizabeth comes to court and ten years later his son Peter attends (NRO, NRS 13449, 28B3).

In parallel in Crabgate manor Wood Dalling we find a John Copman in 1566 and for the next ten years he is present as John Copeman. Then after a short gap we find the 1585 admission of Peter Cockman son of John Cockeman after the death of Elizabeth once his wife (NRO, MC 1858/20, 860x5).

So there is a strong chance that the Copeman clan came originally from Wood Dalling with the senior line moving to Themelthorpe during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There are no surviving Themelthorpe manorial documents prior to 1598, so we are unlikely to discover much more about the family’s early years there. We have only spotted two old deed references: to John Cokeman of Themelthorpe in 1572 and 1548. These are probably both the John d 1572; and incidentally they reinforce that his name was then Cokeman not Copeman (NRO, White of Salle collection). This is reinforced by the John Cokeman named in the Survey of Church Goods for Themelthorpe in 1552 (Norfolk Archaeology volume 28).

As detailed on the Itteringham website, in due course John’s line of yeomen and butchers in Themelthorpe and adjacent parishes emerged with Edward Copeman who died in 1743 leaving a will (NRO, ANW will 1743, no 161/167). Among others, he left bequests to two of his sons: Robert and Thomas. Robert was the grandfather of Robert Copeman of Aylsham, co-founder of Copeman’s Bank there, a lawyer and Clerk to the Peace of Norfolk. Thomas was the father of Robert Copeman, hatter and hosier of Norwich and then farmer, who died as an old man in Itteringham in 1832. It was the confusion surrounding these two contemporaneous Roberts that got us interested in this family in the first place. We have been able to prove that they were close cousins, which had not apparently been noticed by family researchers to date.

### **Other unexpected spelling variations**

The Hemsby line started with yet another version of the name: Copen or, once, Copene. This is evident in the South Walsham register for

baptisms from 1628 onwards to a Matthew Copen. Later, the will of one of his sons, George Copeman of Wood Bastwick (NRO, NCC will 1707, Alexander 108), shows that in this family line Copen and Copeman became interchangeable. In one paragraph in particular, both variants were used as the surname of the same man. This is made absolutely clear by: ‘my nephew John Copeman ... as long as the said John Copen gives security ...’.

In Itteringham, from the late 1680s through to the 1750s, we have another possible version or two of Copeman. The registers for much of this period were rather badly kept and written, with some complete gaps. Through this period though we can track first a Francis Cobeman having children and then his eldest son Stephen and his wife Anne (née Wilson) doing the same from about 1715 well into the 1720s. One of the spellings appears to be Cokeman and several, particularly for the baptisms of some but not all of Stephen’s children, are clearly Cobourn. None of these names appear before this in the village, nor afterwards. Stephen was buried in 1727 and a John Cobeman in 1728. Anne Cobourn widow, presumably Stephen’s wife, was buried in 1755. Apart from these entries there are no more Copemans or similar in Itteringham registers for the next 50 years or so.

Yet, records for the Wolterton/Mannington estate of Horatio, later Lord Walpole, in the Wolterton archive show that John Copeman of Itteringham was a tenant of the estate and local carrier from the late 1730s well into the 1740s, with family living locally too at the time. There is no mention of any Cobeman or Cobourn in the estate accounts. No wills for Cobeman or Cobourn survive in Norfolk for this period and we have not spotted regular incidences of these names in neighbouring parish registers. We think that these too are phonetic variations on Copeman.

And then there is Cogman. While, like Cobourn, this is nowadays a bona fide surname it is very hard to find much usage of it in North Norfolk from 1500 to 1800. For example, there are no wills in the Norfolk courts for this long period. And yet it is recorded in a number of registers for parishes around Themelthorpe at just the right time in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and with just the right limited range of first names to be a variation of Copeman. Phonetically this seems at least possible if one accepts the Cock/Cokeman link to Copeman and the hard middle consonant.

A good example is the John Cogman listed in the 1577 muster for Hackford (NRS volumes 6 and 7). There are no Cogmans in the Hackford parish registers for at least the first 150 years from their start in

the 1550s. But John Coopeman (we assume the son of John d 1572) was married there in January 1579; Alice wife of Thomas Copman was buried there in 1594; and a Thomas Copman was married there in June 1602. Members of the family over many decades bequeath in their wills stalls in Hackford market place. The John Cogman buried 7 November 1624 in Bawdeswell appears to match the John Copeman of Bawdeswell with a 1625 administration.

However, we have to hedge our bets somewhat as some early parish registers, such as those for Themelthorpe and Foxley, do not survive. This has made it difficult to track each family unit with certainty and thus to be sure of all the spelling variations.

So the Old Norse/Old English derived Copeman name was in use in Norfolk in the middle ages, but infrequently by comparison to the similarly derived Chapman. Reaney and Wilson do attempt separate entries for Cockman and Cogman but give no examples. *Cockman* or *Cookman* is unconvincingly given as either ‘servant of cook’ or ‘the cook’s servant’, coming from *cōkman* with a shortening of the vowel before the Old English *cōc* became Middle English *couk* or *cook*. Their explanation for Cogman is even briefer: “identical in meaning with *Cogger* – a small boat.”

Curiously Richard McKinley’s *Norfolk and Suffolk Surnames in the Middle Ages* (Volume 2 of the English Surname Series) makes no reference at all to Copeman; nor to Cockman or Cogman. Similarly, Hanks and Hodges do not give Cockman or Cogman as separate surnames.

