

AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY
SOCIETY



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Front cover: Gospel Hall, Cawston Road. Architects' painting by George and Frederick Skipper, 1891. Courtesy Emmanuel Church.

Back cover: The Norwich Mail: Sketch for a Transparency (c. 1785) by Humphry Repton. Colman Collection. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service.

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Our new book *Sail and Storm – The Aylsham Navigation* will be launched at our Event in Aylsham Town Hall on the afternoon of 16 September as advertised on page 199. We do hope you will be able to come and encourage people you know to join us for this special occasion. We hope to make pre-publication sales at Coltishall Common on 26 August, noon to 5 pm, when the Bure Navigation Conservation Trust will be marking to the day the centenary of the Great Flood of 1912.

Lecture programme for the season has been arranged as follows.

Thursday 4 October. AGM followed by '*Seahenge*' by Robin Hanley

Thursday 25 October. '*Using Local Census Material*' by Victoria Draper

Thursday 22 November. '*The Romans in East Anglia*' by Ian Groves

Thursday 24 January. '*A Journey through Time*' by Dave King

Thursday 28 February. '*The Sedgeford Project*' by Gary Rossin

Thursday 28 March. '*The Howard Tombs*' by Phillip Lindley

Summer excursion. We are very fortunate to have Dr William Bowden, University of Nottingham Department of Archaeology, show us around the Roman town of Caistor St Edmund on the afternoon of 16 August, see notice on page 198. Please do contact Ann Dyball for a place now.

Autumn Course. '*Hidden Histories of Medieval and Tudor East Anglia*' by Rebecca Pinner is also advertised on p. 198, but please do book now as spaces are limited. See also WEA series on '*Art and Social Change*'.

Aylsham at Prayer

by Geoffrey Gale

Twelfth Night ¹

Fabian a servant to Olivia. " in my Ladies opinion: you will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard, unless you do redeem it by some laudable attempt either of valour or policy."

Sir Andrew Aguecheek, "An't be any way, it must be with valour for policy I hate: I had as life be a Brownist as a politician."

It seems curiously appropriate that Shakespeare's one reference to a Norfolk man in 1600 should have been about Robert Browne, a prominent Elizabethan separatist and religious agitator who gave his name to the 'Brownists', a separatist group within the Church of England. His name means little today but in 1572 Robert Browne was well known to the audience of the Globe. Browne had an explosive career. He was born into a prominent Northampton family and attended Cambridge University where he met and became a friend of Robert Harrison, another separatist. At Cambridge both men were influenced by the neo-Calvinist lectures of Thomas Cartwright, a puritan theologian professor of notable authority in the University. However Browne was an unpleasant character, a volatile personality who fell out with most of his associates including, at various times his friend Harrison. This was partly because he tried to control every situation he was involved in and his 'overwhelming rightness of his own opinion'.

When Browne left Cambridge he began teaching at a Grammar school in Southwark, South London. He continued to preach his dissenting religious views in local chapels, but the strain of this dual life of teaching and proselytising became difficult and sent him home to Northamptonshire to rest. Robert Harrison also taught, preached and clashed with his employers, and as a result he followed Browne, and also left his teaching position.

Through family connections Harrison was appointed Master of the Great Hospital in Norwich and there his friend Browne quickly joined him. While they were at the Great Hospital they were able to formulate an opinion regarding the function of the church, the role of the congregations and the form of the service. Browne and Harrison attempted to put these independent views into practice and did this while

they were in charge of the chapel at the Great Hospital. They initiated discussions with their own congregation over matters of church conduct, doctrine and those advantages from being independent of the Church. Unfortunately they were not completely separate from the Church of England. They had overlooked the simple point that they were preaching within a parish church and the parish was a part of the Great Hospital. Both of them then had to reconsider their position in relation to the Church of England. Their proselytising ended in 1581 when Browne was arrested while attempting to establish another separatist congregation in Great Yarmouth. The Great Yarmouth arrest was the first of thirty two different imprisonments Browne was to serve during the next fifty years of his life.

While Browne was serving his prison sentence the separatist congregation now led by Harrison moved across the channel to Middleburg in Holland where Browne later joined them after his release from gaol. In Holland they were joined by Thomas Cartwright, a former Cambridge don, puritan theologian and a preacher of neo-Calvinism. He brought with him his own congregation to this small Dutch town, but there were many theological differences between these English separatists. During 1583 Browne wrote a number of tracts, "A Book which sheweth the Life and Manners of all true Christians". This was an important pamphlet highlighting the divisions within the church. He also wrote a series of smaller tracts that were printed in Holland but destined for sale in England and in mid-1583 a proclamation was issued that forbade both the possession and sale of these seditious papers. Authors were free in Holland to write and print their views in safety but selling and distributing these contentious printings had now become exceedingly dangerous.

In 1583 two of Browne's former Congregationalists living in Norwich sold some of these tracts, and as a result were arrested, tried and hanged for selling such 'corrupting literature'. Browne's influence was obviously very strong in East Anglia. In 1584 a group of Norfolk clergymen wrote to the government asking for help in countering Browne's influence. The Archbishop of Canterbury advised against such action. He was concerned that any government interference would be regarded suspiciously by the population and result in their congregations moving to more strongly puritan churches.

Harrison died in 1585 but five years before his death the congregation he and Browne had worked with began to disintegrate. Browne with a few companions then left for Edinburgh where he had hoped to establish a small group just outside the city. Soon after his arrival in Scotland he was called on to present himself to the City Church Authorities and explain the meaning of his most recent writings. What was said is not known, but once again he found himself in jail. Fortunately a disagreement between the Edinburgh Civil and the Church authorities enabled Browne to be freed. On his release he quickly left Edinburgh, Calvinist Scotland and Scottish jails to return to the comparative peace of home.

The concern that gave rise to these dissenters and separatists movements was part of the problem affecting the whole of the population. It appears to have been caused by the non-protestant structure of the Church of England. When Charles I was placed on the throne it was by divine right suggesting the king had been appointed by God 'aided by his servants on earth'. After the legal murder of the King (for that's what many believed) it was possible to interpret his death as "killing God" thus creating a divisive civil-religious problem that long outlived the civil war. Among the discontents the Diggers and the Levellers were prominent with demands against privilege and property. Cromwell who cared almost as much for private property as for religious liberty, had little time for these social dividers masquerading as religious dissenters.

Many disputes within the church had existed before the civil war and remained, the principal one being the influence of Rome. Real or illusory, it created a belief that Rome was waiting to re-emerge and in 16th Century East Anglia the fear of Rome was a reality. It centred around those Catholic titled families that were interested in restoring the Catholic faith, many of whom were living close to Colchester and Long Melford. The Countess of Rivers², who was a prominent catholic, enthusiastic royalist and recusant, with other landed families would have been capable of raising an armed insurrection. It would clearly have been in defence of the faith and therefore seen as a potential danger. The 'Gunpowder treason' was well remembered in many sparsely populated rural areas.

The reforms in the church that had been demanded by Protestants were believed to be in the process of being eroded by the remaining elements of the Catholic church. The alarm and concern exhibited by puritans was therefore not surprising. It was still being discussed in 1873 through the writings of people like Frederick J. Jobson³, who in a short pamphlet, entitled "A plea for the support and Spread of Methodism in the Villages"⁴, wrote "Witness the increasing number of such clergymen who pass over as perverts to the Church of Rome". His views were not isolated.

After the turmoil of the Civil War, a simpler form of worship had evolved which being closer to protestant thinking had now become firmly established in the national church. The possibility of a Catholic revival was now remote although there was the division of 'high church', touched by the Oxford movement, and that led to the formation of its opposite, a 'low church'. The division defined a social class rather than a religious divide. Shortly after the publication of the 1851 Census, Horace Mann wrote an analysis of the Census highlighting this divide, and the habitual neglect of the church by 99% of the urban working class. He considered the 'labouring myriads' were not actively hostile to religion, just unconscious secularists. But none of this was new, working-class irreligion had been a subject of comment for the previous thirty years, the Census had made it more identifiable. Mann also remarked on the level of church accommodation being as variable as the level of church attendance. The ensuing half century witnessed a redoubling of the churches urban mission to civilise and convert the unchurched urban working classes.

