

AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Vol. 4 No. 1

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Society is ten years old this year. We want to celebrate the occasion and make our activities more widely known, and we need your help.

The committee has already taken steps by booking the Town Hall for **Saturday and Sunday, 2nd - 3rd. July**. We have booked Keith Skipper of Radio Norfolk, as guest speaker on Saturday evening, with refreshments. The Town Hall will have displays showing:-

- * what members have achieved in the first ten years.
- * how and where they find their information.
- * how they record and process it.

There will be, at regular intervals, a slide show and talk by Ron Peabody, and an ongoing slide show with tape sound track. There will also be:-

- * Exhibitions of items from the archives and other sources.
- * An Oral History display with immediate recording facilities for visitors.
- * We hope to interest the schools in drawing and written entries
- * Our publications will be on sale.

The committee consists of a mere 12 members who cannot manage this on their own. We need volunteers to help, and we need them **now**.

How can you help?

We need your ideas. We can offer you help in the practicalities of setting things up. We will also need volunteers for duties such as stewarding, providing refreshments, and generally helping to run the event. Please let me, or any committee member know soon how you can help make this a memorable event.

Jane Nolan
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AYLSHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

JOURNAL & NEWSLETTER

Vol. 4

No. 1

EDITORIAL

This is not going to become a regular feature. There are better ways of using limited space than wasting it on the editor's bleatings. However, on this one occasion, I will indulge myself. With the start of a new volume of our Journal we have an excellent opportunity to explore a new style. Nothing too extravagant, just a small change to our usual appearance. The most striking feature is likely to be the coloured cover and a new typeface which should improve the overall appearance of the Journal.

After ten years of existence, we are entitled to a few small gestures to "jazz up" our publication, but do not be alarmed - it will never be allowed to go to the editor's head, and we will still continue to have a Journal looking very similar to what we have become used to. As you can imagine, the editor is struggling with all sorts of new technology (and beginning to wonder whether he should have started). If a few nonsenses creep into the next few issues of our Journal, please bear with me - it gets harder as you get older!

Changing the appearance of the Journal is one thing, but it is more important to keep the content lively and interesting, and for this I am always dependent on receiving a steady supply of material from our members. My thanks go to all who supply me regularly with features, and I make my constant plea for more and more of the same, to keep the Journal going. I realise how fortunate I have been to have received so much good material to date - long may it continue! I am always in need of illustrations, particularly if they can be used on the cover.

As we have reached the end of Volume 3, it is time for an index and title-page to be produced for that volume. This may take some time to prepare, but whatever the delay, one will eventually appear, so for anyone proposing to have their copies bound up into book form, it is worth hanging on until these items appear. I will let readers know, in the Journal, when they are ready.

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MARK STONES IN AYLSHAM

Avril Fox

Mark stones are extremely ancient, and not a lot is known about them. The only authority I have come across is Alfred Watkins, author of *The Old Straight Track*, who considers them to have marked 'leys' - ancient ways which criss-crossed Britain. Whatever one may conclude about his ley theories, his notes and illustrations of mark-stones are valuable as a record. He writes that they are usually "unworked, though of a selected shape. The smallest are only a foot or so high, either pudding-shaped or flat-topped", but his illustrations show other shapes as well. He points out that in the Middle Ages, when mark stones (sometimes "*merke, merc* or *merch*" is used) were already ancient, they were frequently mentioned in documents. For example, the Laing Charters dated 1536 refer to "*the mech steane with one croce on the heid*"; the Durham Rolls of 1364 call a boundary stone a "*merkstan*", and in the '*Ancient Laws of Wales*' it is stated that there are three stones which must not be moved: "*a meer stone; a white stone; and a guide stone, and his life is forfeited who shall do so*". It is widely known that local meetings (shire-motes etc.) were often held at the site of stones, and oaths were frequently sworn beside them, "marking" agreements on boundaries and other matters.

In Aylsham I have so far discovered eight definite mark stones and a number of other possible candidates, at least two of which may have been moved. They are:-

A typical pudding-shaped stone in the **Buttlands**. This stone would have already been ancient by the time the bowmen of the Middle Ages stood on the butts and took aim.

Another pudding-shaped stone by the gate of the unnumbered house on the south side of the **Hungate Street** surgery.

A small rectangular flat-topped stone at the junction of **Pound Lane** and the **Cawston Road**. Near it is another, similar stone sunk deeply into the ground.

A larger stone at the junction of **Oakfield Road** and **Burgh Road**. This seems to be the largest local mark-stone. I wonder if oaths were taken at it. Stones were often at way-junctions.

A flat-topped stone to the left of the Gateway store in the **Market Square**. It is fortunate that the builders did not discard it when the store was built. (Only recently somebody took me to a site outside **Aylsham** where a mark-stone had stood, but a new wall had been built and the stone had disappeared). In this case, the builders very neatly left it to mark the end of the pavement.

A middle-sized, irregularly flat-topped stone on the left, at the entrance to **Mill Row**; probably the oldest part of the settlement which became **Aylsham**.

Quite near the last, a few feet into **Mill Row**, is a large pudding-shaped stone, clearly a mark-stone, but maybe not on its original site.

At the southern, **Drabblegate** entrance to **Abbot's Hall** there is a magnificent triangular mark-stone pointing into the grounds of the Hall.

The possible stones are as follows:-

One of two marking the entrance to **Red Lion Yard**. It is a typical, though large, pudding-shape, but it may well have lain nearby originally

and been dragged there and used with the large flint on the other side, to mark the entrance to the Yard.

A large stone, invisible until one pulls back a garden plant, stands outside the White House at the junction of Peterson's Lane and Cromer Road.

In Pegg's Yard, off Red Lion Street, a few yards from the entrance, on the right under a hedge, is a large stone of the characteristic pudding shape, roughly triangular, with all the appearance of a mark-stone, dragged perhaps from its original site.

On the Cawston Road, at the entrance to Keymer's petrol station, there is a flat-topped, clean stone. This is not far from the Pound Lane stones mentioned above.

There is an interesting stone at the side of the Stonemason's Arms; not a mounting-block, as the top is rounded. It has the shape of an old milestone, and appears originally to have been a natural stone, the upper three-quarters having later been ground into a smooth shape, but the base remaining in its natural rough state.

The existence of one or two other collections of stones in this flinty, stone-deprived area, arouses queries as to their provenance, but they belong to a different enquiry.

Watkins asserts that "*the primary purpose of these stones was not to act as boundary - but as way marks*", but I am not so sure. If one plots the stones mentioned above on a street map of Aylsham, one finds that a traveller approaching the little settlement beside the Bure, in its early days, along tracks from other parts; from Cawston, or through what became the Buttlands, or along what is now Hungate Street, or up Burgh Road, or from the Heydon Road/Blickling direction and then along today's Schoolhouse Lane, or from Blickling via Peterson's Lane, or indeed from the Bure by boat to land at the present site of the mill, would have encountered a stone marking the boundary of the settlement. A line connecting each stone defines an area coming up from the river which broadens out to enclose the church and the well which is now the old pump. More stones may have existed in the Drabblegate and industrial estate area, probably the site of the original settlement, but later removed

during all the alterations there, including the building and later the destruction of the railway station.