There is some indication that Cockman and Cogman might have been Copeman variations in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. By the late 15<sup>th</sup> century a Cokeman family emerged in Wood Dalling and, at that time or subsequently, in Themelthorpe. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century neither version of the name seems to have been widely used in Norfolk. By the late 16<sup>th</sup> century the surname was shifting to Copeman, but with variations which may well have resulted from writers’ unfamiliarity with the name and historical usage. Copeman became the standard form by no later than the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From that era onwards a great many of the Copemans, in at least Norwich and North Norfolk, can with a high degree of confidence be attributed to the Hemsby and more particularly Themelthorpe family lines.

It would be helpful to know if others can shed further light on this unusual and late surname evolution.

## **Robert Copeman of Itteringham and his connections to Aylsham**

**William Vaughan-Lewis**

In the April 2010 issue of the journal Roger Polhill wrote about Aylsham Bank and the founding role of Robert Copeman and his uncle Peter. Robert was the son of Robert Copeman the Steward of the Blickling estate who lived at Old Hall Aylsham. This extensive family's pedigree and circumstances have been researched in detail back to Robert's grandfather, another Robert, a farmer of Kerdiston (1711–1799) and his wife Susanna Breese of Great Witchingham – where Robert the Steward was born. However, the family's origins had only been sketched out for prior generations and more detailed research has shown that the Aylsham Copemans came from a junior line of a very long-standing yeoman family of Themelthorpe. The stimulus for this research was to try to understand whether Robert Copeman (yes, they are all called Robert, even down to the latest member of the family born just before Easter 2010!) of Itteringham who was buried in 1832 in the church with a splendid slab over him was related to Robert the banker.

Rather to our surprise, since the Aylsham family research had not identified him, it turned out that he was. On the Itteringham website – [www.itteringham.com](http://www.itteringham.com) – is a large volume of material, all downloadable, on the Itteringham family including a very detailed family tree. This present article summarises the work on the pedigree to show the origins of the Copeman clan and the close linkage of the Itteringham and Aylsham lines. While the Itteringham family was not so successful or well known as the bankers they have various links to Aylsham which members may find interesting.

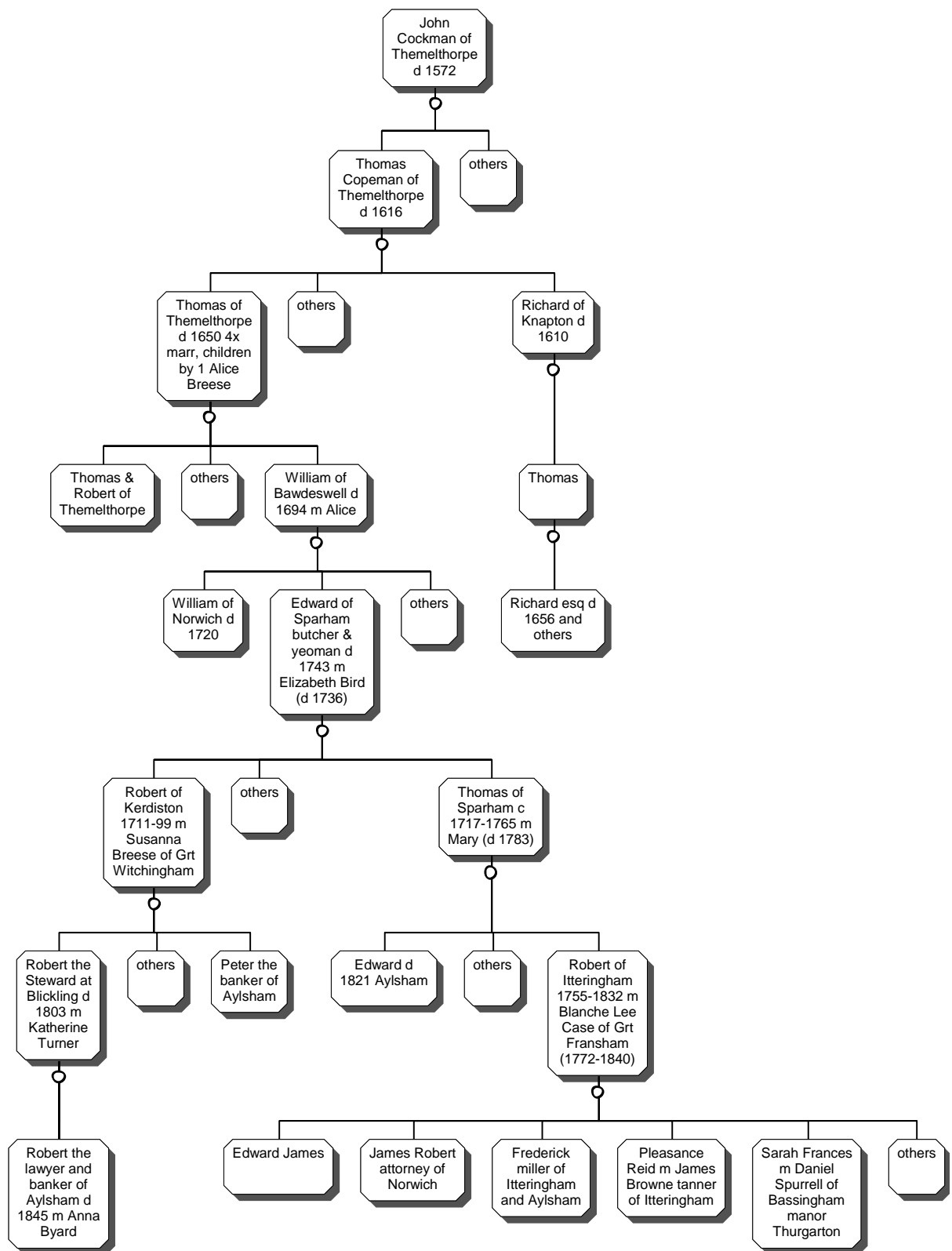
The family can be traced back with reasonable certainty to a John Cockman the elder of Themelthorpe who died leaving a will in 1580. Another source shows him economically active in Themelthorpe in 1548. It has not proved possible to discover whether the family had been there further back; although further research into Wood Dalling manorial records might shed some light on their origins. John Cockman's eldest son Thomas Copeman died in 1616. The link between these two is certain. Both left in their wills references to their 'Church closes' in Themelthorpe, and their relationship can be followed in manorial court