Victorian rural religion had been less researched than the urban variety but rural apathy was just as evident. Land ownership and a village hierarchy set a Sunday pattern in some parishes while in others they were simply indifferent and apathy had become an established factor in this Sunday pattern. They had no quarrel with the church or even a grudge, there was simply a blank space between them and the church.

Aylsham followed a relatively conventional religious passage. The representation of the various churches began when John of Gaunt was linked to the building of the parish church, St Michael and all Angels. The established church allowed for elaborate ceremony and equally elaborated buildings but it was not universally accepted and a more

simple and plain form was called for. Those who disagreed with this degree of permitted ornamentation, agitated for plain buildings and simple text but it was made possible for them to apply to their local Bishop for a special dispensation already sanctioned by the King. This gave them permission to use their dwelling, meeting house or other unconventional building to be set apart as a "place of Religious Worship for his Majesty's Protestant Subjects who dissented from the Established Church"⁵.

It was clearly designed to disperse any religious objection that could become reminders of the recent past. In Aylsham it was a mixed group of Dissenting Protestants who applied to the Bishop for this special dispensation: Methodists, both Wesleyan and Primitive, but "Calvanist Methodists" seem not to have met in the town. Other dissenting churches were limited to Swedenborgians and Plymouth Brethren. Aylsham appears to have avoided those more radical puritan dissenters who had developed around London and the south like the "Muggletonians"⁶ and the "Children of God". Most of these small churches came into being during the Civil War and drifted into isolation and oblivion.

By the late 1700's all the main churches had been established in the town and following are some brief notes about their individual histories. The two most interesting chapels I have left to the end, because they are of interest for almost opposite reasons. They both represent examples of different dissenters' beliefs. One is notable because the chapel is the work of a Norwich architect of some note. The other has a direct connection with the Navigation Company and represents the very opposite of the previous building. Following are some brief notes about these buildings.

1. Methodists Church White Hart Street

Little is known of Methodism in Aylsham between the present building and Richard Jex's meeting house. The original building and the two adjoining cottages were erected in 1840 by William Hall who had bought the land in 1840 and used a local builder Robert Bowers to build the hall and the two adjoining cottages. Many Methodist chapels were being built around this time, such was the spiritual awakening that "persuaded men to building a house unto the Lord". On the 8th February 1844 Trustees were appointed to take over the management of the chapel and

the various mortgages, loans and other financial arrangements that had brought the hall into being. In 1910 a Norwich architect, A. F. Scott, was commissioned to alter the building to make it more relevant to their present needs. A number of alterations were made to both the inside and the outside of the building and also to the façade of the Chapel. All the alterations were completed by the beginning of 1911 and the Chapel was reopened on the 25th January 1911.

2. The Primitive Methodists Chapel, Mill Road

This Chapel seems to have had a more disturbed history than many of the others in Aylsham. It was established in 1830 but not on its present site. In the Wright's Map of 1839 the Primitive Methodists were listed as occupying two buildings on Hungate Street. One of these is close to the Unicorn Public House and still exists. It is recorded on Wright's Map as No 105, a meeting house on Hungate Street. The second building has been rebuilt and the spaces between that group of buildings was altered. Although the building has disappeared the area it occupied can still be located.

The large brick Meeting House in Mill Road was built in 1887 and probably on the same site it occupies today. At that time the building in Hungate Street was called the Buttlands (FC95/1-4) in the copyhold of the Manor of Aylsham Lancaster. It was purchased in 1838 by Benjamin Drake, a Minister of the Gospel, and others were appointed who acted as Trustees. The property was enfranchised in 1888 and fourteen new trustees were then appointed to help with the management of the building. The use of the Chapel by the Primitive Methodists seems to have slowly declined. During the second world war the building was used for a period as a British Restaurant. Finally it was sold by the Methodists in 1960 to the Freemasons and is now known as the Suffield Lodge.

3. Roman Catholic Church of St John of the Cross, White Hart Street

The Roman Catholic Church is intimately involved with the Shepherd family of Erpingham. Samuel Shepherd the oldest of eleven children became the Chaplain of the Aylsham Union Workhouse and for forty one years was the vicar of Calthorpe. He lived with his family in Erpingham for some years.



Emmanuel Church, former Swedenborgians Chapel, and Methodists Church in White Hart Street.

Then Samuel and his sisters Charlotte and Elizabeth converted to Catholicism and moved to a large house in Aylsham. Brother and sisters discussed the need for a Catholic Church in the town but Samuel died before they could develop their cause. The Anglian vicar in Erpingham refused to bury Samuel with the rest of his family now he was a catholic and consequently he was buried at Calthorpe. The small brick chapel in White Hart Street was built in the grounds of their house, now known as Abbot's House by his remaining sisters Charlotte and Elizabeth. They erected it in memory of their brother Samuel and it opened on April 8th 1899. The chapel is similar in size to the one built by Philip Shephard at Abbot's Hall in Drabblegate, both buildings have a stone cross at the end of the roof. The new larger church was not built until 1961.

4. Swedenborgians Chapel, White Hart Street

The emergence of the Swedenborg Church in Norwich and then later into Aylsham is intimately connected with members of the Clover family and Mary Berry, who was a close friend of the family.⁷ Individual members of the Clover family are difficult to distinguish because of the frequent use of the same first name. There are for example two Johns, three Joseph's and three Thomas's all of them spread across four generations. Mary Berry was the daughter of John and Ann Power who were farmers at nearby Erpingham, and Mary married William Berry. On the death of her husband in 1780 she inherited extensive property in Hungate Street and other parts of Aylsham and became a wealthy widow when the two properties were combined. Mary Berry helped to establish a Swedenborgian chapel in White Hart Street and she had firm ideas about

financing the church. She left money to maintain the building and to educate the children of the poor parents attending the New Church. The chapel is set back from the street and half hidden by other buildings. Secluded locations were typical of these early chapels to avoid any manifestations of hostility. The property is believed to have been built for Richard Jex by a speculative builder Mr Wilkes. Later Jex sold the building to John Boardman, a merchant in Gorleston who in turn sold it to Mary Berry.

The introduction and the growth of the Swedenborgian Church in Norwich began with Thomas Clover, the son of Thomas Clover a farrier and Veterinary Surgeon. The son who lived in Aylsham, visiting friends in London was taken to a meeting in 1780. There he was introduced to the doctrines of the "New Jerusalem" chapels. The gathering was held in a small chapel at New Church Cross Street in Hatton-garden which had been used regularly by the Swedenborg Society in London. He expressed his enthusiasm to his brother Joseph, who rejected them and dismissed these teachings as fallacious and dreadful. Years later Joseph changed his mind and both were then equally enthusiastic with the teachings of Swedenborg. In 1818 the first New-Church Society was formed in Norwich and first met in a small hall in Norwich. As followers grew they took over the lease of 'St Mary the Less from the French Protestants' in 1830. In 1870 they moved to a different meeting hall off Elm Hill and in 1890 built a chapel which cost around £600 on Park Lane. Unfortunately by the time the Park Lane Chapel opened membership had started a long but slow decline. The Chapel still exists in Park Lane as a reminder of a barely remembered group of believers.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm on the 29th January 1688 and is regarded firstly as an inventor and scientist and later a philosopher, theologian and Christian mystic. He spent much of his early life at Uppsala University. When he was 21 he decided to travel first to England where he hoped to meet Isaac Newton. Two years later he moved to the University at Utrecht, then Leiden and to Paris. He returned to Stockholm where he published *Daedalus Hyperboreus*, a Swedish scientific periodical, sometimes known as "*The Nordic Daedalus*". It contained a wide range of mechanical and mathematical inventions, many of which were by Swedenborg himself.