While many of the stones are darkened, either by age and the visits of dogs, or having been painted black along with the wall by which the stone stands, some are still pale, perhaps by standing for centuries in long meadow grass and regularly washed clean by rain.

Watkins has nothing to say about why these stones should take the various shapes they do, or of their geological type. My own feeling is that they served various purposes, and that it is possible that their shapes indicated their function. One has to try to put oneself in the position of the small communities that used them - an impossible, but sometimes helpful discipline. They probably date back to pre-Christian, Celtic Britain, long before the time of the Saxon Aegel who is thought to have given Aylsham its name. The small community which placed these stones consisted, in all likelihood, of a collection of huts in a clearing in the primaeval forest beside the River Bure, with a little sacred site and a spring on higher ground. Many of our Christian churches are built on such sites (usually on a prominence). An old pump near the church still indicates a supply of water there.

Perhaps the traveller, arriving at one of these stones, would know that he was now within the boundary of the community and subject to its rules, and maybe the shape of the stone would tell him something further; indicating perhaps where shelter and fodder, or the all-important blacksmith were to be found.

I think Aylsham is unusual in possessing so many of these stones. In other old settlements in which I have lived, I have never found more than two. It would be interesting to know whether the geological character of our stones, which seems to me not to be of any likely local type, indicates that they have been conveyed some distance. This is a flint area, and it is a fact that mark-stones in Britain tend to be geologically similar. The examples illustrated by Watkins are mostly in Radnorshire, Hereford and Worcester, and Shropshire, but like the ones I have found elsewhere, they are all of similar stone. Moreover, when marks were to be set up to perform certain functions, the early settlers would have needed stones of an appropriate shape to indicate these functions. Was there an industry, contemporary with that of flint-knapping, composed of individuals who sought out and provided stones

of certain shapes to be despatched to communities which had ordered them? And why is the 'Gateway stone' flat, the pudding-shaped stones roughly triangular, and the Oakfield Road stone similar in shape to certain stones elsewhere (including one in Reepham)? Are there any stories attached to the local stones?

More research is needed, though clearly the full history of these stones can never be known. Whatever it may be, the one thing that is certain is that their existence should be recorded, and that they should be preserved.

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FLOODING AT MASH'S ROW. 1993

Elizabeth Gale

In his book, *The History of Aylsham*, John Sapwell writes of one of the worst natural disasters to visit Norfolk, which occurred on Monday, 26th. August 1912, when following a fortnight of wet weather, 7½ inches of rain fell in twenty-four hours, accompanied by a north-west gale. He also writes that as a result of this heavy rainfall, Mash's Row was flooded to first floor level and the occupiers had to be rescued by boat.

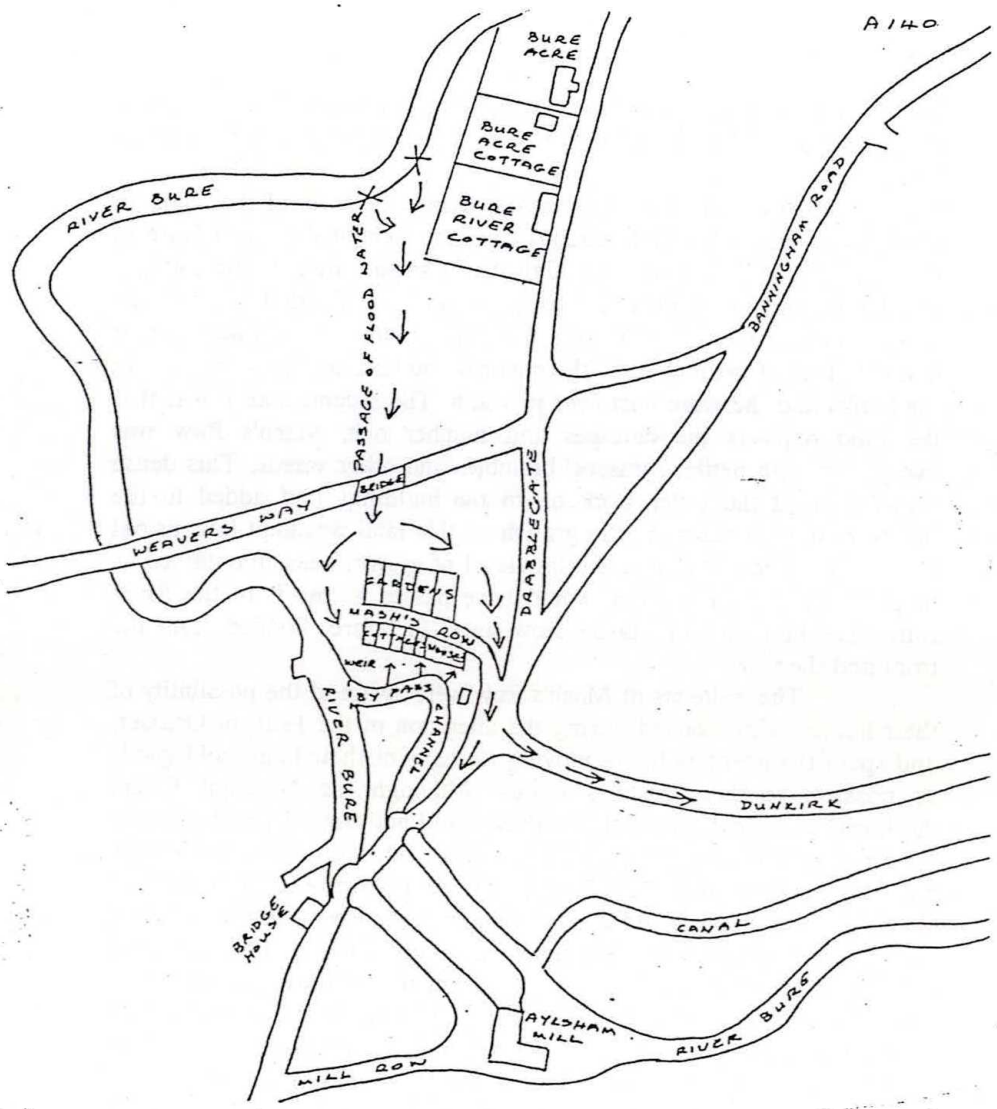
The events of the flood of 1912 have certain similarities to the flood in Mash's Row on 13th. October 1993, as in both cases, homes were flooded to a depth of between 20 and 32 inches and the last residents had to be taken out by boat. The summer months of 1993 had produced a considerable rainfall which had not been totally absorbed into the land, and on the 12th. and 13th. of October it rained both day and night. This rainwater increased the level of the River Bure and its outlets, and additional water drained from the land into the river. On the evening of the 13th. October, the River Bure burst its bank in two places in Drabblegate, flooding the gardens of the houses and cottages and then flowed in a torrent across two fields towards Mash's Row. At the old railway line embankment, which is now the Weavers Way, the excessive water flowed through an arch under a bridge, spread out over the land and engulfed the rear of Mash's Row. This torrent of water flooded the

houses and cottages, and swept forward to the junction at Dunkirk where it flooded part of the industrial estate and the front gardens of three nearby houses.