records. This was aided by the fact that a line (of Richards) moved to Knapton and the Yarmouth area while retaining property in Themelthorpe and the court explanations of this link are very helpful.

Even though early parish registers for Themelthorpe do not survive, it has proved possible to work out the family tree from wills and manorial documents as detailed on the website. This might give encouragement to members who are wrestling with the absence of very early parish registers for Aylsham, but where manorial documents do survive. The senior line in Themelthorpe followed the Thomas first name, with Thomas Copeman who died in 1650 after marrying four times and having many children by his first wife Alice Breese. Most of the families of this clan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century produced numerous children resulting in a massive diaspora of Copemans spreading out from Themelthorpe to Bawdeswell, Sparham, Reepham and its satellite villages and so on. Already Robert was starting to emerge as a close second Christian name; but our line came from a younger son of Thomas d 1650: William of Bawdeswell.

Again the parish registers here are patchy and he died intestate in 1694, but the identification is fairly certain and to whom a number of Norwich Copemans are probably related. Edward, another son of William of Bawdeswell was a butcher and yeoman of Sparham where he and his wife Elizabeth Bird had a number of children, of whom Robert and Thomas are relevant to this article. These brothers produced the Aylsham and Itteringham lines of the family. As a butcher Edward was following the trade of many of his forebears. While the family had a number of market stalls in Hackford and elsewhere (as left in their wills) it is important to recognise that in this era in this heavily meadowed and pastured area of Norfolk the butchers were usually men of real substance, rearing livestock on an appreciable scale and operating as wholesalers of meat as much as retailers.

This put them in the ranks of affluent tradesmen such as tanners and senior weavers and very often sons married well and moved up in status to gentleman farmer and in due course to esquire. Edward and Elizabeth helped the family on this path. She had brought to the marriage an inn in Lyng called The Sign of the Fox referred to in both her will of 1736 and his of 1743. Their elder son Robert married well in Great Witchingham, into the large Breese family, and he was of sufficient status to enable his son Robert to get the prestigious appointment at Blickling.



Highly summarised family tree of the Copemans

By contrast Thomas, 15 years younger than Robert of Kerdiston, was left his father's farming goods and implements and did indeed stay in Sparham as a modest farmer. Here he and Mary baptised and brought up a family. Two of their sons are of particular interest. Edward was to move to Aylsham where he died in 1821 and Robert, via trade and farming in Norwich and Sprowston, ended up as our mysterious gent of Itteringham living in the parish as a gentleman farmer from about 1817 to his death in 1832. With the family connection shown, what did Robert of Itteringham do with his life?

Robert was admitted a Norwich freeman in 1784 as a hatter and hosier. He does not appear to have entered via an apprenticeship and probably bought his freedom. But there is no doubt that he traded as a hatter and hosier, perhaps running a fashionable shop in St Peter Mancroft where he lived when in 1792 he married the twenty-year old Blanche Lee Case. She came from a Great Fransham family with various butchers and tanners among her kin. Perhaps this was a family arranged marriage; or did they simply meet one day at his shop? The couple had a large family, baptised in St Simon and St Jude, St Andrew and St Michael at Plea. The baptisms continued at Sprowston where they moved in about 1806.

At this point Robert seems to have given up on trade and turned himself into a gentleman tenant farmer. Their last two children were baptised in Itteringham in 1817 and 1819, when he styled himself 'gentleman'. One of these two, Robert William, became a young miller in Itteringham but died in 1842. The milling link was to remain with the family.

In 1804 Edward Copeman, Robert's brother, was admitted to the freedom of Norwich as a hatter and hosier, not apprenticed. This may mark the point at which Robert planned to move out of trade and into farming, bringing his brother in to run the Norwich business. Edward made his will in 1820 and died in Aylsham (TNA, PCC will proved in 1823, PROB 11/1666). He described himself as a gentleman of Aylsham (by now presumably retired) and made as executors his wife Anne, his brother Robert Copeman of Itteringham gent and Benjamin Reeve gent - perhaps his brother-in-law? Anne was looked after for life (£50 cash, £500 invested and use of the household stuff) with everything else going to Robert's children after Anne's death. The will also required property in East Dereham and Scarning to be sold. Anne died in Aylsham in 1834 without leaving a will. Edward's will was drawn up by Messrs Copeman and Parmeter of Aylsham and witnessed by two of their clerks and Robert Copeman of Aylsham himself. The Itteringham and Aylsham Roberts certainly knew each other.



In Itteringham Robert lived in what is now White House farm on the Calthorpe side of the parish and close to Blickling mill. This farm had been bought by the Walpole family from the Robins clan of Itteringham. It was a decent sized farm of about 220 acres. The house had once been a stylish Elizabethan manor house, but had become run down and was rebuilt on a reduced scale in the 1790s. Nonetheless in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was still generally called by its old name Itteringham Hall. (Much more about the Robins family and local properties will be in our forthcoming book on 18<sup>th</sup> century Itteringham.) In the 1820s he also tried to purchase the freehold of the farm now known as Hill Farm in Itteringham. It would seem that he was not prepared to pay the price wanted by its absentee owner and in due course the farm was acquired by the Blickling estate – just a month before Robert died. There is little doubt that Robert had done fairly well in life and had truly achieved gentlemanly status.