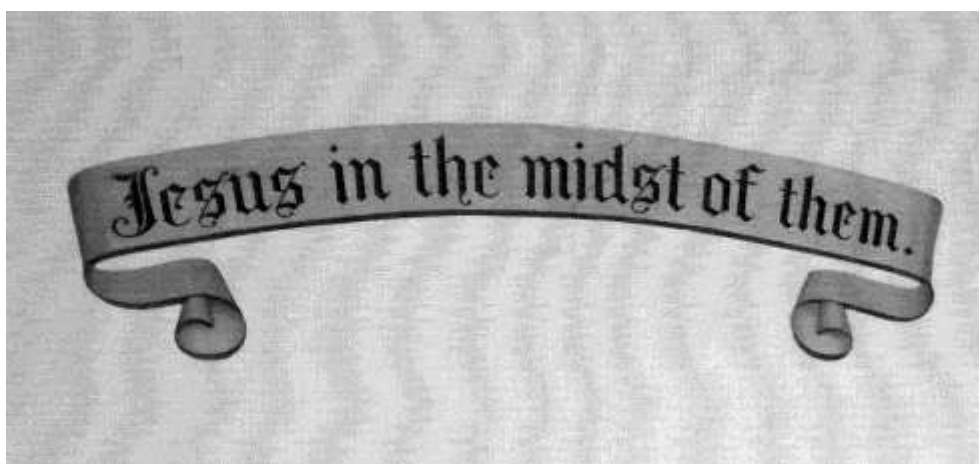
Gospel Hall, Cawston Road, and former Primitive Methodists Chapel in Mill Road.

He had an insatiable curiosity for knowledge and left Sweden to conduct his further studies.

In 1769 he returned to Stockholm to write "The True Christian Religion". On the title page he describes himself "as servant of the Lord Jesus Christ" and regarded the book as the culmination of all his writings "given to Emanuel Swedenborg by heavenly instruction". It was a proclamation of the Second Coming and towards the end he wrote: "Since the Lord cannot show himself in person, yet he predicted he would come and found a new church, which will be called the New Jerusalem. It follows that he will do this by means of a man, who cannot only receive intellectually the doctrines of this church, but also publish them in a printed form". Swedenborg was opposed to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, of one God being three separate persons and taught that the Trinity exists in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ that was not an unusual concept for this period. All of Swedenborg's works, his scientific, philosophical and his theological writings were written in Latin, being the language of scholarship in Europe. He returned to London during 1772 where he suffered a stroke and was partially paralysed. He died on the 29th March 1772, and was buried in the Swedish Church in London. His remains were moved to Sweden in 1909 and he was reburied in Uppsala Cathedral.

5. Plymouth Brethren Cawston Road

The small chapel in the Cawston road was designed by the Norwich architect George Skipper and his brother F.W. Skipper for George Pretty in 1891. The building is a simple and modest construction, (P) and probably built with a limited budget. All the elaborate brickwork is confined to the front of the building, and includes the date of the chapel at it's peak. The hall behind this front is simple with a minimum of brickwork around the windows, inside is a small office which leads to a simple and plain interior. The roof is braced with iron tie rods which simply brace the centre of the roof against the outer walls. Across the back wall of the hall is painted a traditional decorative banner which is filled with the message "Jesus in the midst of them".



Banner in Gospel Hall, Cawston Road, now Emmanuel Hall.

George Pretty whose name is featured on the Skipper drawing of the chapel was a grocer and draper trading in Red Lion Street as shown in Kelly's 1900 Trade Directory. The shop in Red Lion Street was previously managed by Henry Page who between 1896 and 1900 moved his business into the Market Place. Page had greatly expanded the premises and was now selling wines, spirits, china and glass in addition to being an outfitter and selling draperies. Although Skipper assigned the Chapel to George Pretty it seems unlikely that Pretty could have afforded to sponsor the building himself and was probably acting on behalf of others in Aylsham. The Brethren as their name implies were formed in the Devon City of Plymouth. They are a strict group of dissenters who were not allowed to transgress their strictly held beliefs.



Mariner's Chapel, Drabblegate, was in one of these cottages opposite the Anchor Inn, probably the second cottage on the right.

Mariner's Chapel Drabblegate

Perhaps the most interesting and the most relevant of these Dissenters' Meeting Houses was a small chapel intended for use by wherrymen and mariners, those men who worked the waterways from Yarmouth to Aylsham. The history of the chapel in Aylsham begins in March 1844 when William Sapcoat was given a certificate by the Bishop of Norwich allowing his friend Benjamin Southgate to use his cottage as a place of worship for a "congregation of Protestants".

Using a combination of the 1839 Wright's Survey Map of Aylsham and an O.S. map of 1886 it is possible to identify the cottage as being one of a group of cottages in Millgate Street immediately opposite the Anchor Inn. This group of cottages of course no longer exists but the Wright's Map lists the occupier as Benjamin Southgate living in number five. It is unclear in the two or three photographs of the cottages still existing which end of this line of buildings the numbering begins. The second cottage on the right would appear to be the most likely building principally because of its indicated size.

The origins of this request for a dissenters' chapel seem to have begun in Great Yarmouth where a church for the express use of Wherrymen and mariners had been established in 1826. A similar chapel was then needed for the wherrymen at the end of their journey and permission to use a cottage lived in by one of their believers was sought from the

Bishop of Norwich. On the 20th March 1844 permission was given for the cottage to be used as a chapel for an assembly of Dissenters.

What has confused this application are the tactics employed to obtain permission for the cottage to be used as a chapel. The application was made by William Sapcoat of Aylsham on behalf of Benjamin Southgate for his cottage in Millgate to be used as a chapel. It would appear that Southgate was unable to read or write and as a consequence Sapcoat made the application on his behalf and eventually collected the result. The cottage was occupied by Southgate and his wife Lucy but owned by Samuel Parmeter, a miller who may also have employed Southgate at the mill. Benjamin Southgate appears to have been the main force behind the religious use of the cottage. Although it was small it provided the wherryman with a place to worship that was close to the canal and river. Southgate seems not to have had a direct connection with the waterway, but being a sawyer and later a saw sharpener his skills would have been useful in the boat-building activities at Millgate.

As a contrast William Sapcoat was a Minister of the Gospel, he claimed to be from Aylsham but in reality lived at Helhoughton, roughly twenty-five miles west of Aylsham. In 1851 he moved to Portsmouth where he became a Primitive Methodist Minister, and married Harriet who was twelve years his junior. When Sapcoat left Helhoughton he also took his seven-year-old son with him. It is unclear if the mother was Harriet or a previous wife.

The Navigation Company supported the Wherryman's Mission with a donation in November 1860 of ten pounds. During that same year they began a regular annual donation of two pounds until 1882 when they made the last of these annual donations. There was one exception to this regular procedure, in 1869 the Companies annual contribution suddenly became two guineas. I suspect this may have been a 'clerical error' rather than an intention. It would seem easy for two pounds to erroneously become two pounds two shillings and notably it reverted the following year to the original two pounds. In total the company donated fifty two pounds and two shillings over twenty one years and then they suddenly stopped. The reason for this abrupt ending was never explained but it is possible that the mission closed through lack of support or Benjamin Southgate may have simply moved, he did become a saw sharpener and the cottage may have become too small for his business.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (1600–1601), Act 3 Scene 2, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Sir Toby Belch, Fabian a servant.

² *The Stour Valley Riots of 1642* by John Walters (1999).

³ Frederick J. Jobson, D.D. Rev. Frederick James Jobson (6. 7. 1812 – 4. 1. 1881). Jobson was a painter, architect and Wesleyan Methodist Minister. He had been President of the Methodist Conference in 1860 and Treasurer of the Foreign Mission Society. He maintained "that chapels are not to be designed to look like concert halls" and favoured Neo-Gothic design. He used medieval designs for nonconformist chapels he built.

⁴ The pamphlet "A Plea for the Support and Spread of Methodism in the Villages" was published by the Wesleyan Conference Office in 1873 price TWOPENCE.

⁵ Register of Dissenters Meeting Houses 1824–1855. DN / DIS / 4 / 2 NRO.

⁶ The Muggletonians were a radical religious sect who developed after the English Civil War. Sometimes called Radical Puritans they continued from 1652 to the 20th Century. They did not actively proselytise for new members but waited for the faithful to come to them. Their leaders were John Reeve (1608–1658) and Lodowick Muggleton.(1609–1698).

⁷ My thanks to James Wilson, librarian of the Swedenborg Society, London, for tracing the Norwich connection with the Clover family. Jane Nolan's papers in the Aylsham Town Council Archive also helped with Mary Berry's family connection.

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Henry Fenn Laxen (1874–1900), a native of Aylsham – the man and his memorials

Derrick Baker

Upon entering the church, visitors to St Michael and All Angels at Aylsham will probably notice the oval marble tablet mounted well above head-height between two of the windows on the south side of the nave, a short distance west of the south transept.