At the same time, on that evening, the level of the water in the by-pass channel, which extends from the weir at the River Bure to the Aylsham Mill, had risen so high that it spread towards the cottages and houses in Mash's Row and caused them to be flooded. There were two reasons for the flooding from the by-pass channel, and one was that due to a lack of maintenance, the channel had become overgrown along the banks and therefore narrower in width. The second reason was that the land opposite the cottages and number one, Mash's Row was overgrown with nettles, grasses, brambles and other weeds. This dense growth forced the water back on to the buildings and added to the flooding. In previous years the growth on this land was kept low, as old photographs show, and had the low level of growth been maintained as in previous years, the water would have passed across it to the River Bure. The buildings in Mash's Row were, therefore, flooded from the front and the rear.

The residents of Mash's Row were aware of the possibility of their homes being flooded during the afternoon of the 13th. of October, and spent the next few hours moving as many of their household goods as possible to their upstairs rooms. Although the National Rivers Authority had provided sandbags, these could not prevent the floodwater from invading the houses. At 7.30 pm, the floodwater had burst through one of the cottages in Mash's Row, and in the following few minutes had flooded all the cottages and the two houses in the Row. All the residents had either evacuated before the flood water engulfed their homes, or had left shortly afterwards, but two residents remained and were taken out by boat the next morning. On the 15th. October, the floodwater had completely vanished from Mash's Row, and the residents returned to their homes to inspect the damage and start the cleaning-up operations.

The water had left a residue on walls up to flood level, and on all floor surfaces there was a coating of mud. All carpets and other floor coverings had to be removed and discarded, and the floors washed down and cleaned out. The houses and cottages were not habitable as they were not only wet, but all the electrical appliances were affected by the water and were no longer in working order. The Mash's Row residents cleaned



X = BREACH IN RIVERBANK
 ARROWS INDICATE FLOW OF RIVER WATER

up their homes by day, and retired to spend the night with relatives or friends. De-humidifier machines were installed in every residence to extract water from the floors and walls, electricians and other maintenance engineers came to repair the equipment that had been damaged in the flood, and after four days, the majority of Mash's Row residents had returned to their homes. Every house and cottage has required the installation of new kitchen units, the re-decorating of rooms, and the replacement of carpets and furniture.

The flood of 1912 destroyed a great deal of the river and canal system, and this change has subsequently affected those living in Mash's Row. The wherries no longer come to Aylsham, and the canal that they travelled upon has become neglected and overgrown throughout the years. It is not only the non-maintenance of the river that has contributed to the flooding in Mash's Row, but the changes in farming methods in the surrounding area which have to be taken into consideration. In the period from the 1800s to the mid-1900s, the agricultural fields in Norfolk were relatively small and surrounded by hedges and ditches. Many of the hedges and ditches have now gone, and the ditches that remain are overgrown and neglected. The fields are wide open spaces where the soil has been compacted by the weight of heavy agricultural machinery, drainage ditches have disappeared, and any excess of rain lies on the land. When this rainfall drains from the land, it drains into the nearest river. This drainage of rain water takes with it the topsoil, and silts up the river bed, thus creating further potential flooding problems. In recent years there has been a considerable amount of building in Aylsham, and the drainage from these buildings flows into the River Bure and adds to the problem at times of heavy rainfall.

The residents of Mash's Row had been concerned for the last two years at the possibility of their homes being flooded, as they have witnessed the neglect of the River Bure and the by-pass channel near their homes. Their fears were justified on 13th. October 1993, and they formed an action group within the following week, with the aim of preventing any further flooding to their homes. They submitted documentary and photographic evidence to Richard Ryder, their Member of Parliament, who took their complaint to Lord Crickhowell, the Chairman of the National Rivers Authority. It is due to the concern of Richard Ryder and Lord Crickhowell for the residents of Mash's Row

that work on the River Bure has been implemented. This has consisted of the N.R.A. dredging and widening the River Bure from the A140 to the Aylsham Mill. The opening up of this area of the river bed has allowed the water from the River Bure to flow past Mash's Row without building up to a high level. Since the October flood the N.R.A. has carried out work on the by-pass channel from the weir at the far end of Mash's Row to the underpass at the bridge near Bridge House. Further work at the bridge will be carried out within the next few months, and this gives the Mash's Row residents some confidence for the future.

This confidence, however, could be undermined if the River Bure is not maintained in future. The river banks from Aylsham to Ingworth and further beyond, are sadly overgrown, and the natural river bed is curtailed, thus preventing the free flow of water. The River Bure, in the other direction, from Aylsham to Burgh, Oxnead and Buxton has also suffered from a lack of river and drainage maintenance, and in recent times these areas have been flooded.

The cottages in Mash's Row were built in 1845 by William Mash, and the present two houses in 1848. They are listed as Grade II buildings and are of historical interest to Aylsham and must be saved from any further damage by flooding.

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SOCIETY NEWS

ANGLO-SAXON NORFOLK - An audience of over 50 members and visitors (including some from Blakeney) filled the Friendship Club on November 25th. to hear Tom Williamson talk on Norfolk in Anglo-Saxon times. Whatever the subject, one can be guaranteed to enjoy any talk given by Tom Williamson; his exuberance, enthusiasm and deep knowledge of his subject would carry any audience along with him, and hold his listeners entranced until the very end. He manages to do this however abstruse his subject, and it was certainly abstruse on this occasion! We learned that Norfolk people have always earned the

reputation for being argumentative, litigious, disputatious and with firm opinions of their own. [Nothing much changed there over the years]. We learned about Freeman and Sokemen and how their distribution throughout Norfolk had discernible links with some of the place names that have evolved. Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors are the link between Romano-Britain and the Medieval Britain of the Normans. The break up of the large Anglo-Saxon estates led, in turn, to the complex grouping of the Norman manors.

I think most people listening felt, as I did, that they agreed entirely with everything the speaker had to say, even if we were not quite sure that we had understood it all. Most of Tom Williamson's argument is set out in greater detail in his recent, excellent book -*The Origins of Norfolk*, published in 1993 by the Manchester University Press at £12.99. It makes recommended reading for all who enjoyed his lecture.

T.W.M.

COMMITTEE CO-OPTIONS - Following the committee elections at the AGM there were two vacancies for co-opted members. These have now been filled by Derek Lyons and Mrs. José Lamb. Derek Lyons is new to the committee and brings with him great technical expertise which he currently exploits on the Mardler, and which he recently has been putting to good use in our Oral history work. José Lamb was a committee member when our Society was first founded and will be a great asset to the committee in this her second session.