Robert made a short will in September 1831 which was proved in September 1832 (NRO, NCC will 1831, Cooke 513). He left all his estate, farming stock and effects to his wife Blanche Lee and his three remaining sons Edward James, James Robert and Frederick. All four were made executors and were required to carry on the business of the farm to the benefit of his wife. Witnesses were his two servants Sarah Sparrow and Ann Barwick – good Itteringham names.

Robert Copeman died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1832. His remains, together with those of his wife Blanche who died eight years later are interred beneath a slab in the aisle of St Mary's church. The slab is inscribed

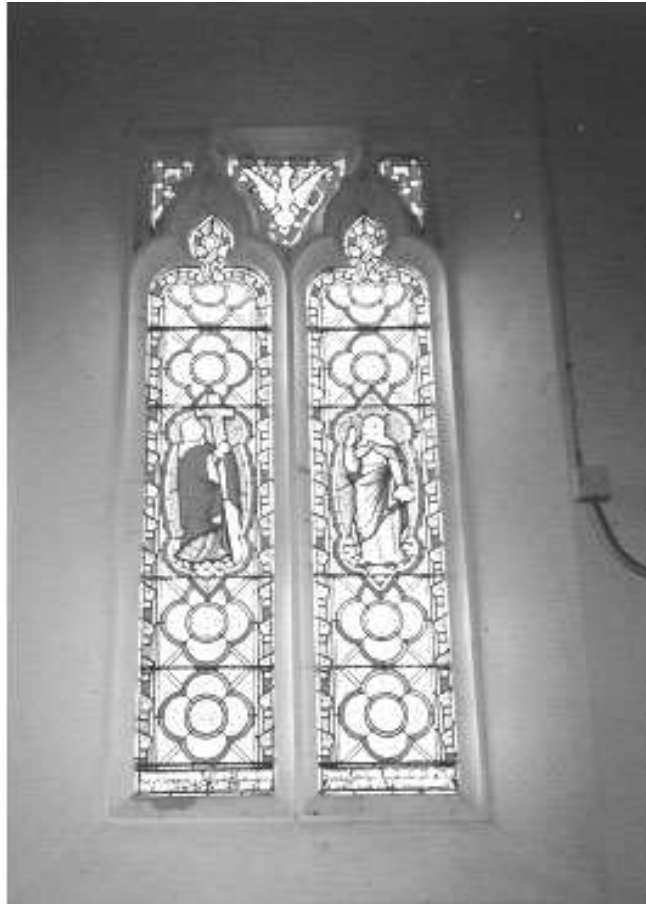
In remembrance of

Robert Copeman

late of this parish  
and during a long period  
an earnest churchman  
inhabitant of the City of Norwich he died  
sincerely regretted by his  
family and friends the  
14th of March 1832 aged 77 years

Also of

Blanche Lee his wife  
who died Jny the 14th 1840  
aged 68 years



In a stained glass window on the north side of the church:

To the beloved memory of Robert Copeman who died March 14th 1832 aged 77 years and Blanche Lee his wife who died Jny 14th 1840 aged 68 years by their surviving daughters

From census entries and directories we know that Frederick continued to farm in Itteringham. We also know that in 1854 he agreed to lease 44 acres of Blickling Park – he remained committed to the area. For a time he was owner of a cottage in Itteringham. His brother Edward also owned a small cottage on the site of the Methodist chapel on Itteringham Common and left this to Frederick who sold it in a deal which enabled the building of the chapel in 1864. Perhaps the family was sympathetic to dissent as so many were in this part of Norfolk.

James Robert, from the Norwich Freeman list, was a lawyer and it seems quite possible that this was the James Robert Copeman attorney at

law of the City of Worcester, who died at the end of 1840, leaving in a terse will everything to his wife Sarah (TNA, PCC will 1840, PROB 11/1937). Edward James was a little more forthcoming in his 1853 will in which he made his wife Sophia (born Fisher) and his brothers-in-law James Brown (the final e comes and goes!) and Daniel Spurrell executors (TNA, PCC will 1853, PROB 11/2180). He left lands to be sold in Thurgarton, where he was living as a gentleman, and in East Ruston. His house and lands in Itteringham he left to his brother Frederick. The painted window in his house and his shares in the Salisbury Gas Company were of importance to him but do not help us much! But his bequests show us who were responsible for Robert's gravestone and stained glass in Itteringham St Mary's:

Edward's sister Ann Blanch Law, widow (she had married Joseph Alfred Law on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1830 in Norwich St Gregory's)  
The children of his sister Pleasance Reid the wife of James Brown (they had married on 9th October 1828 in Itteringham Church)  
His sisters Mary Copeman, Harriet Copeman and Jane Copeman. The children of his deceased brother James

He asked to be buried near his first wife's grave in Roughton; he was buried there on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1853, aged 59. He had married Mary Joy there on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1833. His first wife, also Mary, left a will made in 1842 in which she left her husband the £1,000 trust fund she had received in her marriage settlement (NRO, NCC will 1843, Miles 447). She referred to him as Edward James late of Coltishall merchant, but now of Thurgarton gentleman. The progress from trade to farmers and gentry is a feature of this family. And while he was living in Thurgarton his sister Sarah Frances married Daniel Spurrell esquire of Bassingham manor Thurgarton. Pleasance had married Itteringham's tanner James Browne, who lived at Bintry farm. By the 1850s he too was in pursuit of gentleman farmer status rather than trade, with an application to convert all his tannery buildings into barns and farm buildings.