Some 2½ inches thick, measuring 2 feet by 3 feet overall, and with an inset black border framing the inscription, the tablet was erected: ‘... *in grateful remembrance of all those who gave their lives for the British Empire in the South African War among whom was Corporal Henry Fenn Laxen of the ... Northumberland Fusiliers ... a native of this town ...*

I spotted the tablet during my first visit to Aylsham in 1996 when in the early stages of my family history research. Although the specific link was unknown to me, I suspected that the tablet was of significance to my

investigations since I had recently learnt that my great-grandmother, Ann(ie) Frances Bullock, had been married twice, and that her former surname was Laxen. When I later discovered that Annie's maiden name was *Fenn*, I became convinced that the tablet was indeed relevant to my family history. In due course I learnt that Henry Fenn Laxen was the eighth of thirteen children born to my great-grandmother.

The basic facts of Henry's short life are readily retrievable from the public records:

- He was born in Aylsham on the 17 July 1874, the son of Richard Laxen, harness maker, and his wife Ann. Probably, he was born at 10 Market Place, the long-established (from at least 1800 onwards¹) harness makers' premises and Laxen family residence bordering the square.

- Henry was duly baptised, but not until he was well over four years old. The ceremony took place at St Michael's Church on 25 March 1879, jointly with that for three of his brothers and two of his sisters – truly a family event but undoubtedly charged with sadness since his father Richard had died just six months earlier, in September 1878.

- In the 1881 Census for Aylsham, Henry was recorded as a scholar, aged six, living at the Stonemasons public house in Millgate with his step-father, Robert Bullock, his mother Annie and nine siblings. (The Publican's Licence for these premises had been held by Henry's father over the period 1875-1878, then by his widowed mother, Annie Laxen (1878-1879) and latterly by Robert Bullock, harness maker, (1879-1880).²

- After infants' school, Henry attended the National Boys' School from July 1881 to June 1887, leaving just before his thirteenth birthday.³

- The 1891 Census indicates that Henry had followed in the family tradition of harness making. Probably, he learnt his craft at the Market Place premises where his widowed grandmother, Ann Laxen senior, was the proprietress and his elder brother Albert was employed. However, by now Henry was at *Heigham* – a harness maker, aged 17, boarding with his married sister, Edith Annie Buttifant, and her young family.

- Supposing him to be a bachelor, I was surprised to discover in July 2000 that Henry had in fact been married; his marriage certificate yielded

much useful information. The ceremony took place at St Paul's Church, Southsea, on New Year's Day, 1896. Henry was aged 21 and his young bride - Edith Mary Ellen Mack, the daughter of a foreman slater - was just 18. Henry was resident at the Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth, and his *Rank or Profession* is shown as Lance Corporal. Henry's elder brother, Charles Henry Laxen, was a witness. The document thus provided evidence that Henry was by now serving in the Northumberland Fusiliers and had had some promotion. Regrettably, no wedding photograph, or indeed any other image featuring Henry, has been traced. A Fusilier Private's uniform of the period is shown following.⁴



The service records of soldiers who died in service before WW1 were not retained and so exactly when Henry enlisted in the 5th (Northumberland Fusiliers) Regiment of Foot - dubbed '*The Fighting Fifth*' - is unknown. However, Muster Rolls and the Regimental Journal provide snapshots of his Army career, and from these it can be deduced that Henry joined C Company of the 1st Battalion of the Regiment on or very close to 17 July 1891 – his 17th birthday. A year younger than was normal, this probably reflects the fact that his elder brother Charles had been serving in that Battalion for two years or so – since 29 May 1889.^{5, 6}

Henry enlisted for twelve years; seven in service then five years as a Reservist. The Muster Rolls record him (with Charles) as a Boy Soldier at Lydd in 1892⁷ and again at Dover in 1893.⁷ By June 1894 he was a Private serving at Aldershot.⁸ He was *appointed* to Paid Lance Corporal on 11 April 1895.⁹ Then came his marriage on 1 January 1896 whilst stationed at Portsmouth. Eighteen months later (July 1897) he was at Gibraltar¹⁰ (a Lance Corporal now in A Company) and was still there on 1 January 1898.¹¹ From April 1895 to March 1898 (at least) he was gaining the educational qualifications necessary for promotion to Corporal.¹²

On completing his seven years term, Henry was discharged to Reserves. However, he was almost immediately recalled to active service. It was recorded in August 1898 that: *No. 3080 Corporal H Laxon (sic) was taken on the strength of the Battalion having rejoined from Army Reserve under Army Order 23 of 1898.*¹³ At 24, and a full Corporal in E Company of the 2nd Battalion, he was destined for the battle fields of South Africa.

The subsequent records relating to Henry are of an increasingly harrowing nature. We know from the memorial tablet that he was mortally wounded at Nooitgedacht in December 1900 but, at that time, his family would have been unaware of his deployment there. *Had* they known, they would have been dismayed to read in the Norwich Mercury of 19 December 1900 a lengthy report that commenced:

***Another British Reverse: Four Companies of Fusiliers Captured:
General Clements Retires.***

The British forces under General Clements met with a most serious reverse at Nooitgedacht in the Magaliesberg Hills, west of Pretoria, early on the morning of Thursday, 13th. ... Five officers and nine other ranks were killed and ... 18 officers and 555 rank and file were missing.

The bad news was compounded, and would rapidly have spread throughout Aylsham, by the following report in the Eastern Daily Press dated 1st January 1901:

NORFOLK MEN IN THE ‘FIGHTING FIFTH’

Mr AR Laxen, a saddler, of Aylsham had two brothers at the front in South Africa at the commencement of the war. Both belonged to the Northumberland Fusiliers, known as the ‘Fighting Fifth’, both being in the Stormberg disaster on the 12th December, 1899, where Corporal CH Laxen* was wounded in the head and knee, being a cripple for life.¹⁴ By a strange coincidence his brother, Corporal HF Laxen, was shot through the spine at Nooitgedacht on the 13th December, 1900, and has died at Pretoria. Much sympathy is felt for them, as they are both well-known natives of Aylsham.*

** The action at Stormberg actually took place on the 10th; CH Laxen was a **Lance-Corporal**.*

It would have been of little comfort to his family to be notified by the War Office a few months later that Henry had been awarded the Queen’s South Africa Medal with three Clasps denoting his service in the Cape Colony, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.¹⁵

Many reports of the Battle of Nooitgedacht have been published, varying markedly in length, accuracy and degree of ‘spin’, but one notable document, with an extensive bibliography, provides a comprehensive, balanced and modern review of the engagement from both the British and Boer points of view.¹⁶ It includes the observation that:

Nooitgedacht can be considered as one of the main battles of the Guerilla-phase of the Anglo-Boer War in the Western Transvaal.

Notwithstanding the foregoing endorsement, I have chosen next to quote from a contemporary Regimental account of the Battle.¹⁷ (The text, heavily edited, includes my insertions indicated thus [].)

The 12th December, 1900, found six Companies of the Second Battalion encamped at the Nooitgedacht Pass, in the Magaliesberg Range of mountains, some thirty-six miles west of Pretoria. A few small scattered [Boer] Commandos only were known in the immediate neighbourhood. ... On the summit of the precipitous heights were four Companies of the Battalion (E, F, G, H) - strength eight Officers 300 men - occupying a semi-circular line of outposts over very rocky and broken ground, either flank resting on the edge of the precipice. Immediately below (south of the Magaliesberg) [was located] General Clement's force. ... Captain Yatman was in command of the picquets [and the signallers] on the top of the Magaliesberg.

... A strong [Boer] Commando, after travelling two days and nights without a rest from Warm Baths district, arrived on our right flank after dark, and in conjunction with local [forces] ... organised a joint attack on the [lower] picquets from the north and east, getting into position under cover of darkness. The total Boer force was estimated at 3000 men. [Firing was heard from about 4 am to 4.30 am] ... but as there came a lull ... we fancied the attack had been repulsed, and the Boers driven off. And so they had; but this was not their main attack - that had been reserved for our Companies on the [summit].