NEW YEAR'S PARTY - This ever popular evening out drew 65 members and friends to the Friendship Club for another enjoyable meeting. The pattern of the evening seems to provide just the right mixture to suit all tastes. We enjoyed our usual mulled wine, the excellently prepared meal with its varied ingredients, then we leisurely worked our way through Peter Holman's ingenious competition. After an opportunity to circulate and catch up with old friends and discover new ones we were entertained by Brian Davies with his concert harp. Our New Year parties are renowned for the quality and variety of the musical entertainment provided. Tonight was no exception, and this was the first time many of us had sat and been entertained by a harpist. We enjoyed this programme as much as any we had listened to before, and the quality and expertise of Mr.Davies's performance was a delight to listen to, and enjoy.

T.W.M.

REVIEW

Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles. A British Academy Research Project.

For anybody interested in the coins and tokens of the British Isles, the publications in this series are an absolute essential. The series began in 1958 with the publication of Volume 1. dealing with Anglo-Saxon coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and has now reached Vol.44* covering tokens of the British Isles 1575-1750. This section is part IV in the series on tokens, and covers Norfolk to Somerset, and naturally includes Aylsham.

In the preface the authors refer to Norfolk as "a revelation, with 358 entries". Aylsham is recorded with examples of tokens issued by:-

<i>Thomas EMPSON,</i>	<i>Grocer</i>	<i>1665</i>
<i>Jeffrey [Laphery] FLAXMAN</i>		<i>1664</i>
<i>Lancelot [Lansalet] THEXTON</i>	<i>Grocer</i>	<i>1666</i>
<i>William WATTS</i>		<i>n.d.</i>
<i>Michael HAUKINS</i>		<i>1666</i>

The references are nearly all accompanied by photographs, and the whole book is a solid authoritative book of reference. Despite the fact that this is the most recent book on the subject, Dr. Sapwell was ahead of his time and had all these recorded in his *History of Aylsham* published back in 1960. Another example of how detailed his research was.

* Sylloge of coins of the British Isles; 44. "Tokens of the British Isles 1575-1750" Part IV. Norfolk-Somerset. Published by Spink & Son, Ltd. in November 1993 at £25.

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AYLSHAM CHORAL SOCIETY Tom Mollard

One of the pleasures of being involved with the Aylsham archives is in being able to see the new items that are occasionally donated to the collection by members of the public. One never knows

THE TOWN HALL, AYLSHAM.

Programme . .
. . of Concert

To be given on

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23rd, 1913,

BY

The Aylsham and District Choral Society,

Kindly assisted by

MISS HILDA M. LITTLE (violin).

The Society's Accompanist:—Miss MAGGIE WADE.

Hon. Conductor:—Mr. FRANK HILL, F.R.C.O.

Tickets 2s. (reserved), and 1s. Admission 6d.

Doors open 7.30, to commence at 8.

Carriages at 10

Barnwell, Printer, Aylsham

what might come our way - it could be a programme of some recent event which will eventually become of historic interest, or it may be an original paper, 100 years old or more, which someone has carefully treasured through the intervening years. One recent acquisition is a programme of the Aylsham Choral Society for a concert given in the Town Hall on 23rd. April 1913.

What do we know about the Aylsham Choral Society, and what else do we possess about it already? Surprisingly little, is the answer. Sapwell's history is always the first source of information on Aylsham, and Sapwell tells us that a Choral Society was founded in Aylsham in 1840, and gave concerts in the Red Lion clubroom. This is borne out by White's Directory of 1845 which states, "*Aylsham Choral Society, established in 1840 for the study and practice of sacred music holds its meetings in the Concert room in Red Lion St.*" How long it flourished, we do not know. It was certainly in existence in 1850 because we have in the archives an original poster for a concert in April of that year..

A Musical Society flourished in the town between 1882-1888, and we have one of its minute books for 1886-88 in the archives. Whether this was a direct successor of the Choral Society, or whether they existed simultaneously, we do not know. The 1850 poster suggests that it was a strong, well-established society. The programme advertises a public concert to be given in the Assembly Rooms at the Black Boys Hotel, on 12th. April 1850 - "*by members assisted by the principal instrumentalists of the Harmonic Society of North Walsham*". These instrumentalists were a sizeable group and consisted of 3 first violins, 4 second violins, 3 violincellos, 2 flutes, 2 clarinettes, 2 cornepeans, French horn, bassoon, trombone and drum. The conductor was Mr. Mower, organist at North Walsham, and admission prices were from 1/- to 1/6d. (quite expensive for those times).

The Society was also able to produce a paperback volume of 34 pages, entitled "*A Selection of Sacred Pieces now in practice by the Aylsham Choral Society*". This was printed by Charles Clements of Aylsham for, and sold by, the editor R.A.Clark of Aylsham. There are two copies of this booklet in the archives, although there are some pages missing. Unfortunately the copies are undated, but one booklet was the personal copy of George Roe, who was a solicitor's clerk in Aylsham

PART I.



1. Partsong - "The Vikings" - *Eaton Fanning*
The Choral Society.
2. Vocal Duet - "The Birthday Morn" - *Landon Ronald*
The Misses Grace Day and Eva Spink.
3. Song - "A Song of Surrey" - *Hermann Lohr*
Mr. H. Gay.
4. Songs (a) "Under the Hill" } - *Hadow*
(b) "A Song of the Four Seasons" }
Miss Isobel M. Hoare.
5. Quartet - "When Hands Meet" - *Pinsuti*
The Misses Day and Cox,
Messrs. H. McCreedy and D. Steward.
6. Song - "Sing! Sing!" - *Godfrey Nutting*
Miss Gay.
7. Violin Solo - "Arioso" - *J. H. Fiocco*
Miss Hilda M. Little.
8. Song - "To welcome You" - *A. Goring Thomas*
Miss Eva Spink.
9. Song - "Galloping Dick" - *Percy E. Fletcher*
Mr. Alf. George.
10. Song - Spanish Waltz Song *Elizabeth Needham*
Miss L. Sarsby.
11. Chorus - "The Wedding Chorus" - *Cowen*
The Choral Society.

around 1845, so it seems likely that this volume was produced by the original Choral Society. At some stage the society slipped quietly out of existence. Turning again to Sapwell, we read that the Choral Society was re-formed in July 1913. Sapwell was correct about the year, but as the recently acquired programme shows, it was actually functioning and putting on a concert as early as April of that year. I have reproduced part of the programme for that concert to give a flavour of their activities. It is interesting to see that the conductor of the 1850 concert was the organist of North Walsham parish church, and in 1913 the same tradition was maintained, as the conductor this time was Frank Hill, organist of Aylsham parish church. Frank Hill was also the moving force behind the re-formation of the Choral Society.