Meanwhile Frederick had become a successful miller first in Itteringham and then at Blickling Mill, between at least 1845 and 1858. He had taken his father's tenancy and so was both gentleman farmer and miller – a businessman of some standing. Subsequently Frederick was at the new steam mill at Dunkirk in Aylsham, the subject of the next article.

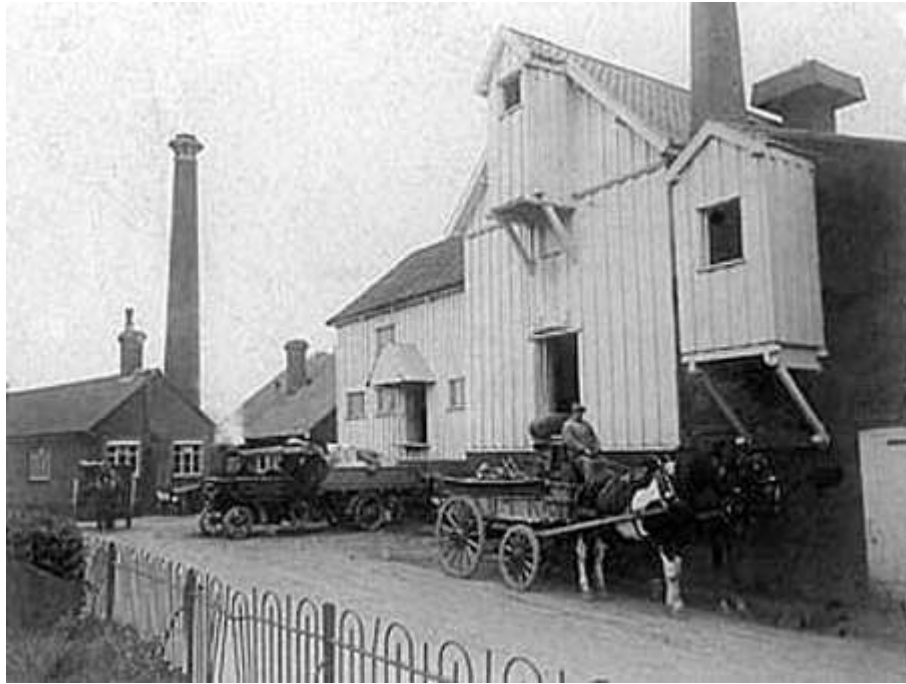
## Frederick Copeman and the Aylsham Steam Mill

**Phil Bailey**

Frederick Copeman was born in Sprowston in 1807. As indicated in the article above, his father Robert, then in his early fifties, had recently bought a farm there after retiring from a career as a hatter and hosier in Norwich. His mother, née Ann Blanche Case, was 35 and had borne Robert seven children, most of them surviving. The family moved to Itteringham some time between 1814 and 1816 to live at the White House (Itteringham Hall), still conspicuously visible across the Bure from the Great Wood at Blickling. By 1830 Robert was leasing 209 acres from the Wolterton estate, more or less comprising the White House Farm east of the village and north of the bend in the Bure around Blickling mill. At this time he also rented from his nephew James Lee Case 203 acres that probably lay north-west of the village, his efforts to acquire Hill Farm south of the village in 1826 having failed. Frederick and his elder brother Edward both had cottages at Itteringham Common and at some time prior to the tithe assessment in 1839 the family leased three fields from the Blickling Estate between Itteringham Common and Blickling mill.

When Robert died in 1832 Edward, the eldest son, took over the Wolterton lease for a short period, but soon passed it on to Frederick. Edward was a merchant in Coltishall and subsequently moved to Thurgarton where he died in 1853. He married twice but had no children. Frederick continued to live at the White House until after his mother died in 1840. He married in 1843 and he too began to turn his attention increasingly to business, starting mill and wherry enterprises in Aylsham, taking on the mills at Blickling and Itteringham. He moved to Blickling Mill House sometime before 1850. Ben Cook's Memorandum Book of 1856 has a copy of the record of improvements that Frederick Copeman made to the machinery in the Blickling Mill in 1851.

He was aided in these ventures by his brother in law, James Brown. James was the same age, came from a family with farming interests in Erpingham, and had married Frederick's elder sister, Pleasance Reid Copeman, in 1828.



Aylsham Steam Mill c. 1903

He subsequently took up the lease of 250 acres from the Blickling estate of Bintry Farm, then known as Tanyard Farm, south-west of the Itteringham village. He continued the tannery there and by 1850 he was listed in the trade directories as a merchant in timber, corn, cake, seed, coal and manure. White's 1854 Directory for Aylsham notes that a wherry service was available from "Fdk Copeman, Margeson, and Brown, owner".