No sooner had the attack on the Camp below been successfully repelled than heavy fighting was heard on the heights above the camp. The ammunition mules, which had been previously sent up the bridle path to the picquets under Captain Yatman, returned to camp with the information that our men had called to them from the top to go back or they would be captured. Captain Yatman signalled down to say large bodies of Boers could be seen coming up the rough broken rocky ground on his right and left. About a quarter of an hour after his message, the

heliograph informed us from the summit that the signallers were surrounded, the Boers only 300 yards off them, and further signalling out of the question.

[We much later learnt] ... that it was H Company who had first opened the ball on that memorable morning. Lieutenant Isaac was on the extreme left of our outpost line. He found himself holding about 150 Boers at bay, but so excellent was the cover that Boers came rushing on, taking shelter from rock to rock until, having overpowered our left flank, they worked into position along the top of the precipice, and fired into the rear of our picquets, while others engaged them from the front. Although being attacked from all sides, our men stuck it splendidly; the fighting by now had got to very close quarters, the Boers being within 40 yards in many places; five officers out of eight were wounded, the ammunition was all but exhausted, and there was no hope now of help coming from the camp below. Shells from our own guns were falling close to our picquets, and out of the small force who found themselves surrounded, about 30 percent were killed and wounded.

To quote ... one of the Boer officials ... ‘our men had fought like lions, and refused to surrender till the last, although outnumbered by 6 to 1’. He said it was the toughest piece of fighting they had had the whole war - that they never expected to find us so strongly established on the top of the Magaliesberg, and that they had suffered heavily themselves.

The following reproduction of the contemporary monochrome wash drawing by FJ Waugh¹⁸ provides a dramatic illustration of the Fusiliers’ predicament and the manner in which so many of them came to grief.

It is sobering to read¹⁹ that

‘The wounded from Nooitgedacht were not all picked up for about five days, the difficulty of finding some of them among the huge boulders of the mountains being very great. ...’

Disaster at Nooitgedacht: the End of a Brave Signaller



One despairs to think that Henry – shot in the spine – may have suffered this trauma, possibly under the threat of attack by the Cape Griffon vultures that populated the Magaliesberg. The Regimental Motto is *Quo Fata Vocant* (Whither the Fates Call). When, exactly, did poor Henry realise the grim reality of what the Fates had in store for *him*?

Henry's demise was recorded in the Regimental Journal²⁰ as follows:

The death of Corporal Laxen on the 27th, from wounds received on the 13th, is also much felt in the Battalion. He was very popular with all who knew him well.

His widow, who received no compensation or Army pension, commissioned the following memorial card, and this informs us that Henry was known to his intimates as ‘*Harry*’.



About one hundred of the British dead are buried in three cemeteries in the vicinity of Nooitgedacht²¹, one being on the top of the Magaliesberg where there is also a British monument – a large, inscribed, granite slab lying flat on the rocky ground. The present memorial replaced the original erected by General Clements that was vandalised.²²

But where is *Henry* buried? I resolved to try and answer this question soon after discovering the memorial tablet in St Michael’s Church. By luck, I read in 1997 of the existence in South Africa of a database²³ of the British and Burgher War Graves of men killed in action in the Anglo-Boer War. I wrote to its compiler, and learnt from him that Henry was interred in Grave 347 in the Military Section of the Church Street Cemetery in Pretoria’s city centre. Subsequent correspondence with the War Graves Division of the SA National Monuments Council brought

forth the following photograph of Henry's grave marker, an iron cross bearing his name (misspelt as *Lascan*) and other personal details:



Out of the blue some eight months later (in August 1998) I received a letter from Johannesburg. The writer was one Dr Peter A Laxen, a nephew of Henry. In his long and informative letter, he stated that his father, Frederick W Laxen, had emigrated to SA after the Boer War, raising his two children - Peter and Sheila - in Boksburg with his wife Constance.

Peter said that his father often used to speak of his Laxen family, referring to his siblings, including Henry and Charles who had been casualties of the Boer War. He further commented that *'Henry's grave was often discussed, but we never went to see it or find it, and I remember [Dad] saying he thought it was in Pretoria. As a child and young person, I often used to think of Uncle Henry, and where he might be buried.'*

In 1962, taking advantage of some overseas travel related to his work for the SA Government, Peter and his wife Billie visited the UK, including a trip to Aylsham. They visited St Michael's Church, discovered the plaque to Henry - as did I some thirty-four years later! - and established contact with their local Laxen relatives. (It is pleasing to record that their son Graham has also made the trip: see his 2009 ALHS article.²⁴)

Peter continued that, over the years, he had often tried to track down Nooitgedacht and Henry's grave, but without success. (Evidently, Nooitgedacht is a not-uncommon African name.) However, with some help, he eventually discovered the location of the grave and, accompanied by family members, he made a visit to Pretoria in about 1986 to see it at first hand.

Peter commented that he had been meaning for years since to have a headstone erected on Henry's grave and, prompted by the impending 100th Anniversary (1999-2002) of the Anglo-Boer War, he decided to contact the National Monuments Council for permission to do so. The official dealing with his enquiry was so surprised at his request as she said that somebody else had been asking about that very grave! She was referring to the letters that I had sent in 1997, which she copied to him.

At the time of writing (August 1998), he stated that he had made contact with a stonemason in Pretoria. A headstone was subsequently commissioned from him and the resulting memorial duly erected on Henry's grave in the Autumn of 1999, in time for the start of the 100th Anniversary commemorative activities.

In January 2000, at his request, I passed to Peter details of his uncle *Charles* Laxen who had been seriously injured at Stormberg. Six months later I heard back that he had had his Uncle Charles' details added to the base of Henry's new headstone. He also reported that he and his wife had made a rather stressful pilgrimage to the summit of the Magaliesberg (1852m altitude), the site of the most intense fighting in the Battle of Nooitgedacht. Reflecting on his visit, he was moved to comment:

‘By following in Henry’s ‘footsteps’ to the top of the Magaliesberg we have paid tribute in some way to his bravery. His grave and his battlefield are no longer unknown.’

For my part, I view Peter’s long-held empathy for the uncle he never met; his doggedness in tracking down the burial place and erecting there a fitting headstone; and lastly, his pilgrimage to the inhospitable battle site, as in themselves constituting a notable and laudable memorial to Henry.

The following photographs show: i) Peter and his wife Billie at the grave before Charles’ details were added to the headstone - the original iron cross still in place and visible behind it, and ii) the final headstone.



Closer to home, Corporal Henry Fenn Laxen’s name also appears on the rather grandiose Boer War Memorial at Norwich. This was unveiled by Major-General Wynne on 17 November 1904.²⁵ This discovery prompted the question as to when the tablet at *Aylsham* was erected. The answer was found by following the paper trail!

The earliest pertinent documentary evidence discovered is in the Vestry Minute Book for St Michael’s Church.²⁶ The relevant entry reads:

Vestry Meeting 14 November 1904:

Mr TW Purdy submitted to the Vestry the plan of the tablet proposed to be erected in memory of Corporal Henry Fenn Laxen the only Aylsham man who lost his life in the late South African war. He having died on 28th December 1900 of wounds received at Nooigedacht*. And he informed the Vestry that all the costs of erecting the tablet had been privately subscribed.*

Mr BB Sapwell then proposed and Mr HJ Gidney seconded that the Vestry consent to an application being made by Mr TW Purdy for a faculty to erect such a tablet on the South Wall of the Nave of the Parish Church in the space between the 1st and 2nd windows on the West of the South Transept. This was carried unanimously.

Signed: JG Hoare

**This early Minute suggests the origin of two errors that are in evidence on the tablet: 'Nooitgedacht' is missing its initial 't', and Henry died on the 27th day of December.*

A Mr AR Laxen was a participant in the Vestry meeting. This was Albert Richard Laxen, harness maker of Aylsham's Market Place, and Henry's elder brother. There is no later information in the Minute Book concerning the tablet.

The Application for a Faculty²⁷ was prepared in compliance with the episcopal legalities by the Churchwardens, Messrs. Gidney and Purdy, and submitted to the Consistory Court of Norwich in early December 1904. A detailed actual-size drawing of the proposed tablet formed a part of the submission. After due consideration by the Consistory Court, the resulting Faculty²⁸ was granted by John, Bishop of Norwich, on Saturday, 18th February 1905. Surprisingly, the tablet had been erected within St Michael's on the Wednesday, *three days earlier*²⁹, clearly indicating that a positive outcome from the Application had been anticipated!