I have recently discovered that this was not the first programme of the re-formed society. The entry in the Aylsham Almanac for January 1913 reads:-

"The Aylsham Choral Society gave its opening concert this month, when Cowen's 'The Rose Maiden' was presented. The choralists numbered 43, and under the conductorship of Frank Hill F.R.C.O the singing was highly creditable".

The future for the re-formed society might have been strong and fruitful, and could well have continued for many years. However, the times were against it. Twelve months later, the men would have been in Flanders, or preparing for their ill-fated expedition to Suvla Bay. The women would have had other things on their minds. Let Sapwell have the final word - *"The society was re-formed in 1913, but was probably extinguished within a year by the outbreak of the first world war."* We have no further records of the society.

This is all that the archives can tell us about the Choral Society, but I feel sure that more must be known about it. It would be very welcome if someone could add to this scanty account, and give us a fuller picture of the society and its activities.

In the December 1993 issue of the Journal, I was interested to read in the 'Notes & Queries' the comments of Canon Jack Vyse concerning his doubts about the accuracy of James Hooper's newspaper article of 100 years ago, which referred to the gravestone of Robert Gibson, hanged for sheep stealing and buried in Aylsham churchyard. My interest in this subject began four years ago, when I purchased a property, off Red Lion Street, Aylsham. Shortly after taking up residence in what was formerly "Laxens Yard". I began to hear stories of how the above felon, Robert Gibson, was caught on or in the vicinity of my house, all those years ago.

Some of the stories related to me indicated that Robert Gibson was the last man hanged in England for sheep stealing, and that he was hanged at Norwich Castle, then the City gaol. Also, the residents who related these stories, remembered being shown the gravestone of this felon, when they were children and being warned of a similar fate if they did not behave, but no one could indicate the location of this gravestone. Another detail related to me suggested that the perpetrator of this crime was apprehended 'in flagrante delicto' on the premises of what was then a smokehouse.

Armed with these details, and being rather sceptical of the whole story, I set out on the trail of some facts to substantiate this information, and was surprised to find that notwithstanding some embellishments, the story was, in substance, corroborated. To those who may be interested, I have detailed the series of events which I have been able to trace and which I believe to be based on fact. I have used locally obtainable sources in my research. The most reliable accounts of the fate of this unfortunate felon, who in more "enlightened" times may have suffered the indignity of Community Service instead of the gallows, were to be found in the local press of the day, in particular *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*. Assize records alone do not give an accurate picture of those sent to the gallows, as many of those sentenced to hang were often reprieved on execution day; also there is surprisingly,

no definitive record of executions performed in the County of Norfolk during the last 300 years.

Below are the known facts related in chronological order:-

- 1770 Robert Gibson born this year. [The burial register for Aylsham shows that Robert Gibson was buried here on 13th. April 1824 aged 54. - entry no. 370]
- 1821 Listed in the Aylsham census records for this year - "Robert Gibson: - 1 house inhabited by two families in Drabblegate - 3 males, 2 females - none employed"
- 1824 March 27th. Robert Gibson, aged 54, was capitally convicted of stealing two sheep, the property of P.D. Batson of Aylsham. (see Note 1)
- 1824 April 3rd. Robert Gibson, along with four others, was sentenced to death by hanging, on the following Saturday. (see Note 2)
- 1824 April 10th. Robert Gibson, along with two others, was hanged at Thetford Gaol. (see Notes 3 & 4)
- 1824 April 13th. Robert Gibson was buried in Aylsham churchyard.
- 1824 April 17th. An account was given in the press of the executions carried out at Thetford, including that of Robert Gibson.
- 1830 & 1839. Potter David Batson is listed as a butcher, Red Lion Street, Aylsham. (cf. Pigot's Directory for both years)

It can be seen from the evidence above that the probability of the sheep stealer, Robert Gibson, being buried in Aylsham churchyard is confirmed. It can also be stated that although he was not the last man in England to be hanged for sheep stealing, he was probably the last Norfolk man to hold that dubious honour. The last execution for sheep stealing in Norfolk was on Castle Hill, Norwich on April 18th. 1829.

The malefactors were John Wood and Thomas Butler from Woodford, Northants. - as foreigners, they don't count. After 1832 sheep stealing was no longer a capital offence.

As to the doubts about executed felons being buried in consecrated ground, it is a recorded fact that many of these unfortunates were interred in churchyards, often in the area of the churchyard north of the church, which was considered less 'sacred' than the rest.

REFERENCES

Note 1.: The *Norfolk Chronicle* entry on March 27th. 1824, detailed the Norfolk Lent Assizes proceedings, with the Right Hon. Sir Charles Abbot presiding. The Robert Gibson case was not written in detail, only the verdict was printed, as follows:-

"Robt. Gibson, aged 54, was capitally convicted of stealing two sheep, the property of P.D.Batson of Aylsham. Saml. Gibson, aged 23, included in the same indictment, was acquitted".

Note 2: The *Norfolk Chronicle* entry on April 3rd. 1824 detailed the sentence and summing up of the previous week's assizes, as follows:-

".....you Robert Gibson have been convicted upon the clearest and most satisfactory evidence, of a crime for which your life has become forfeited to the laws of your country. I cannot feel at liberty in the discharge of my duty, required as I am to afford the protection of the law to persons and property, to forbear allowing the awful sentence of the law to take its course, nor can I recommend you to the mercy of the Crown, or hold out to you any hopes that your life will be spared. You, Robert Gibson have been found guilty of the crime of sheep stealing. It is clear that in the commission of the offence, you were accompanied by your own son. It is owing only to the accidental absence of a witness that your son also has not been placed at the bar to receive judgement. The offence of which you have been found guilty has been in the highest degree aggravated by the circumstances of your taking with you, to the commission of a most serious crime, the person whom, of all others, you ought to have sought by your own good example to have trained up in the path of virtue. The offence is of a very serious nature. There is no

protection for this species of property but that which the law affords, for it is impossible for its owners to employ persons constantly to watch and protect them from the depredations of wicked men. In many of the cases of this kind.....the temptations of sudden hunger have been an inducement to their perpetrationIt has not appeared however from the evidence that your case has been of this description, but we are led to believe that you were in comparatively comfortable circumstances..... you were a person keeping a horse and cart, and had been enabled, thro' assistance perhaps of your friends to erect a new house, and might therefore have lived by honest industry.....I would exhort you to employ the short time which remains to you in this world in preparing yourself for the next. You will have the assistance of a pious and reverend clergyman, and all that I need do is recommend you pay attention to his admonitions, and to follow his advice in order to obtain that mercy in another world which you must not expect in this."