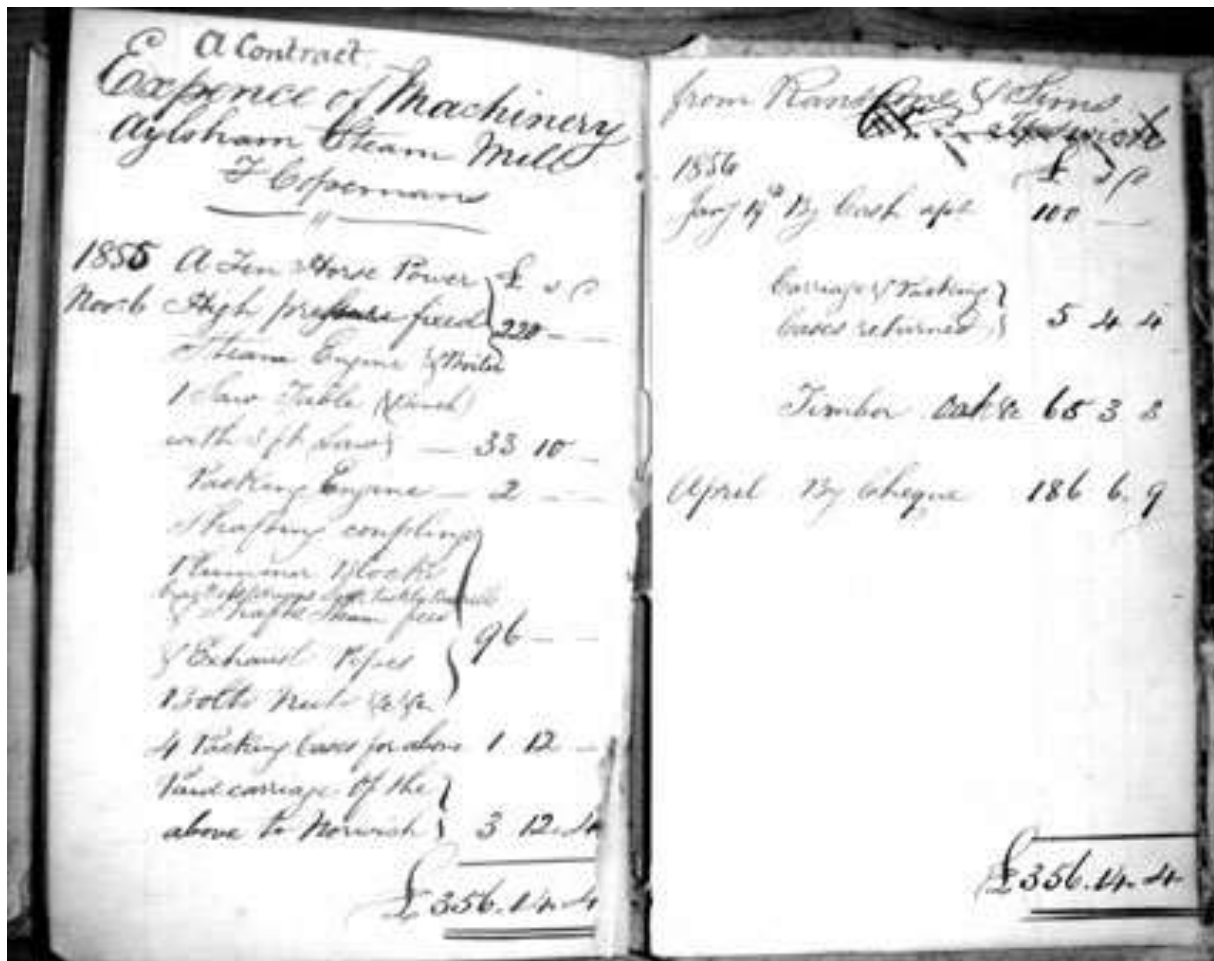
Frederick Copeman by now had vested interests in the two windmills at Aylsham. One was on Buttlands Lane (now Mill Road), in the area of what is now Swan Close, erected in 1822 by Fiddy Barnes, a baker in Red Lion Street. The other on Cawston Road, with the base still extant, was built in 1826 and belonged to the farmer Henry Soame. White's directory of 1845 records Copeman and Soame as corn, oil-cake, etc. merchants in the canal basin, dealing in coal and running a wherry service to Yarmouth. Applications to Mr. F. Copeman of Blickling were cited in an advertisement in the Norfolk Chronicle for 14 July 1855 for the sale or lease of the Brick Tower Windmill on Buttlands. It was said to be in excellent repair, being nearly new, with granary, stable and cartshed attached. The success of the Aylsham ventures no doubt depended much on Frederick's cousin James Lee Case, appointed mill



Map of Dunkirk, from the Ordnance Map of 1886.

book-keeper in Aylsham. His name first appears in the Aylsham trade directories in 1843, the year Frederick was married and may have come into some money to start his Aylsham enterprises. James Lee Case continued to work for the family until at least 1850, when he is recorded as a farmer in Millgate. He moved to Valley Farm on the Heydon Road about 1865 and lived in Aylsham until he died at the age of 89 in 1898.

The next major initiative was the erection of the steam mill by Frederick Copeman at Dunkirk in 1856 on land bought from Samuel Parmeter. The site was along the navigation canal across the river from the water mill (the land may have been leased a little earlier as the trade directories indicate the mill was already operational in 1856). Samuel's grandfather Robert Parmeter had bought the freehold of the water mill at Aylsham in 1771 and his son, also Robert, benefited from the opening of the navigation in 1775, extended the business as miller and maltster and rebuilt the mill in 1795 to its present form. Samuel, born in 1798, inherited the mill when Robert died in 1831. He seems to have had no children and by the 1850s went into partnership with John Thornton Bullock and his brother Stanley Bullock, selling the water mill to them in 1856.



Copy of contract for purchasing machinery for Steam Mill at Dunkirk, from Ben Cook's Memorandum Book.

Ben Cook's Memorandum Book for 1856 in the Aylsham Town Archives has a copy of the contract made with Ransomes and Sims of Ipswich (forerunners of Ransomes lawnmowers) to install a Ten Horse Power High Pressure Fixed Steam Engine, with machinery for sawing and milling. The contract is dated 6 November 1855, the bill for £1140 9s 5d paid in July 1856.