I had presumed early in my research that it was Henry's widow, Edith Laxen, who had been the prime mover behind the placement of the tablet

in the church. However, subsequent discoveries suggest otherwise. Thus, in the 1901 Census, taken a few months after Henry's death, Edith was recorded as living with her parents and siblings in far-off Dover. In the fourth quarter of 1903 she married a railway worker, George Owens, and the first of her five known children was born in early 1904. Clearly, following Henry's untimely demise, she had embarked upon a new life, and probably her thoughts were far-removed from Aylsham when the application for the tablet was being progressed.

I am now of the view that those instrumental in raising funds and organising the tablet were members of the extensive Laxen family, supported perhaps³⁰ by prominent Aylsham residents with military affiliations* who felt a moral imperative for the town to honour - and to be seen to honour - the only native of Aylsham to have died in the War.

**Mentioned in the Vestry Minute above are Thomas Woods Purdy, an Aylsham solicitor who, in 1904, was a Lieutenant in the 3rd VB Norfolk Regiment (C Company) and Henry James Gidney, another Aylsham solicitor who in 1904 was an Honorary Major in the same Company.*

Whatever the logistics, it is satisfying that the plan came to fruition and that the tablet - *neatly executed by Mr CH Rust of Norwich*²⁹ – continues to keep alive memories of an Aylsham man cut down in his prime in such horrific circumstances.

But that is not the end of the account! There was another 'memorial' worthy of mention. It was not '*writ in stone*' but was a '*flesh and blood*' expression of fraternal regard.

The brothers Charles and Henry Laxen clearly had a close bond. They grew up together; they served in the same regiment; and they both fought in the disastrous action at Stormberg. Whereas Henry escaped uninjured from that particular engagement, Charles was seriously wounded and was discharged from the Army on medical grounds.⁵ However, he went on to lead a near-normal life and to add to his already sizeable family. Notably, the first of his four children to be born after the Battle of Nooitgedacht, a son, he named *Richard Henry Fenn Laxen* – in clear homage to the brother he had lost.

This Richard Laxen also made the Army his career, attaining a high rank in the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers and receiving a Military Division OBE in the Birthday Honours of 1961.³¹ I can visualise him in the Officers' Mess from time-to-time, reminiscing about the exploits and death in combat of that Fusilier uncle in whose memory and honour he had been named!

References and Notes

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- ³ Aylsham Boys' National School Register 1872–1911. Aylsham Town Council Archive. (See Aylsham Local History Society J. 7: 385–388 (2007), for a related article by Peter Bull.)
- ⁴ Hoynck van Papendrecht, Jan. A pen-and-ink sketch commissioned from him by the Daily Graphic.
- ⁵ The National Archives (TNA) Disability File, PIN 71/3793.
- ⁶ The 1891 Woolwich Census shows Charles, 20, in the Cambridge Barracks, Woolwich Dockyards.
- ^{7 & 8} TNA Muster Rolls for Reg. District 5: WO 16/2969 & 16/2996.
- ⁹ St George's Gazette (Magazine of the Northumberland Fusiliers, 1883–1968), 30 April 1895, p. 54. After 19 months probation, he was *promoted* to the paid rank on 17 November 1896. *ibid*, 30 Nov 1896, p. 167.
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- ²⁰ St George's Gazette, 3 January 1901, p? '2nd Battalion Notes.' (Pretoria, 31 December 1900.)
- ²¹ From Ref. 16, pp. 42–44.
- ²² J. South African Military History Society, Vol 12, No 4, December 2002. 'Anglo-Boer War Centenary Commemorations 1992–2002: The Battle of Nooitgedacht, 13 December 1900.'. Downloaded from <http://samilitaryhistory.org>.
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- ²⁵ Information from <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Norfolk/NorwichNorfolkBoerWar.html>.
- ²⁶ Aylsham St Michael's Church Vestry Minute Book 1893–1988. Norfolk Record Office. PD602/76 AYLSHAM. (Currently, the Minute Book is in the care of the church at Aylsham.)
- ²⁷ Application for a Faculty. NRO DN/CON166 St Michael's Aylsham.
- ²⁸ Faculty for the Erection of a Tablet. NRO DN/FCB/12 AYLSHAM.
- ²⁹ Cromer and North Walsham Post, Saturday, 18 February 1905. See also Majoram, H.W. (1906) 'Chief Local Events During the Year 1905', Aylsham Almanack, 1906. February, p. 8.
- ³⁰ This notion was suggested to me by Elizabeth Gale in a letter dated 29 November 2001.
- ³¹ Supplement to the London Gazette, 10 June 1961, p1449. See also The Times, 10 June 1961, p. 6.

Acknowledgements

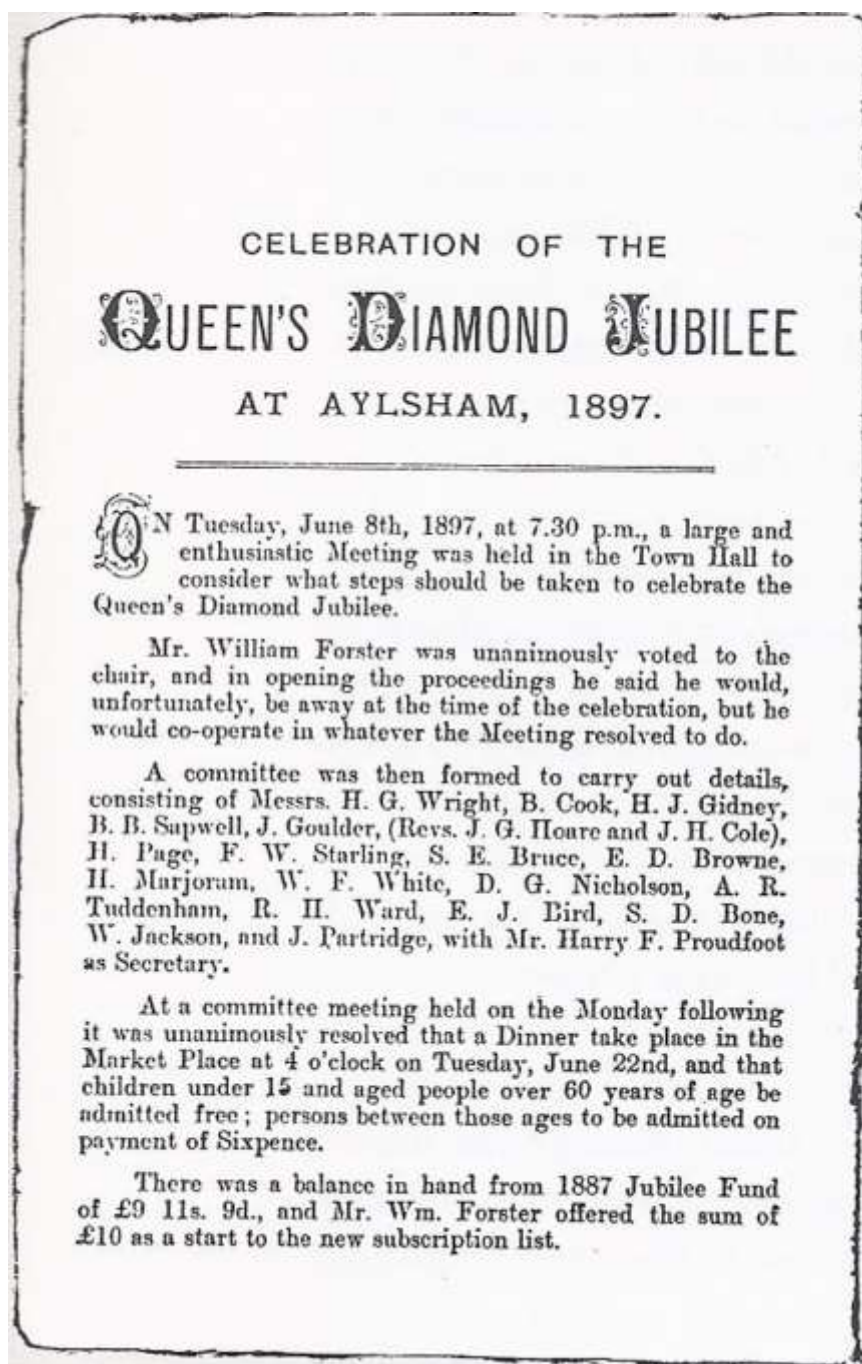
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The Other Diamond Jubilee : 1897

by Melvyn Wix

Dr. Sapwell describes the event in his History of Aylsham and the town archive holds a box of records.