Note 3: The *Norfolk Chronicle* entry on April 10th. 1824 detailed the reprieves and the conduct of the condemned at Thetford gaol as follows:-

"Of the five unfortunate men who were left for execution at Thetford gaolhave been respited during His Majesty's pleasure, viz. Henry High sen. capitally convicted of sheep stealing, and William Thurlow (aged 21) one of the men concerned in the rape committed on Mary Relton. For James Reeve, Miles Wiseman and Robert Gibson, no respite having been received.....they will be executed at noon in front of Thetford Gaol. The three last named prisoners have conducted themselves in a becoming manner since the time of their condemnation. Gibson, however, has shown less penitence than his companions, and has all along denied that he was the person who committed the offence for which he is condemned to suffer. A gentleman in the course of this week, went from this city to London for the purpose of laying some favourable circumstances which have since transpired with respect to Gibson, before the Home Secretary of State, with the hope of obtaining a reprieve, but we do not find that any has been received."

Note 4: The *Norfolk Chronicle* entry on April 17th 1824, mentions the executions as follows:- *"On Saturday last, the following malefactors*

were executed at Thetford, pursuant to their sentences at the last Assizes - James Reeve for rape, Miles Wiseman for shooting and wounding Wm. Everett, gamekeeper, and Robert Gibson sentenced for sheep stealing. They were attended to the scaffold by Mr. Johnson, the Governor of our County gaol - we understand that the general behaviour of these men was quiet, excepting an ebullition of temper, now and then, from Gibson. They expressed their thanks for the spiritual advice given them by the Reverend T.D. Atkinson and the Rev. Mr. Ward.... With respect to Gibson and Reeve, although their guilt was so clearly proved, yet to the very last moment, we regret to find that both of them persisted in their innocence, and solemnly protested that they were perfectly free from the crimes for which they were respectively doomed to suffer. In justice to Gibson, it ought to be stated that he repeatedly and fervently expressed his hope that his sons and family might profit from his awful death, forsake their evil company, constantly resort to their church, and in a word, lead a new life."

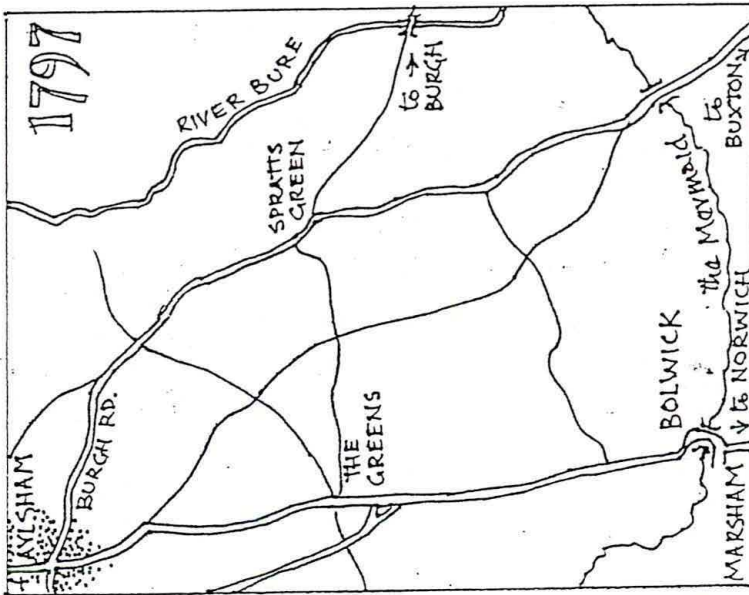
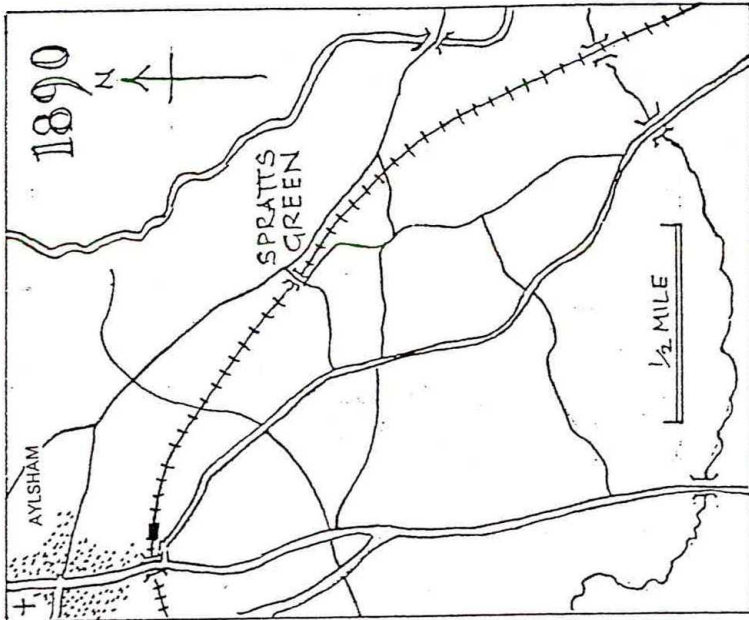
Note 5: The *Norfolk Chronicle* entry on April 24th, 1824 gives a macabre reminder of the times in an incident related to the executions related above. It reads as follows:-

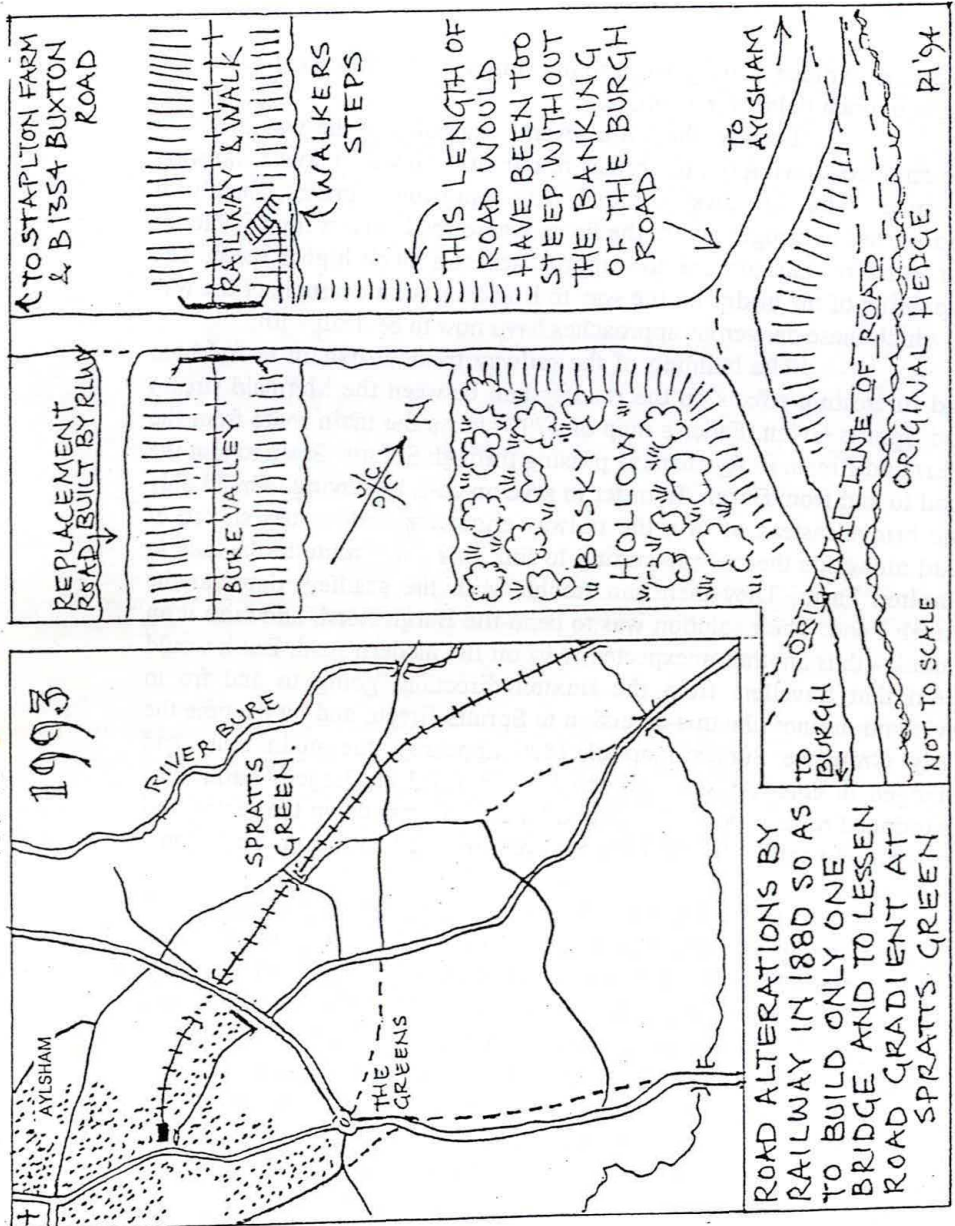
"The body of Miles Wiseman who was executed at Thetford for shooting at the gamekeeper at Rackheath, was stolen from Hardingham churchyard a few nights after its interment by some Resurrection Men who had been observed lurking about the chief part of the previous day."