In 1858 James Brown closed the tannery at Itteringham and probably developed the tan yard and sawmill at the Dunkirk site. There had been a tan yard on the Bure near the Belt house started by John Wickes in the previous century, marked in the tithe survey of 1839 and run then by his son William Wickes, but seems to have fallen into disuse thereafter. At a later period there was a building known as the Bone Mill on the Dunkirk site alongside the canal and the production of bone and meat products may have been developed with the tan yard.



Miller's House

In 1860 Frederick Copeman moved to Aylsham, building a fine two-storey residence on the Dunkirk premises, still extant as the Miller's House. The business continued to flourish during the 1860s, but progressively under the direction of the next generation. In 1864 Frederick Copeman moved to Netherton House in Long Stratton, taking up considerable land there and in the adjacent parishes of Aslacton, from where his wife had come, and Moulton St Michael. He died there in 1877, aged 70, but his wife lived on in the house until her death at 90 in 1898. Their only son William Utting Copeman continued at Dunkirk for a few years, before moving to Yarmouth, then, with a considerable family, to Hastings in Essex by 1871 and a landowner at Bramerton by 1881, perhaps on property inherited from his father.

The census returns indicate that James Brown's business interests reached a peak in the 1860s. In 1851 he employed 17 men, by 1861 he had 31 men and in 1871 just 7 men and 5 boys. His wife Pleasance died in 1867 and he seems then to have retired to the farm in Itteringham, where he is recorded living with his daughter in 1871, by 1881 had given up farming and died a few years later. After his wife's death the sons seem to have rallied round to keep the business going at Dunkirk. The elder son Edward (also known as James Edward) had made his career as a seaman, becoming the captain of a coastal vessel in Western Australia, but returned to England in 1863 newly married and at the age of 34. After a short period with his unmarried brother Fredrick Brown farming in Cawston he is recorded at Dunkirk in the trade directories for 1868. He seems to have been involved mostly with the sawmill (he is described as a sawyer on his death certificate). In 1869 he was joined there by his



brothers Frederick (now listed as a tanner) and John. Frederick soon retired to his farm at Cawston in 1871 and Edward left the business to run the Royal Oak public house in Dunkirk from 1872 to 1875 and may have retained an interest in it until 1883. He is listed as a beer retailer in Drabblegate in 1879. He suffered from a lung complaint, no doubt as a result of years at sea and exacerbated while working at the mill. He returned with his family to Australia in 1883, where he died within five weeks. John continued to run the business until 1878, when the mill was sold to Benjamin (Ben) Cook. Previously Cook had bought and improved the water mills at Blickling and Itteringham. For some years the production of bone meal, meat meal and other related animal products was undertaken by James Vince.

Ben Cook soon set about renovating the Dunkirk premises, installing roller mills in 1886, a relatively new process at the time, and built new offices, granary and stabling in 1894. He retired in 1907, selling the business to Barclay Pallett and Company, who also bought up the water mill from the Bullock brothers in 1914. Ben Rust and his father Robert managed the mills for much of the last century and Ben has included considerable detail for the account in *Millgate, Aylsham* (2006). Briefly the Dunkirk site was now developed to mill just flour, extended with a grain silo and dryer in 1959 and a new provender mill in 1966. In 1967 the mill site was sold to British Oil and Cake Mills (BOCM), a subsidiary of Unilever, and the new owners enlarged the plant and added bulk handling facilities. After several conversions the mill finally closed in 1994, the land redeveloped for housing and agricultural business.

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## **SOCIETY NEWS**

### **Visit to Marshland Churches**

**by Tony Shaw**

A really well organised visit on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2010 that ran like clockwork with the coach arriving and leaving at all six venues (4 churches and 2 pubs) within minutes of our schedule.

Thirty seven members took part along with our guide Roy Tricker of Ipswich, an ex Field Officer from the Churches Conservation Trust, whose task of converting four grey stone monoliths into living history was achieved in magnificent style.

Each of the four churches had a small printed booklet giving the main items of interest, varying from the professionally printed coloured booklet for Walpole St Peter to the locally photocopied sheets for Wiggenhall St Germans. They all provided a good insight into the features of their subject.

First stop was All Saint's, Walsoken, where our resident guide was assisted by Peter Wadlow, the current Churchwarden.

This was really transformed into living history by our two guides, firstly on the outside where Roy pointed out various features which showed some 4–500 years of changing architectural styles and then on the inside by asking Peter about some understated lead sheets attached to the wall at the rear of the north aisle.

These show the names of various church wardens and plumbers, who cast the lead, the dates of 1782 and 1815 being when parts of the roof were re-leaded. Peter's name along with the date 1983 is currently on the roof of the north aisle, it has survived two raids when lead was stripped from other parts of the roof, so all being well it will eventually find its way to being a panel on the nave wall somewhere around the year 2300.

The living history theme is continued on the Coates Window at the west of the south aisle, installed in 1993 in memory of Claude Coates, a past churchwarden and local fruit farmer. The window also includes memorials to the donor of the Seven-sacrament Font in 1544 and the restorers of the tower and bells 1901 along with coats of arms and other references to past supporters.



All Saints, Walsoken.



St Mary's, West Walton

Our second stop at St Mary's at West Walton again was 'living' due to the continual changes of architecture and the many references to times and people seen inside. It was very much alive on the day of our visit as preparations were under way for the church fete on the following Saturday.

A large yellow sign outside proclaimed that the road would be closed for resurfacing from the same Saturday, some divine intervention is needed to delay the roadworks.