First page of report in the Aylsham Almanac of 1898 by Harry Proudfoot, the Secretary of the Jubilee Committee.

At a public meeting a Committee was elected to organise the town's celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The committee was elected on 8th June and the events were to begin twelve days later on Sunday 20th. William Forster, who was elected Chairman, would be unable to attend but gave a generous £10 to start the Subscription List that would raise funds for the over-60s and under-14s to have their food and entertainment free. They decided to treat the over-60s because it was the sixtieth year of the Queen's reign. Rev. Hoare offered to entertain them in the vicarage grounds. Over 130 people subscribed.

The catering for the older folk and the under-14s was put out to tender. The expected 150 older folk were to have tea, bread and butter, cold meat, pickles, hot plum pudding and cake, provided with crockery, cutlery and table-cloths, while the anticipated 400 children would have tea, sandwiches, beef patties and cake without anything sharp, breakable or in need of laundering afterwards.

Dr. Sapwell lists the quantities of beef, beer, mutton and plum pudding ordered for the feast, with the contemporary prices. Local businesses certainly benefited from supplying everything from gunpowder to safety-pins. Cheque stubs and invoices in the town archive show that seven local businesses supplied the bread and flour, and four supplied the meat. Most versatile of traders was F. Starling, whose shop provided tables and seats, eighty-nine bread baskets, jugs, cans, weights for scales, spoons for the egg-and-spoon race, safety-pins, oil and gunpowder. The two boxes of fireworks, however, were bought from C.T. Brock & Co. of London and delivered by the Great Eastern Railway.

Mr Durrell, who had agreed to the sports and bonfire being held on his meadow, was paid £3 2s 6d to compensate for the loss of a crop and for one cut of straw to start the bonfire. 10 gallons of oil had been bought to make sure of a good blaze, and there is a plan for the construction of the bonfire in the town archive. A shilling was to be paid to a Crier for the feast, and two shillings to the sweepers-up after the event. Two pounds ten shillings was paid for the ringing of the church bells. Mr. Page kindly offered his house in the Market Place for the making of 128 plum puddings.



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in the Market Place and the Volunteers band. Courtesy Aylsham Town Council Archive.

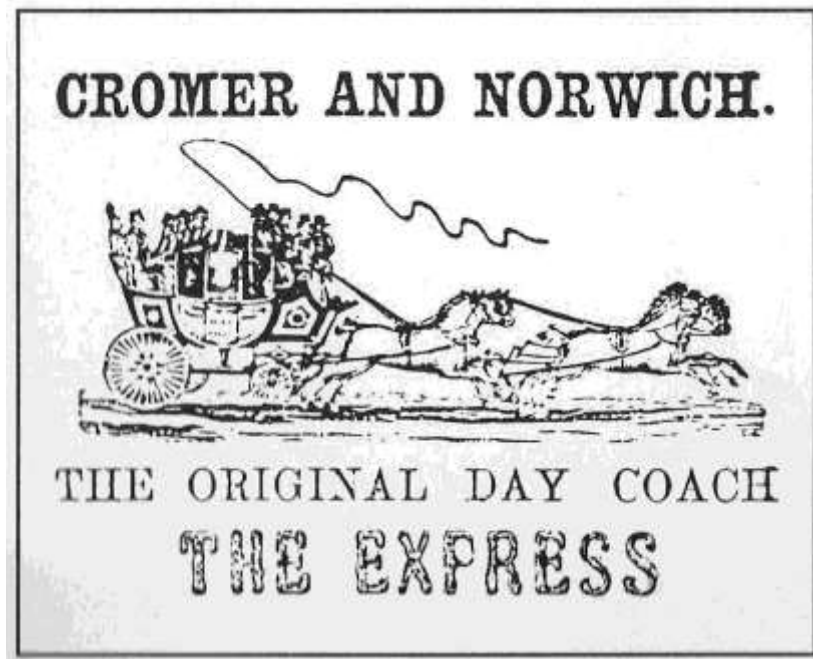
The minutes record .J.W. Purdy expressing the idea that there should be a lasting legacy in the form of a Recreation Ground; a notion aired previously but abandoned. It was not until 1920 that Aylsham got its Recreation Ground as a memorial to the sacrifice of the Great War and the generosity of the Goulder family.

It is also recorded that the members of the Committee were each allocated an area to find out how many under-14s and over-60s there were . The result:

Area	Under 14	Over 60
Millgate beyond the Water Bridge. Also the town side from the Water Bridge up to Gas House and Town Lane including Muckland	154	36
Commercial Road, Doctor's Meadow, Cromer Road to Mr. Denmark's, Peterson's Lane, Blickling Road to Police Station and School Lane	28	13
From Gas House to Miss Lerner's, with Town Lane and White Hart Street up to Mr Miller, shoemaker, and Mrs Goulder on the Hill	60	32
Red Lion Street to Rev. Ford's, incl. Church Hill	30	4
Burgh Road and Norwich Road from Rev. Ford's, Out to Spratt Green and Bolwick Hall Cottages	32	7
The Market Place, Dye's Loke, Church Terrace and Penfold Street	10	5
Hungate Street from Mr Bond's, round by LeNeve's including Unicorn Yard, Carr's Corner and Buttlund	75	27
Rookery, Hungate, by Yaxley's land, round by Smithson's House and Mill Road to Swan	31	22
Cawston Road from Engine House to Bridge including Fox Lane	35	25
Pound Road	26	9
Cawston Road from Bridge to Spa, Heydon Road and outlying District	20	6

Society News

Norwich to Cromer turnpike, a talk by Adrian Vaughan



Our speaker Adrian Vaughan has a great interest in transport systems, particularly railways. Now he is researching the road system and gave us an entertaining talk on the 22nd of March 2012. Norfolk once had a few straight well built and maintained Roman roads. This had degraded to green lanes, drove roads, local tracks and links between centres of population that could be a nightmare to negotiate.

In 1555 every parish was tasked with the maintenance of its own roads – but with variable enforcement this was not the solution. Cromwell in the 1640's needed good roads to move armies and equipment around in the civil war. He tried to raise a levy at 1s in the £ on income to pay for materials to keep the roads in order – but his dynasty did not last. Such a localised system produced axle deep mires of mud in the winter and sun baked ruts in the summer. Times of journeys between towns were listed in days. The popularity of the coastal trade and navigation canals can be understood when quantities of clay, timber, corn and iron had to be moved around the country.

One of the first improvements came in Norfolk in 1695. A particularly swampy part linking Wymondham and Attleborough, and so affecting the route to London was taken in hand by a group of interested parties; the area was drained and the road given better foundations.

In the 18C two gentlemen were in the forefront of building new roads rather than infilling potholes on existing tracks. Telford and Mac Adam worked on better drainage and a waterproof surface. Stones were graded then covered with gravel and sand. Turnpike trusts were set up with tolls at various points to pay for maintenance. It was the job of the poor to break up flints with hammers to provide on site repair materials.

So, much better roads but this came with the understanding that the surface could be badly damaged by heavy carts with narrow wheels. The tolls were reduced for carts with a 9" wheel width, with a greater reduction if the front and back wheels were offset so producing an 18" width. Carts drawn by more than seven horses were charged more. As the road surfaces improved even more, Royal mail and stage coaches entered their Golden Age. Coaching inns with the attendant industries of ostlers, blacksmiths, fodder providers and coach drivers boomed until the spread of the railways from the 1830's onwards.

The turnpike trusts were slow to innovate. Adrian suggested that if the road system had been more extensive and in better order, fewer railways would have been built. But a train could always exceed the 9 m.p.h. of a coach. Gurney's steam road carriage at 20 m.p.h. was rejected as too damaging to the road surface. The Red Flag Act of 1831 in institutionalising low speeds hastened the collapse of the turnpike system. The trustees paid shareholders out of revenues. With revenues much reduced bankruptcies followed.