---ooOoo---

ANCIENT AND MODERN WAYS TO THE SOUTH-EAST OF AYLSHAM. Peter Holman

The local roads that we drive about on, are so permanent in their surface that we may forget the more flexible choice that our predecessors had over the trackways that they followed. Our twisting country lanes twist and turn for a variety of ancient reasons as our





forebears avoided marshy wet ground, fallen trees, and went round the edges of open fields, for example.

Locally, there are several examples of the way in which the engineers laying out the routes of our two, now abandoned, railways produced what are awkward and now dangerous corners, mainly at approaches to bridges across the lines, where roads that were suitable for horse-drawn transport are now approached at a much higher speed. The bypassing of the bridge on the way to Blickling is an example of the way in which these dangerous approaches have now to be dealt with.

The building of the railway from Wroxham to Aylsham had interesting effects on the road system between the Mermaid stream and Spratts Green. Faden's map of 1797 shows the main route from the Mermaid stream to Aylsham as passing through Spratts Green to join the road to and from Burgh. In order to save on cost, by having to build only one bridge instead of two, the railway engineers built a new stretch of road alongside the railway cutting to link this main route to the lane to Staplton Farm. They then had trouble with the gradient down to the Burgh Road. Their solution was to bend the Burgh Road, and raise it on a bank - thus another unexpected twist on the modern road. But it would seem that travellers from the Buxton direction, going to and fro to Aylsham did not like this diversion to Spratts Green, and by the time the early Ordnance Survey map of 1890 appeared, the main route had changed to enter Aylsham by the Buxton Road at Diggens Farm. The abandoned route is now a little-used lane with grass down the centre, and one section near the Mermaid is not even metalled, and is no more than a farm track.

In 1981 the building of the Aylsham bypass resulted in the dead-ending of the Buxton Road out of Aylsham, and motorists had to use, either the roundabout or Burgh Road (again!). The bypass was built on top of much of an old lane known as Orchard Lane down to a level crossing, which was replaced by a tunnel when the line was reopened by the Bure Valley Railway in 1990. This is very modern history, but it is worth a thought that modern traffic must follow the smooth surface of modern roads. No longer can the individual decide his own route across country. Only the planners can devise and build new routes for bypasses and motorways. No more avoiding damp hollows, and dodging round fallen trees for us!

St. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, AYLSHAM,
NORFOLK. 1380 - 1980.

Nolan Golden.

This article was written by the late Nolan Golden in 1980 when the Parish church was celebrating its 600th. anniversary. It was published in the "Ringing World" for September 26th. 1980 [Vol. LXXVI No.3622] The article is a very comprehensive account of the history of St. Michael's church bells, and no doubt was well appreciated by the readers of "Ringing World" when it appeared. As the readership of "Ringing World" is a very specialised group, it seems unlikely that many ordinary readers in Aylsham would have seen it at the time. It is re-published here for a wider readership by kind permission of the editor of "The Ringing World", and with the approval of Mrs. Golden.

The parish church of St. Michael in Aylsham which is currently celebrating six centuries of Christian witness, possesses one of the earliest rings of ten. The inventory of Edward VI mentions five bells here, and five years before this, the will of a local shoemaker, one John Betts, contained a bequest for a new treble bell. A sum of £10 was available. The bell was to be hung by Edmund Withe and his son John who were to have 6/8d each for doing it, if there was sufficient money left. After these payments, any residue was to be spent on the frame.

In 1648 John Brend recast the tenor, presumably with the help of John Draper, in a local barn whose owner was paid £1 for the use of it. Samuel Gilpin did certain work in King Charles II's reign; in particular, he recast the saint's bell in 1683 at a cost of £1-18-10. This saint's bell hangs on the same level as the present ten, and, fitted with a half-wheel, is often chimed for the last minute or so before the service begins. In conjunction with Edward Tooke, the former 6th. and 7th. were recast in 1677-78.

The octave came in 1700. An ornate coloured stone shield, bearing the names of churchwardens John Curtis and Thomas Coulson, testifies to this. Again, the work was done by Messrs. Gilpin and Tooke. It is reasonable to assume that there was both a capable and enthusiastic band of ringers at Aylsham to justify the augmentation, and before many years had passed, the men of St. Michael's were at issue with the

redoubtable and already famous band at St. Peter's Mancroft in Norwich. The November 6th. issue of "*The Norwich Gazette*", 1731, told its readers that a peal of Grandsire Triples had been rung at Aylsham in three hours and eleven minutes, second only in time to the record peal at St. Margaret's, Leicester, in February, 1730 in 3 hours, 6 minutes and 27 seconds, and that furthermore, the Aylsham ringers whose names were appended, did not believe the Mancroft ringers -

"did, or can prick the said peal [of Stedman Triples, which the Norwich men claimed to have rung, following the peal of Stedman by the rival band at St. Michael's Coslany] to Truth, notwithstanding their several Pretensions, they having often contradicted themselves in pricking the same."