Lunch at the King of Hearts next door was again well organised and very enjoyable – the only complaint heard was that the plates were too full!

Our next visit was to Walpole St Peter, a village church which has been labelled 'Queen of the Marshlands' and 'Cathedral of The Fens', a perfect example of how the proceeds from all those sheep helped buy the wool barons their tickets to heaven.

As our guide pointed out, all of these buildings were constructed at a time when most of the workers could not read or write and most of them thought the earth was flat, that's if they thought about it at all during the daily grind of tending sheep and building mini cathedrals.



Walpole St Peter. Interior view courtesy of the St Peter Parochial Church Council.



Boss in south porch of Walpole St Peter: Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The stone carvings even in the most remote and elevated parts are done in great detail, before the advent of binoculars and telescopic lenses, there being one onlooker who could see the detail from afar at all times.

Wiggenhall St Germans was our final stop and the smallest and poorest of the four, buttresses supporting the walls were very straightforward brick structures to achieve the intended purpose of supporting the wall, in contrast to those seen at West Walton where they were designed to extend and enhance the building.

The special feature of this church is the pews dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, depicting the apostles and the deadly sins.

While today 'hell' is envisaged as being cast into a fire the way it was seen then was being consumed by a giant fish as is happening to the poor couple caught in the act of adultery.

The baptismal font is a prominent feature of all the churches visited but here there are two. The second one sits loosely on the floor and has been salvaged from Wiggenhall St Peter which is close by but is now a roofless shell.

Altogether a great outing thanks to all the meticulous arrangements by Ann Dyball and the knowledge and enthusiasm of our guides.

## Norwich Silver – a talk by Francesca Vanke



Silver beaker by William Cobbold (fl. 1570–1595). Courtesy of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

Francesca Vanke started her talk on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> March by saying that Norwich silver was important due to its rarity. Although well known in the middle ages it wasn't until 1565 that Norwich assayed its own silver and controlled the quality of the metal that could be debased by adding copper. The Norwich marks consisted of three signs – the city arms of the castle over a lion, an individual maker's mark and a date letter. In 1624, following the recent formation of the Grand Companies in

Norwich, the goldsmiths stamped their wares with a different version of the city castle over a lion mark and a crowned rose. Other minor changes were introduced in the 1640s, 1661 and 1688. In 1697 the Britannia Silver Act was passed, preventing the assaying of silver anywhere other than London. Protests followed and the law was amended in 1701 to allow cities, including Norwich, to resume stamping their own plate, but few pieces were stamped with Norwich marks after 1701.

As a hundred and thirty years covered the Civil War and the Reformation a major reason for the rarity of silver items was that people frequently melted down their pieces in order to remake them into a more useful article. They were not looked upon then as family heirlooms and during the Civil War silver was melted down to pay the troops.

During the Reformation some of the Catholic faith items were remade into plainer articles. With the rise of wealth there was also a demand for Civil Regalia. Several slides were shown of chalices and a 'salt' made by William Cobbold, a well-known silversmith in Norwich. Plain beakers were made for the Dutch immigrants. A crystal mace was donated to the City and city waits were given silver chains and crosses. Spoons became very popular using cheaper silver from South America – especially Apostle spoons and silver mounts on porcelain, wood and ivory.

There is an early record of a Goldsmith Workshop in the St Andrew parish of Norwich. There would be a Master, three Journeymen and an apprentice doing the same work as a silversmith. There were several well-known silversmiths during the early period, recognisable by their marks – Timothy Skottowe (TS), Thomas Havers (TH) and the Haselwood family (AH for Arthur Haselwood and EH for Elisabeth Haselwood, who continued to own the family business).

The collection of the Norfolk Museums contains over one hundred pieces, mostly secular. Norwich Castle also holds around four hundred pieces of church silver belonging to the Diocese of Norwich in association with the Cathedral Treasury, where many pieces are put on display. The Norwich Diocesan plate is some of the finest in Britain. The history of Norwich silver tells us much about the history of the city and the historical changes during that time. Francesca Vanke brought all that to life in a commendably scholarly and entertaining way.

**Gillian Fletcher**

## **AYLSHAM THEN AND NOW**

**Sunday 12 September 2010**

The Society is hosting another free open meeting on 12 September to show the local history of Aylsham, using the Town Hall Archives and the knowledge of our members, complemented by a public lecture.

2–4 pm Exhibitions in the Town Hall, with a film show “Aylsham Then and Now” by Derek Lyons and displays of publications and archives.

Refreshments available

2 pm A 20 minute talk at the Churchyard and a different one at Red Lion Street

3 pm Talks repeated at the Churchyard and Red Lion Street

4–4.30 pm “Accent on Laughter” – a talk by Keith Skipper

5 pm Close

The Heritage Centre in the Churchyard will also be open.

## **COURSES IN AYLSHAM AUTUMN 2010 – SPRING 2011**

Aylsham Local History Society:– East Anglia and the Settlement of America by Douglas Baker. Ten sessions from 22<sup>nd</sup> September at 2 pm – £35.

WEA:– Germany on Film by Jo Statham. Eight 2 hour sessions from 21<sup>st</sup> September at 2 pm – £44.

WEA:– Venice and its Buildings by Margaret Forrester. Ten 1.5 hour sessions from 12 January 2011 – £44.

WEA:– The City of Berlin: Past and Present by Barbara Marshall. Day School Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2011, 10 am –4 pm – £12 + £ 6 for lunch. Booking essential.

Venue: Friends’ Meeting House, Pegg’s Yard, except Day School at Friendship Club, Cawston Road.

Please telephone Ann Dyball, 01263 732627, for further details.