The Norwich to Aylsham Turnpike was enacted in 1794 with onward links to Holt via Blickling. It started from St. Augustine's gates and arrived at the Black Boys up Hungate Street. Lord Suffield was a trustee of the Aylsham to Cromer section built in 1811. Adrian showed us photographs of sections of the planned turnpike route with junctions for private roads. Photographs of Ingworth today showed the junction of the turnpike and the old road demonstrating just how narrow at 12-14' they were. It was good to see how the modern system still reflects the turnpike route.

In 1888 County Councils took on maintenance of the trunk roads, so taking on the former turnpike roads which had been neglected with the coming of the railways. Tarmac was more widely used, stopping the nuisance of dust for early motorists.

Questions at the end of the talk showed there was more research to be done on the manpower needed for turnpike gates, how many gates there had been and where, who were trustees, did they ever make any money. If they had survived would the trustees have supported or opposed the Aylsham Bypass?
Lynda Wix

Further Reading.

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Roadsign at Roughton.

A visit to four Round Tower Churches

by Jean Hawke



Heckingham St Gregory built soon after the Norman conquest.

Wednesday 24th April 2012 couldn't have been a worse day to visit remote Norfolk churches down rough country lanes (unless it had been snowing), with the wind blowing cold rain off the nearby marshes and North Sea, but the pleasure and interest in seeing these wonderful ancient buildings made the weather almost irrelevant. Our enjoyment was enhanced by the knowledge and enthusiasm of Richard Barham's introduction to these churches, their history and something of the people who used them.

The first stop was Fritton church, dedicated to St Edmund who was murdered by the Danes in AD 870. His image, with the arrows which killed him, is in the very small original window in the Anglo Saxon apse, although the original glass was destroyed in Cromwell's time. The apse, or chancel, was the oldest part of the church and was unusual in that you stepped down into it rather than up, as is usually the case. It had the feeling of a Greek Byzantine church about it.



St Christopher opposite the main door of St Edmund, Fritton.

Fragments of the original wall painting from the twelfth century can be seen and there is an impressive wall painting of St Christopher with the Christ child on his shoulder, opposite the main entrance, so that a traveller visiting the church could gain reassurance for the rest of their journey across the marshy wastes. The main body of the church was extended several times after the conquest, but not the chancel which was the responsibility of the priest, and all the new work, e.g. the north aisle, was not added symmetrically, leaving a dog-leg in front of the chancel. Above the screen was a royal coat of arms for George 2nd from 1749 reminding the congregation that the King was head of the church and not the Pope.

The next church was St Mary's at Haddiscoe standing on a hill above the Reedham to Beccles road, its tower being a landmark for miles. The tower base is Saxon and the upper parts Norman, the chequerboard top wholly fifteenth century. The fifteenth century porch guards a Norman doorway with some very fine carving on the arches and one of Norfolk's best Norman sculptures of a priest holding a chasuble. The door itself has some medieval ironwork thought to have a Scandinavian influence. Little decoration remains but there is the familiar St Christopher and the Christ child protecting travellers again. The fifteenth century font shows the four evangelists alternating with angels. One stone plaque in the floor was dedicated to "Bele, daughter of John, wife of Peter the Dykegraffe", (dyke worker), dated 2nd December 1525. Around that time many Dutch drainage engineers worked in the area on land reclamation and some settled in the area. The imposing height of the nave and chancel is the result of Medieval enlargement and the extent of this can easily be seen on the outside of the building. In one of the south windows is a fine piece of stained glass work by Martin Travers dedicated to the memory of Mrs Arnesby Brown. It depicts a young John the Baptist greeting the infant Jesus seated on Mary's lap with the church in the background. Beneath this is a wall plaque dedicated to the memory of her husband, painter J Arnesby Brown R.A.

A lunch stop was next at the Garden House, Hales, where we all had a very well organised pre-ordered meal in comfortable and warm surroundings. Still raining – we all piled back in to the coach to our next stop – St Margaret's church, Hales.

This small, thatched, Norman church stands on an isolated site, long since abandoned by the settlement which was once grouped around it, now 1 km to the north. An unprotected north door has some still very fine Norman carving on the arches which has weathered extremely well. It is an almost perfect example of a Norman church with its apsed east end to the chancel and the Norman arcading outside it. Inside are the remains of a St Christopher painting on the wall opposite the main door, along with traces of wall paintings from different ages. The original altar stone is built into the altar table and bears 5 crosses, etched into the surface, which represent the 5 wounds of Christ. Unfortunately, the church is now redundant but has been in the care of Norfolk Churches Conservation Trust since 1973.



South door of St Mary's, Haddiscoe, and the chancel of St Margaret's, Hales.

Finally, we visited Heckingham St Gregory, built just after the conquest with a later-added north aisle. On approaching this thatched church, which stands on a grassy hillock, it appears that the tower is octagonal but it is, in fact, round for the first 14 ft. The chancel has an apsidal east end and a very fine south door with elaborate arches of Norman carving believed to be by the same hand as the doorway at nearby Hales.

There is some medieval stained glass in a south window and a very sturdy funeral bier made in 1908 which was shared with Hales church. St Gregory's is also in the care of Norfolk Churches Conservation Trust.

Back on the coach for the journey home the sun came out for the first time that day, but rain was with us again for disembarkation in Aylsham Market Place. However, the weather did not dampen enthusiasm for the subject, only strengthening resolve to revisit at a later date and to find more of the same.

Thanks must go to Ann Dyball for organising the visit, Richard Barham (of the Round Tower Churches Society) for his invaluable input and to Martin our coach driver for getting us safely around some tight corners.

Note: Photographs and descriptions of these churches, and many more, can be seen online on the excellent www.norfolkchurches website.

Hidden Histories of Medieval and Tudor East Anglia.

The Society is delighted to offer a ten week course to be delivered by Dr Rebecca Pinner of The School of History, University of East Anglia. This course will introduce you to topics, ideas and individuals often overlooked by 'traditional' history, and will also consider objects, artwork and buildings that are 'hidden' ...

There will be ten sessions 2.00–3.15. on Wednesdays in Peggs Yard beginning Wednesday 19th September. Cost £35. For safety reasons, the Society committee has decided on a maximum number of 40, and places will be available on a first-come first-served basis. Booking is essential.

To book places or obtain further information please contact:
Jim Pannell 01263 731087.

WEA AYLSHAM BRANCH

Art and Social Change by Judith Stewart

The course is for ten sessions from 18 September at the Friends' Meeting House, Pegg's Yard, Aylsham, Tuesdays 2–3.30 pm. Fee for ten week course: £45.

Contact: Ms Ann Dyball 01263 732637 or ajdyball.co.uk

Visit to Caistor St Edmund

This is a special opportunity to have a conducted tour of the site of the Roman town of Caistor St Edmund by Dr William Bowden, who is leading the new research project from the Department of Archaeology, University of Nottingham.

Members will be encouraged to share cars to meet at the site at 2 pm. Please contact Ms Ann Dyball as soon as possible on 01263 732637 or ajdyball.co.uk.

TO CELEBRATE THE LAUNCH OF OUR NEW BOOK

Sail and Storm – The Aylsham Navigation

September 16th 2012

Programme from 2.00

In Aylsham Town Hall

- ❑ New book and signed copies on sale
- ❑ Exhibition on the Navigation
- ❑ Refreshments
- ❑ Two films of 'The Aylsham Navigation' by John Parker
- ❑ Talk by Professor Tom Williamson (4.00)

In Aylsham Heritage Centre

- ❑ Film of 'The Great Flood' by Derek Lyons
- ❑ The Navigation embroidered by Aylsham W.I.
- ❑ The Bure Navigation Conservation Trust and Wherry Trust

At Dunkirk Staithe

- ❑ A half hour guided talk on the navigation

Bure Navigation Conservation Trust

August 26th 2012

Coltishall Common 12–5 pm

Extravaganza to mark the day of the 100th anniversary of the Great Flood. The event will incorporate a visit by the wherry '*Albion*', lots of canoes, entertainment and treats for the whole family. See aylsham-navigation.norfolkparishes.gov.uk.