A fortnight later, Thomas Melchior, leader of the Mancroft band, suitably replied -

"We take leave to tell the Aylsham ringers that we do not believe that they rung 5040 changes at once pulling down, any more than they believe that we have pricked, or rung, Stedman's Triples."

Undaunted, the local band had visions of greater achievements. In October 1735, the Norwich papers record that -

"Two new bells are just cast in Southwark by the person who cast the famous peal of 12 for St. Saviour's.....for the town of Aylesham"

and next year, an advertisement in *The Norwich Gazette* for March 6th. reveals

"The famous Mr. Samuel Knight, Bell founder in London, having compleated a peal of ten bells for Aylesham did, on Her Majesty the Queen's birthday, ring a compleat peal of 6048 changes of Caters, which was performed in 3 hours and 42 minutes, and was allowed to be the Best of Ringing: being the first 6048 that ever was rung upon ten bells in England, except in London."

The names of the performers follow; seven of those who took part in the 1731 Grandsire Triples took part, assuming William Whiley

and William Weily to be the same man. Thomas Spurrell again rang the observation bell and presumably conducted the peals. He was a member of a mill-wrighting firm, and this family made the splendid oak frame for the Fakenham octave which did duty until the 1935 re-hanging.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the critical ears of the local band decided that their four trebles were not good enough. Osborn and Arnold of St. Neots were called in, and the rejuvenated ring was opened on Monday, 19th. June 1775. The local correspondent writes that the bells for sweetness of tone and perfectness in tune are allowed (by Judges) to be a complete peal of ten as any in the kingdom; the Tenor weighing 19cwt, 3 quarters, keyed in E which is a third sharper than St. Peter's new tenor. It is thought to be an ingenious piece of work as ever was executed by any founders. The Aylsham ring and the magnificent new ring of 12 at St. Peter's Mancroft were opened within days of one another.

Aylsham was, from earliest times, a centre of change-ringing and remains so to this day. Many a five- and six-bell ringer has widened horizons here. The Norwich ringers regularly came, and the great Samuel Thurston rang three peals at Aylsham, including his first as conductor. The particulars of this peal "*allowed by all judges to be a very masterly performance*" were duly recorded on a stone tablet on the south wall of the ringing chamber, a tribute to Samuel Thurston's skill as a stonemason. The Marsham ringers certainly looked upon St. Michael's as their second tower, and such worthies as Thomas Greenwood, Thomas Eldridge and John Ulph (whose family were sextons for many years) and the famous Charles (Cambridge S Major) Middleton all frequently walked the two miles to Aylsham to enjoy ten bell ringing.

Occasionally, the local band lost that perfect accord that should exist between the church authorities and the ringers. In 1850, :-

"in consequence of a little altercation between the churchwardens of this town and the ringers, respecting a wedding, the ringers made what the Sailors term a 'strike'

wrote Charles Clements, Junior, to James Burman, Master of the Great Yarmouth Company. The bells remained silent until the following Easter Monday, -

"When, at the request of the Parishioners, they were again rung by our company"

It appears that a former Yarmouth resident had come to Aylsham, and had declared at a Vestry Meeting that ringers in Yarmouth could not ring without first obtaining leave of the churchwardens. This Mr. Clements (incidentally a printer of some of the earliest Diocesan Reports) doubted, and wanted to know if the newcomer had ever held the office of churchwarden!

In 1890 the bells were re-hung and installed in a massive oak frame by the Days of Eye. Seventy years later, Mears and Stainbank rehung the bells, retaining the timber frame which, with judicious strengthening will last another century. A small section of the 17th. century frame may be seen in the ringing chamber.

Although the local bands, through the generations, have not been prolific peal ringers, the local newspapers record a relatively large number of quarter peals and date touches. In 1843 an attempt to ring 5580 changes of Plain Bob Royal was lost 180 changes from the end when the tenor clapper fell out. Altogether, 64 peals have been rung on the bells - eight before the formation of the Diocesan Association in 1877, and the 6048 of Cators rung in 1736 remains the longest length on the ten bells.

The ringers of today endeavour to keep up a high standard, with the accent on Sunday Service ringing. Appreciating the fact that bands survive only if teaching is practised and readily available, Hanbury and Ivy Carter worked hard to keep the band going between the wars, and John Pumphrey [now the Reverend John Pumphrey] took over from them, devoting more than twenty years to the service of the Company. A number of ringers has found the town a pleasant place to work in and to retire to, and have helped to strengthen the band. When change-ringing first took place at St. Michael's, is not known, but the present company will make its voice heard in the celebrations in this the 600th. year of the dedication of the present church, and work to ensure that the art of ringing is handed on to future generations.

PARTICULARS OF THE BELLS

Treble	G 27½" Osborn & Arnold. 1775	5-1-01
2nd.	F 28¾" Osborn & Arnold. 1775	5-2-21
3rd.	E flat 29¼" Osborn & Arnold. 1775	5-0-27
4th.	D 30¼" Osborn & Arnold 1775	5-2-02
5th.	C 32¼" Samuel Gilpin. 1700	6-0-05
6th.	B flat 34½" Mears & Stainbank. 1879	7-1-21
7th.	A flat 37¼" G.Mears & Co.1860	8-1-27
8th.	G 40¼" John Stephens. 1726	11-0-26
9th.	F 41½" Thomas Newman. 1741	13-3-15
Tenor	E flat 49" Samuel Gilpin. 1700	17-1-06

The Sanctus bell's diameter is 18 7/8"

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NOTES AND QUERIES

EASTO family - Dr. D. Case, 7 Eden Close, Wilmslow, Cheshire writes that he has an interest in the C18th. family of Easto who lived in Aylsham. If anyone has a similar interest or information about the family, he would be pleased to hear from them.

AYLSHAM MILLS - there was a tailpiece in the Eastern Daily Press of 23rd. December to Ben Rust's excellent history of the Aylsham Mills which was published in the Journal (Vol.3 No.6. June 1992). Production at BOCM's animal feed mill finishes at the end of January 1994 with the loss of 26 jobs. Production will be transferred to the company's mill at Wymondham . The Aylsham mills will become just another part of Aylsham's history.

[**A TAILPIECE - JUST FOR COLIN ULPH**] - The following newspaper cutting comes from the *Eastern Daily Press* for December 1993 - exact date not recorded. Just another item for the Ulph family archive. See also a reference to another Ulph on p. 29 of this Journal.

Pick of the past

100 years ago

Through the liberality of Harry Ulph, the children in Yarmouth workhouse were bountifully entertained to an excellent dinner at the Aquarium. After the feast the children were all taken to the circus.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The programme for 1994-95 is under preparation and ideas are being considered. A day excursion to Colchester is one possibility, and could be on 19th. May. A shorter excursion to Norwich to see Dragon Hall and the Old Music House is also planned. One trip which is guaranteed, is another Mystery History Tour which Peter Holman has promised to arrange - date as yet unknown.

None of these are yet arranged and any dates mentioned are tentative. Watch for further details as they appear in the Journal & Newsletter.